

## **Introduction**

So often as professionals we become distant in our role as expert from the very person that we are tasked to serve. We control access to needed resources and understanding, leaving our “client” or patient in a position of needing what we have to give. In many ways we celebrate and nurture this distinction as professionals. We promote and support heavily our professional affiliations and organizations. And while giving up the benefits of being a part of a profession is not the aim of this effort, we do propose that in leaning too hard on our professional identity, an identity that was founded in colonial roots and a history of white supremacy, we become just one more experience of disempowerment, of inequality for those we serve. We replicate for them the place of being once again the “have not” in a relationship.

We question here if this type of relationship can produce the results we want; the real individual empowerment and social justice action we so desperately need. If the methods by which we do our work is disempowering, we cannot expect the outcome to be otherwise. We have to do something differently or we are destined to learn over and over again that separate can never be equal.

We propose then a new model for practice based on solidarity with those we serve called *Solidarity Social Work Practice*. As an overall hypothesis, the application of Solidarity Social Work Practice principals, which could be applied to any profession allows us to create a different type of social relationship, a one-on-one professional relationship that provides a greater likelihood of empowerment, healing, and the application and full expression of our professional values.

### **The Evolution of Solidarity Social Work Practice**

Solidarity is not a new concept in practice. We see it today in many forms; in the ways that we are training to address police brutality, in promoting migrant rights, in healthcare reform, and more. We readily pick a side as a professional mandate, showing solidarity in our work with and for those on the margins. As a point of intervention, most solidarity work is focused on social and structural change of both ourselves, and our systems. For example, as acts of solidarity, we work to rid our communication of micro aggressions that perpetuate racial stereotypes, we fight for needed funding and equity-based policy change at all levels, we picket and march to raise societal awareness and we are learning and countering our own implicit biases

formed in a history of colonialism and slavery. The list goes on; much critical and needed work is being done at this collective and structural level.

Solidarity Social Work Practice however is different in both its intervention level and in its practice directive. SSWP adds something that is missing: an opportunity to purposefully build a new and more equitable relationship with the people we serve, one interaction at a time. If you drill down into solidarity as we see it, into an actual practice that can be replicated in a professional setting, it is defined here as the purposeful act of modeling equality. Modeling equality creates solidarity in every encounter, opening a door to a professional relationship where healing, for as long as it can be maintained, can occur. As the directive, in whatever space and opportunity we have, we create a world where we are as equal as possible. While the specifics can vary depending on the setting, in any attempt to minimize the constraints of hierarchy, the importance of human relationships, and the inherent dignity and worth of all people (as explicit in equality) can work their healing magic. This healing, needed for both “practitioner and patient”, is also what is needed for people at the bottom to move forward to action. Modeling equality in a relationship conveys to another person that they are valued, a liberating concept in particular for those on the margins.

In our service professions, we have a rare opportunity to create the types of relationships, the actual world, that we want to see. We don't have to continue to replicate the current forms of social relations based on inequality that are less and less sustainable. This current social hierarchy is only sustained by systems that are entrenched in oppressive practices and we are complicit as we continue without challenge. We can instead, one encounter at a time, create the world that we want to see right now in our professional work.

### **Implementing and Testing the Model**

We are currently testing this model of practice. Stay connected for updates!