

TUNING IN TO THE LEADERS

SESSION 10



Dr Sudha Nair started off her social work journey in 1986 at Ang Mo Kio FSC and currently serves as the Executive Director of PAVE, the first family violence specialist agency. She has a deep interest in issues related to the welfare of women and children and is fondly known as the “Jane Addams of Singapore”. In her journey as a social worker, she has had significant positive impact on many social services and public policies.

Dr Nair was recently appointed to the Public Service Commission, a body that plays an important role in the Singapore Public Service. Her experience gives her both the breadth and depth in understanding issues which enable her to tease out the leadership qualities of potential leaders. Her contributions to the social service sector won her the Outstanding Social Worker Award in 1998.

WHAT SOCIAL WORK MEANS TO ME

Increasing Social Functioning

Helping your clients to stand on their own feet

Social Justice

Not to be complacent but to have a little anger in order to advocate for your clients

Empowerment

Work yourself out of a job

Social Work: a place to exercise your creativity. To think out of the box in creating programmes and services where none existed and to improve on current services

Collective Responsibility

Working in partnership with your clients and systems to help your clients reach their goals.

Respect for Diversity

Respect for your clients regardless of ethnicity, socio-economic status, language or religion



LESSONS LEARNT ON THE JOURNEY

Research is in our case files. We need to spot the trends.

One must have the facts to prove what you are doing or saying in order to change systems.

A greater appreciation of the political landscape and its impact on social work practice.

Advocacy: to change “what is” into “what should be”.

Your first degree qualifies your learning, not justifies your cessation of it.

If you do not have a supervisor, look for one in order to help you grow





Assessment is important.

Use the theories that you have learnt to make sense of what you are doing in practice.

Wrong diagnosis leads to wrong intervention.

LESSONS LEARNT ON THE JOURNEY

Quality of reports:
Cases cannot be closed until your recordings are done.

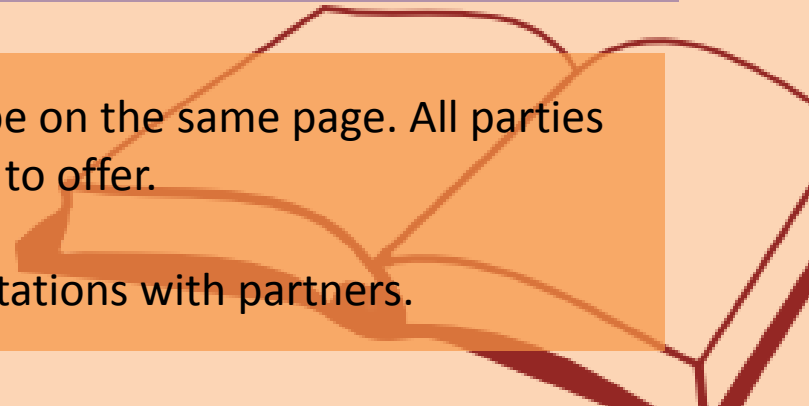
Have ownership and responsibility for the work that you are doing in both the good and bad times.

MUSINGS ABOUT SOCIAL WORK

- Social workers need to keep abreast on social issues. Every ministry's decisions affect social workers.
- Social workers on the ground are in the best place to give information to policy makers on what needs to be done because you have direct contact with the people going through issues

- Passion alone is not enough. You must be able to use your brain and assess. Passion alone clouds judgment.
- Do not fit all cases into one theory. Have a wide repertoire of knowledge to help your client.

- Work with partners as collaborators – be on the same page. All parties have something to offer.
 - It is important to have consultations with partners.



MUSINGS ABOUT SOCIAL WORK



We can look at a situation through a keyhole or a wide angle lens. But for me, the best way to look at a situation is through a kaleidoscope. A kaleidoscope creates new perspectives and possibilities.



Hone your skills by looking at cases in your own agency. As a professional group, have a role to play in giving feedback to the policy makers (eg. Vulnerable Adults Act). Start small research areas in your agencies and critique each other.

Questions and Answers

Question: What are the challenges that this society will face in this era and what are the skills that social workers require to overcome these challenges?

As problems become more complex, for example the aging population, people are becoming more open to seeking what they want, and we will see it in social services as well. Clients are going to be more demanding and expecting services.

Furthermore, the change in population make-up will lead to parenting issues becoming more complex (eg. Lasse-faire parenting leading to demanding children). Also, the vulnerable adults sector is something that all social workers have to look at as well.

The skills that social workers require is the ability to pre-empt what is going to happen and the kind of services that are needed, understanding the needs of Singaporeans, and listening to policy changes in the society . It is important to be an innovator; do not only wait for the government to give directions but take the lead. We have to note that social work education is only the foundation and everything else is a build-on.

Questions and Answers

Question: How have you continued to hold your supervision with your supervisees?

I am a firm believer in supervision. You cannot throw a worker into the field and expect him/ her to manage. You have to hand-hold the new worker, you have to coach them. There should be continued supervision through various platforms: case conferences, sitting in on sessions, continuous questioning and asking. Make sure good information is gathered and learn through presentation.

It also helps to be viewed as a partner rather than a supervisor. Have your supervisees see you as a team partner and learn how to give space to the newer workers.

I believe that supervision is needed at every level. (I still receive supervision today)

