

Diversity Practice Paper: Prince Edward DSS

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Social Services can provide a well-rounded list of services that are meant to support the individuals in many aspects of their lives. Social Services have many clients with unique needs and goals. Although Social Services are known for the diverse support and resources they provide the local community, there are many barriers' individuals might experience. Social Services can only provide services to individuals who are a resident of the county in which it is located. Social services benefit programs are available however there is criteria that must be met before any assistance can be provided.

It is well known that social services are portrayed negatively in the media and many individuals hold negative views towards this agency. As a future social worker it is important to understand why many people hold this belief. It is important to know the controversy around social work, as it allows social workers to become more aware and understanding of people's experiences. Throughout history, there have been many moments where social workers have failed individuals, families, children, and communities. However, policies are frequently changing, and social workers are meant to support social justice and want to see active change take place. Properly educating the community about social services and their policies could ensure many feel more aware of the services they have available to them, and how to access it.

The Prince Edward County Social Services has an energy assistance, heating assistance, and cooling assistance program. These are newer programs to social services and I have noticed some common issues arise. In order to qualify for these programs, often the individual must be going through a crisis. This is typically classified as something unexpected happening that prevents the individual from being able to pay certain bills. However many applicants have been

denied because their crisis didn't meet Social Services policy. I believe the clients aren't informed about the true purpose and requirement of these programs.

Clients applying for assistance online will be asked to a website to fill out the application. To apply, you often need an address, phone number, social security, and birthdays of every resident in the home. It will ask for the gross income of each household member, and it is likely you will need housing and utility expense information, childcare expenses, financial resource information and health insurance information. The information requirements for programs and assistance are long, and in depth. It is critical that social services have up to date information regarding the clients and their situations, however it does cause many barriers for the individuals needing services and resources. SNAP is meant to provide assistance with food, however if someone doesn't meet the Social Services requirements they will continue to struggle and not have access to healthy, quality, affordable food.

I spoke with two individuals at the Prince Edward Department of Social Services. I spoke with my field supervisor and the director of Social Services. When asked about diversity, equity, and inclusion issues my supervisor stated that all of the social workers there put in an active effort to become competent and treat everyone equally and fairly. My supervisor has noticed that individuals who have medicare often can't receive high quality in-home care because of the costs and that there is a large difference in the in-home care in terms of insurance and what financial assistance the individual may have. My supervisor and the director stated that the environment at the agency has changed since they first began the job. This local social services has significantly more diverse employees, and an overall better supportive and positive environment than it did years ago.

I also spoke with the director at this agency. I asked about the diversity, equity, and inclusion issues and she had a lot to speak about it. The director stated that they try to be as inclusive as possible, but there are moments where people are offended or feel discriminated against. The director stated that there are also communities that feel withdrawn from Social Services and aren't likely to reach out. When I asked her how clients may be oppressed or discriminated against, she explained that the identifying information on applications is only used for statistical reasons and that information doesn't play a part in how clients are treated here. She did state that the Muslim community in Prince Edward are often distant and don't accept assistance from social services. She said that she didn't know if it was not enough outreach or if it was a cultural difference. The director said that funding plays a large part in everything that Social Services can do, and sometimes it may be a financial limitation where they can't provide assistance because a program has reached the maximum funds for that time period. The director also stated that because Prince Edward is a fairly small county, she believes that lack of exposure to different people and cultures play a large part in the issues at this agency.

I asked both individuals how to advocate for the community about issues such as diversity, equity, and inclusion. The director stated that open dialogue about the issues and education plays a large factor in seeing positive change and communication. This can allow for Social Services to be aware of the issues, and make action towards change to improve the clients experience. When I asked how one could engage in social justice advocacy, both individuals stated that it is common to go to the people above you to see change happen, however there is always opportunity to be a part of the change and show up when and where policies and bills are discussed.