

Social Justice

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Social Justice Plan

Counselor educators have several roles in their profession. One of those hats is related to advocacy and what better to advocate than for social justice. Social justice is all around us, it is not simply about race or about gender or sexuality. Social justice involves looking within oneself and doing some self-exploration to better help the community and the world. This paper is my own reflection to construct my social justice plan.

Explore Life Meaning and Commitment

One of the reasons I decided to be a counselor was due to the inability to find a mental health counselor for one of my old students with autism who needed a counselor for a traumatic event that had happened to her. When I came to realize that in my community many mental health counselors did not feel equipped to work with children on the autism spectrum, I decided to change careers and do something. I love to help my community in whatever I can, this is something I do as a mental health counselor and even as a supervisor, and hopefully as a counselor educator. I love what I do because I enjoy helping people heal internally and sometimes rediscover themselves. I also love what I do because I can make connections within families and have them gain insight into what is going on in their children's minds. I feel I do this not only because I am called by God to do it but because I truly love helping others. I have been told I love the heart of a servant, which I agree with.

My passion for the community is for everyone, however, my heart and my social justice advocacy is geared to two populations: the Latino population and those individuals with disabilities. I have been able to speak in conferences on the gaps for counseling in both populations. I also help parents understand their children's diagnosis or even disorders. I also help with public awareness about mental health in order to assure that anyone who needs mental

health services is able to get them. This idea that anyone can get services when needed also means that sometimes I see people pro bono, this is done to assure my community gets what they need. I think all students and clients can succeed sometimes they just need someone to help them along the way or just to speak up on their behalf. This is idea of speaking up is important, because as a counselor with a disability, I have seen how even future counselors are treated because they have a disability, therefore, I want to help create awareness and justice for all future counselors for them to feel safe and able to continue their professional journey by helping them speak up.

Explore Personal Privilege:

When exploring my own personal privileges, even though I am Latina, I am white. In my culture, I am considered white, even though I have been told by some who are not Latino/a that I am considered “of color”, I am white. Knowing how I may come off as, I sometimes address that with certain clients to help them feel safe and heard. Apart from identifying as white, I am also cisgender heterosexual which also has its own privileges, therefore, when working with individuals within the LGBTQI+ community, I am aware of it and at times seek out a colleague to assure the client is being treated fairly without prejudice and with respect. Looking deep to the various identities that make me, me, I also feel being a professional and having a degree, is a privilege, therefore, sometimes if a client or supervisee reports they feel unconnected because I come from money, which is something I have heard, I open up and self-disclose enough to make them feel safe and heard. Only because I am a professional does not mean I come from money, but I struggled to be where I am. I might not tell them about my time being homeless, hearing shootings in my community, or even not sure what to eat or wear, but I give them enough to make them heard and safe.

Even though some might consider being a Christian a privilege, in today's world one must be careful due to oppression for being a Christian, I still feel proud, just like being proud to be Latina, again, but being aware that oppression may follow. Among all these privileges, I have one that I love being a mother, a wife, and bilingual individual. All these things are a part of who I am, however, do not cause me to treat anyone less than me due to them.

Explore the Nature of Oppression:

Oppression is something that makes my eyes tear up because I have seen it done to my family and myself many times. I have been asked to drop out of school and even stay home doing nothing due to my disability. I am unable to go to restaurants due to things not being accessible for the visually impaired. I have also been asked to change careers and even been asked sexual favors to get a job, which I refused, only because I am a woman. I have been told not to pursue a doctoral degree or even be a counselor or researcher, and even ignored at restaurants only for being Latina. Oppression is real. I have seen my dad attacked by cops and my husband stocked by another, all for looking a certain way. Honestly, I fear for my kids.

I love standing up for my community and for those oppressed. I stopped a guy from mistreating a cashier only because she was Latina, to be insulted for being one too. I feel that as a Christian my heart is with those that are oppressed, which is why I present on marginalized population in various conferences. I sometimes even educate police officers in my community when given a chance. I love advocating and speaking for those that might fear to speak up do to deportation or more injustice, that is what I do as a professional and what I will continue to do, until the good Lord takes me, to make sure my kids never feel the way their grandparents, father, and I have felt. Apart from my kids, I also think of all the children community.

Work to Become Multiculturally Literate:

Living in a remarkably diverse city there are many diverse cultures to learn from. I am blessed to be in a city that has people from various parts of the world. One thing that I love is music, music has helped me connect with many diverse cultures, I love hearing Arabic, Brazilian, African, Swahili, and many other Christian/Gospel music. I was able to learn Portuguese to connect with others in my community, and at times provide counseling in the language. I am currently aiming to learn Arabic and feel a need to learn Mandarin considering my kids are learning it at school. I have traveled to many places around the world, and even done mission trips. I love reading literature, especially poetry, when possible, in the languages I speak. I love getting to know others, which was something I enjoyed as an Urban Gospel Radio host in 2017, a place where I learned about cultures, and other marginalized groups in my community. I am not saying I have it all mastered, but I really try, because I know how it is when people assume something of me just because I speak Spanish, such as I am from Mexico, when my origin is Spain and then Cuba. I try to get to know various cultures because it is all a part of getting to know and love my neighbor, one of the greatest commandments given to us by Christ.

Establish a Personal Social Justice Compass:

Believing in Christ is one of my main centers in life, which governs all I do as week as nt goals. We are asked to love our neighbor and therefore for me that is giving a voice to those that are scared or fear the outcome, or are simply tired of fighting. When looking at a social justice plan, I will give voice to students and clients that might feel oppressed. I will continue to speak on the topic and close the gap between disability and graduate school, especially counseling. I will continue to educate those in my community, including officers, to assure they are aware of privilege, decreasing oppression. I plan to create a group to lobby for social justice for individuals with disabilities because that is a community that is seldom spoken for. Apart from

that, I will continue advocating for those that might be forgotten such as our military veterans to get the help they need. One can say I have many goals in my plan, but I feel they are all connected and want to make a better tomorrow.

Conclusion

Counselors are called to be advocates and this includes social justice. As an individual I bring my own privileges, and being aware of them is important. It is also important to know what oppression is and how to be more multicultural. For me, the idea that drives me to a better tomorrow is what the Lord asks from us, which is to love our neighbor as ourselves, and we can only do that if we advocate for them through a social justice plan.

References

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