

Benchmark Social Justice Action Plan

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Life Meaning and Commitment

My career as a counselor is founded on the natural drive I have to help those who are hurting, a drive that my parents noticed when I was just a child. My mother always told me stories about my concern for other children in my class and my natural inclination to step in between a bully and another child. My desire to help others continued as I got older and connected with various volunteer agencies locally and across the United States. However, it wasn't until my own experiences in counseling in my late teens and early twenties that I realized the calling the Lord was drawing me to apply this in a professional way. I know that I can only do this work through His equipping of my natural gifts connected to the guidance He provides through the Holy Spirit.

One of my current movements towards a more inclusive practice has been to establish an independent practice within a larger collaborative with professionals who are highly committed to providing quality counseling services to marginalized populations. Three of my colleagues work within large community agencies serving low-income populations and focus on effective treatment of neurodiversity. My previous group practice has been a very healthy dynamic that has encouraged personal healing from past experiences in the community mental health world, allowing me the bandwidth to pursue a doctoral degree and reigniting the desire to assist increasingly diverse populations. However, this practice naturally limited some of my ability to work with marginalized populations due to cost and the practice's orientation with the Christian faith. I look forward to continuing to grow my private practice in a way that is more inclusive, allowing me to advocate at the interpersonal level.

Personal Privilege

My privilege as a Caucasian female of middle class standing can be clear from the first time someone meets with me, as evidenced by my skin tone and general appearance and dress. I know that my skin color and appearance as a cisgender female provide me privileges of general acceptance within some larger communities. As a Christian, I have limited experiences of oppression due to the status of the religion within the country, and my socioeconomic status allows me to afford the comforts of housing stability. After traveling to other parts of the world, I also recognize my privilege as a citizen of the United States as a highly developed country.

These personal privileges must be used to engage in local and regional movements to improve inclusion of culturally different individuals in the discussion of policy and necessary systemic change. This has not been something I have actively done since being in this community, although I have done it in previous communities; this is largely due to my concerns with being ostracized by other aspects of my own cultural communities. I know that this is something that many people face, and I need to be able to navigate this challenge and find supports through my advocacy journey.

Oppression

The nature of oppression is often more hidden than overt measures found in many history texts. My personal privilege has prevented me from receiving many types of oppression, although I do feel that some of the political changes in the country could change this in the future. I am concerned for the oppressive society that my children and grandchildren may experience, but historically I have felt powerless at making change that will better the future. Now that I have been in this course, I understand that there are many ways I can engage in advocacy work that can make a difference, even if it only affects a small portion of the

community. I do not think that I have overtly used personal power or authority in unjust ways, however I am aware that I have not used my privilege to consistently advocate for the oppressed. As I move forward in my advocacy work, I plan to incorporate more conversations with others regarding the nature of oppression and the need for systemic change.

When I read the United Nations (1948) universal declaration of human rights, I really took time to reflect on each article and the potential influence of each on the status of policy change in the United States. Without this turning too deeply into politics, I am discouraged by the limited adherence to these policies within larger political groups in the United States. I have been on a self-reflection journey, which is a critical aspect of engaging in advocacy efforts and remaining conscious of power dynamics within larger social systems (Fickling & Gonzalez, 2016). Even though I may not directly engage in oppressive behavior, my non-engagement in policy reform measures against oppression does not change larger systemic issues.

Multicultural Literacy

Multicultural literacy extends far beyond the knowledge that can be gained through multicultural courses at the collegiate level and must be an active part of continuing education in the profession. The United States is becoming more culturally diverse each year, and I must remember that my own community is more diverse than it may appear. When I choose areas for continuing education, I must focus on learning cultural experiences to strengthen my ability to recognize and respond to diversity.

One of my favorite pastimes is immersing myself in other cultures through travel, and although expensive, traveling has provided me with many opportunities to experience cultures that are unique to my own and given me a new outlook on overall American culture. I would like to continue immersing myself in various cultures and am actively looking at this in my

immediate community. As recommended by Sue et al. (1992), I also have been working to build in personal reflections on my own values, biases, and assumptions regarding human behavior after learning about other cultures.

Social Justice Compass

After reviewing the suggested material, I have identified a few principles that guide my commitment to social justice and advocacy work.

1. All individuals deserve equal rights to life, dignity, respect, privacy, education, and autonomy.
2. I must remain aware of my own cultural background, biases, and worldview as it relates to my work as a counselor.
3. I will engage in regular discussion of advocacy needs for the individuals in my practice.
4. My professional and personal life will remain focused on beneficence.
5. I will engage in at least two formal multicultural training opportunities per year in addition to my required CEU standards for licensure.
6. I will engage in regular consultation with counseling professionals and cultural professionals to maintain multicultural literacy.
7. I will use my position as a counselor educator and supervisor to encourage personal reflection on social justice with whom I come in contact.

As I continue developing my professional career, I will continue to look towards and adapt these principles to continue pursuing advocacy within the counseling field in addition to my larger community. I am grateful for this course and how it has furthered my knowledge and awareness of tangible advocacy work the profession.

References

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