



## International Network for School Social Work

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### The History of School Social Work

School social work was introduced at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century as part of the universal education movement in several countries. The initial role of attendance officer evolved into a social work role. While a focus on reducing absenteeism remains important in many countries, school social work has developed new directions to serve varied national educational priorities and changing social needs. The spread of school social work around the world reveals that roles and methods are often imported from countries where school social work already exists, while independent pathways also develop to meet local priorities. The following summary shows some of the different interpretations of the role and how this is reflected in the title given to the role. The placement of social workers in schools shows that many countries have recognized the need to address factors that interfere with successful learning and that social work skills can help.

In the **United Kingdom**, school attendance officers were recruited in the late nineteenth century as an enforcement service. The role developed into the present position of *education welfare officer* in which attendance work is still a major function.

In the **United States**, private agencies placed *visiting teachers* in schools in three East coast cities in the early part of the twentieth century. The goal was to provide contact between home and school to promote school attendance. Early on, *visiting teachers* started to use social work methods. The role has been transformed repeatedly, reflecting changing theories and needs. Most school social workers in the United States have a Master's degree in Social Work and use the title *school social worker*, which was introduced in the 1930's.

*School social work* started in **Canada** in the 1940's, growing out of earlier truancy and school attendance work, but evolving into a complete social work service, in which improving school attendance is still a major function. *School social work* services vary across the country, since each of the 10 provinces has autonomy in how education is administered. The greatest concentration is in the Province of Ontario. The majority of Canadian school social workers have the Master of Social Work degree.

School social work developed in the Nordic countries between the 1940's and 1970's without the emphasis on school attendance, but rather on social care to help all children reach their potential. The role of the *skolkurator* in **Sweden** includes social work and guidance/counseling, encompassing prevention and intervention and emphasizing teamwork with other specialists. **Finland, Norway, Denmark and Iceland** provide similar services. In Finland the new Child Welfare Act requires municipalities to provide services of *koulukuraattorit* and school psychologists. The Nordic countries require school social workers to have university training in social work.

School social work was started in the **Netherlands** in the 1940's. *Schoolmaatschappelijk werk* provides a comprehensive service. There have been *attendance officers* in **Malta** since 1946. The Education Act of 1974 stimulated a change from attendance enforcement into *education welfare*, in which workers help families keep their children in school. Further changes came with the change in the title from welfare officer to *social worker* and efforts to expand the role beyond a focus on absenteeism.

School social work started in **Argentina** in the 1960's in the Buenos Aires Province. The **Ghana** Education Service started a *school welfare program* in the 1960's to provide help with school attendance and to ensure that children's needs are met so that they can benefit from school.

*Schulsozialarbeit* originated in **Germany** in the 1970's as an extension of *social pedagogy*, a traditional profession in much of Europe. The number of school social workers varies greatly from State to State. The Child and Youth Welfare Law (1990) set the stage for greatly increased services through collaboration with Youth Welfare agencies.

**Hong Kong** started a *school social work* program in the 1970's in collaboration between government and private agencies. The program continued after Hong Kong was restored to the People's Republic of China and made a Special Administrative Region.

The **United Arab Emirates** have implemented school social work *تصاوي اجتماعي* in schools since 1972, providing a comprehensive range of programs.

The Ministry of Education in **Poland** established the profession of *social pedagogy (pedagog szkolny)* in 1975, offering typical social work services.

Social work services have been introduced to schools within the last 5 decades in **Australia, Korea, Japan, Norway, Austria, Switzerland, New Zealand, Russia, Latvia, Hungary, Lithuania, Estonia, Saudi Arabia, Luxembourg, Sri Lanka, Taiwan, Mongolia, China, India, Singapore, Pakistan, Liechtenstein, Vietnam, Trinidad and Tobago, Curacao, Iceland, India, Nigeria, France and South Africa**. Social work students in **Bulgaria, the Czech Republic and Slovakia** have piloted school social work as part of their training.

Much needs to be done when school social work is first introduced to the education system and in the early stages of its development. Advocating for a comprehensive and accurate job description and ensuring that it is implemented is necessary. Adequate staffing, working conditions and salary need to be worked on, otherwise the program may be unsuccessful or even detrimental. Steps to ensure that school social work becomes institutionalized with appropriate standards call for training, professional standards, a professional association that can represent the field, certification and ideally legislation that validates that social work has a place in schools. The countries listed above are in various stages of such steps towards incorporating social work into their school systems.

There is little information about services to children in schools in many other parts of the world, including much of Africa, Asia, Central and South America and the Mediterranean.

There is interest in developing school social work in some of these areas. Bulanda & Sulaiman conducted a needs assessment in **Sierra Leone** (published in in 2017 in *International Social Work*) by interviewing teachers and administrators regarding the socio-emotional needs of children, concluding with a recommendation to employ school social workers. The possibility of introducing school social work in **Turkey** has been explored in published articles since 2015. Yeşilkayali & Meydan published a study in the *Journal of Academic Science* in 2017 that showed that school social service should be initiated in **Turkey**. In 2017, Alhajjaj wrote his dissertation (available in ERIC) on a qualitative study exploring the need for school social work to address challenges among students in **Jordanian** schools. In 2018, Omona published a report in the online *International Journal of School Social Work* on a school social work pilot project with positive outcomes in **Uganda**. Studies such as these can provide impetus for starting programs for social workers in schools.

Other published articles cover issues in schools that school social workers could address, such as bullying, poverty, behavioral problems, educating homeless students and poor attendance. Often these articles do not include social work intervention among the recommendations, but the documentation of the problem is an indication that social intervention is needed.