



Individuals and communities
transformed through human services

Winter 2015

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LINK

Newsletter of the National Organization for Human Services

A Closer Look at The Challenges in Human Services

Inside this issue:

We Are Diversity	2
A Day in the Life	4
Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity	5
Homeless Alone	6
How Old is too Old?	7



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The New Realities
In America: Preparing for the
Challenges Ahead

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The New "Realities" in America: Preparing for the Challenges Ahead

In every sense of the word, America is a much more complex society than ever before. From diminishing funding sources to new measures of evaluating the use of those funds, from increased workloads with fewer professionals in the field to greater accountability expected of workers, from a more diverse client population in terms of ethnicity, age, lifestyle and socioeconomic status, to name a few, to newly-imposed limits on what can be provided to these clients, human services workers face challenges that they have never experienced.

This coming year's conference is dedicated to examining many of these topics in an attempt to understand the dynamics of them and how they impact the human services profession, as well as attempt to uncover new and emerging issues so that the profession may be prepared for them.

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We Are Diversity

Steve Cockerham

A great conference in Charlotte this year! The city is stunning, and the weather was perfect. No wonder the Panthers are undefeated! As expected, Melissa Patton and the NOHS team led by Jennifer Waite, Kiera Des Champs, and Maurice McDonald put on a wonderful event, and it was so nice to see people again as well as meet new folks. New board members were introduced, and updates from the regions got us informed about initiatives and activities.

TUA Honor students were recognized, and HS-BCP credentialing was emphasized, thanks to CCE. Leadership in the CSHSE informed participants about accomplishments and developments in accreditation for human service programs. Information about publishing with our Journal for Human Services was provided along with access to useful textbooks in the field. Being able to talk with programs with tables in the vendor section was thoroughly informative and appreciated.

The keynote speaker was Dr. Pearl Wong, Associate Professor from Pfeiffer University, who gave a particularly incisive and perceptive speech on diversity. Occasionally, one is struck by a singularly distinctive insight, a bolt of understanding with an inner “ah ha” moment. As Dr. Wong spoke, her words inspired a unifying thought, which was this: Diversity is the quintessential identity of humanity. Sometimes diversity is considered as how we identify someone different, not of the majority or mainstream. In fact, because we are all different in more or less ways, we are all represented by diversity.

Sorry, all those who think they are members of the majority, the dominant, the standard and typical, the expected, the way we’re supposed to be...and manage to take pride or comfort in being accepted, average, and okay in the eyes of others...you are fooling yourselves. You are different, too, and if you don’t know it, you are lacking perception or self-understanding, and if you don’t open up and share, you are hiding it. It’s there. We are all different, and there is no way to make us all the same.

Some differences are harder to hide – skin color, language, cultural couture. Others can be easier to conceal – affectional orientation, religion, socioeconomic level. Yet, we know no two of us are exactly alike. So why the all the problems between people because of their diverse identities? Dr. Wong explains this in her brilliant concept of boundary development. As best we can imagine, because we sure don’t remember, we have no sense of boundary when in the womb, no sense of self apart from mother. We begin our experience of life with a boundary separation – we are born.

However, this stage is completely dependent on others and, ideally, symbiotic, with loving, able caregivers and with whom we bond. Although a separate being, we are not aware of this, not in the sense of personhood. The movies or ads that depict babies talking is an example of this funny but foolish fantasy! We are not cognizant of our uniqueness the first few months after the day of our births.

BUT, a switch is thrown! Soon, we begin to want, to demand autonomy. We learn that this thing called toe or toy is, in fact, mine, and that we want to be an individual with rights and privileges. We cry “NO” and “MINE” and insist on “ME.” We must have a “not me” experience to have a “me.” As Dr. Wong so creatively stated, “We must have a clearing to have a place.” Fortunately, this stage, too, passes, and we yearn for rapprochement. After the terrible twos, we realize that we cannot do it alone and need help, so we open ourselves to others.

We establish boundaries when young to gain a sense of self and then soften them to gain safety, as long as we’re not abused or endangered. Inescapably, we encounter the boundaries of other people and are hurt by this. Our loved ones can try to protect us from this, but only by living in the proverbial bubble or poor health can we deny adapting to those around us. “Boundaries injure,” an emphatic phrase expressed by Dr. Wong. We must have boundaries to survive yet boundaries give rise to fear of loss of love, loneliness, abandonment, guilt, and other unpleasant emotions.

Now, applying boundary development to the issues of diversity is the parallel process of being and becoming our psychosocial selves while maintaining cultural boundaries in order to survive as a group. Our individual and group boundaries are expanding along with the rapid changes in our global human development. That we are the world means that living together productively and peacefully is essential for survival. The alternative is death and destruction, not progressing but regressing.

Guess who’s been sneaking into houses again!



Kris Kringle’s early boundary issues...

N O H S

Prejudice and discrimination lurk in this failure to develop, from the fear of those who might invade boundaries. We can run and hide, playing with just our own siblings or friends, never going to school or work or shopping or vacationing or sports. Appropriate development insists upon social and community relationships. Yet, we can get stuck, only doing life with those we think we are like. Enlightened development is reaching the higher stages of boundary development, where we maintain our diverse identities by remaining true to our differences and then integrating ourselves fully, freely, and with welcome acceptance into all the varieties of human experience.

Boundaries are both the problem and the solution. Without them, there is no one. Boundaries establish who we are. But, the miracle of separateness, that I am an individual, capable of metacognition, able to think about self in relation to others and the environment, contains a necessity of balance. We can be so separate that we fail to survive when help is offered. We can also be so open that we are taken advantage by those who think boundary means capturing and engulfing others. Boundaries protect as much as they separate. We need them, but the barrier must not be so impermeable that it prevents us from experiencing the fullness and variety of all life offers.

Our diverse identities are represented in the manifold opportunities of our societies – to go to the same games, restaurants, beaches, schools, jobs, etc. Dr. Wong provides this simple but authentic assurance, that we can and should maintain our diversity while integrating into all the engagements of our social existence. Life is so much more interesting, entertaining, enlightening, inspiring, and incredible when we interact within our differences.


Can you imagine anything more boring than everyone being just alike, not one whit of a difference. We wouldn't need to ask anyone any questions, their opinions, their suggestions, their advice, their take on things. What in the world would we talk about? I mean, we are already alike enough. We all have and express our emotions similarly. Dr. Wong presented the research on intercultural emotional expression. We can identify the emotions of any culture or group of people on the planet by simple observation of a static facial expression.

Following the insight that we are diversity is the concurrent one that human services is essentially a process of helping people understand and accept their differences. What we do with those suffering from mental illness, disability, poverty, hunger, homelessness, disease...is help them cope with who they are and how they relate to others. What we fundamentally do in the field of human services is help people maintain their integrity of being while joining together in the community of humankind.

When we help those with mental illness, we ideally want them to reach a state of being reasonably at ease with themselves and their people. When we help those with addictions, we ideally want them to be satisfied just being themselves and relating to people with trust and reliability. When we help our elders, our children, our disadvantaged, our hungry, our homeless...we want them ideally to be comfortable living with themselves and others.

Our values in human service are the values of diversity. We live in different parts of the world. Our backgrounds are varied. Our problems vary. We look dissimilar. We have a multiple range of jobs, interests, problems, worries, issues, etc. But what we do in human service is reach across those differences and grab hands, give hugs, laughing and crying, learning as much as we can while having fun doing it. Human service is diversity.






Definition of Diversity

The concept of diversity encompasses acceptance & respect.

It means understanding that each individual is unique, & recognizing our individual differences.



NOHS

A Day in the Life

Kaitlin Jacobs

Close your eyes and imagine you are ten years old. It's Friday, and the end of your first week of fourth grade has almost come to a close. You've spent the entire week avoiding eye contact with your teacher so you won't get called on for an answer. You feel a wave of relief as the day is coming to an end, and soon you will be able to relax in the comfort of your own home without the constant pressure and anxiety of being noticed or being publically called on by the teacher and humiliated when you don't know the answer.

As you're lost in your own thoughts, the teacher calls you by name and asks you to read paragraph three of the textbook. Of course, this paragraph has to be the longest one of the whole page. After you realize you have to read in front of your entire class of twenty-six students, your heart drops out of your chest. With all eyes on you, your throat tightens up and you feel as if you can barely swallow. As you look at the paragraph with frantic eyes searching for words you recognize, you realize you can only recognize a handful of words throughout the entire section. All of the words you cannot recognize or distinguish begin to jumble together and look foreign to you, and you have no idea where to start.

You recall the agitation in your mother's voice as she talked to your grandma on the phone weeks ago about how she knows you can do better in school, but you just don't care enough to put the effort in. You want to know how to read. You want to know how to do your time tables in under one minute and for once, to be the fastest in the class. You want to be smart, and just one time you want to feel confident with all eyes on you when you're called on to read in class.

Open your eyes.

This is how it might feel to have a learning disability that has gone unnoticed and uncared for. Growing up, reading always came easy to me, and I never felt the need to put myself in others' shoes who I knew struggled in school. I never thought twice about the kids in my class who could not read aloud; I just assumed they weren't trying hard enough. My selfish and unsympathetic mindset was challenged when I noticed my nephew was suffering severely while I tried to help him with his homework. I would try desperately to get him engaged in his reading homework, but in return I would notice how he would nervously shake his leg under the table and insist he wanted to go home and play video games. After arguing back and forth that he was not trying hard enough or paying attention to me, he finally lowered his head in defeat and told me three words that broke my heart, "I can't read."

To this day, my 12 year old nephew's learning disability has not been properly monitored or cared for. The past three years he has been passed on to the next grade because they simply cannot "fail" him anymore. My nephew deserves better than this. He is 12 years old and can tell you anything you need to know about cars; the kid is a genius in that field. But, because he struggles tremendously in school and does not get the proper help he needs, he is seen by his teachers and peers as a nuisance. Because he chooses to protect himself by pretending he just doesn't care about school, he risks being seen as unintelligent. I worry every day for my nephew and all of the kids who have to live with undiagnosed learning disabilities. As a Human Service practitioner, I hope to bring a voice to the children who do not have one. I hope to bring guidance and care to the children who are viewed as unintelligent and bullied for it, and above all, I hope you are also affected and inspired to make a difference just as my nephew has affected and inspired me.



Courtesy of National Institute of Child Health and Human Development

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Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity

Karina G. Estrada

Sexual orientation and gender identity are simultaneously deeply personal matters and highly politicized issues which invoke controversy. There is a tremendous amount of ignorance surrounding these subjects. Those who do not conform to the heterosexual binary are often ostracized and made victims of uncalled-for hatred and malicious acts. This ignorance, willing or otherwise, threatens the safety and well-being of members belonging in the LGBTQA spectrum. Many of these members are young and confused; they need proper guidance and answers to their questions.

These teens are often denied access to necessary resources pertaining to their specific circumstances. Unlike their heterosexual, cisgender counterparts, LGBTQA youth do not usually receive the appropriate sexual education in order to better understand themselves. There exists such a variety of orientations and gender identities that they can be difficult to keep up with, but hardly any are taught or even talked about. LGBTQA adolescents may not have certain information regarding their health. Transgender individuals might have inquiries about the process of transitioning, and non-binary individuals might not quite understand what is happening to their minds and bodies and need reassurance that everything is fine.

Mental health is just as important as physical health, and having to hide from and lie to family and friends can have a toll on one's state of mind. Those who are considered to have "deviant" sexualities can often be faced with depression or anxiety. Too many queer teens turn to extreme measures like self-harm or suicide. These teens lack a support group or someone with whom to share their issues.

How one wishes to be perceived can also play a role, big or small, in one's mental health. Even seemingly unimportant resources such as access to cosmetics, safe and affordable chest binders, and even the "right" clothing are significant factors for FTM teens in the ability to be comfortable in their own skin and can make a difference. Information about how to find these resources can be difficult to come across.

Another problem that plagues the LGBTQA community is the immense amount of homelessness. There is an overabundance of runaways and homeless queer and transgender adolescents. They often feel as if they are trapped and have nowhere to turn. Fortunately there are shelters and centers that are specifically designed to help them; lamentably, these safe-havens are few in numbers and can only do so much. If the world continues to socially progress, there might be an increase of helpful institutions such as these (until one day the need for them won't exist at all.)

Finding easily accessible resources for queer adolescents along with keeping their safety and physical/mental well-being in mind are first priority when working with these individuals. So much harm can be prevented when the different aspects and resources pertaining to LGBTQA lifestyles are simply taught, and information is spread. Both queer and straight-cis persons can benefit from learning about themselves or their LGBTQA loved ones. Ignorance can only be fought with knowledge.

"Those who do not conform to the heterosexual binary are often ostracized and made victims of uncalled-for hatred and malicious acts."

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Homeless Alone

Niki Garmon

The number of children who grow up without parents or guardians is a major issue in the world today, and the number of children who are orphaned continues to grow worldwide. The technical definition is "a child whose parents are dead" (Google), but abandoned and deserted children can also be considered orphaned. Parents serve a variety of roles and functions in a child's life. They provide children with basic necessities for surviving such as food, water, and shelter. However, parents give their children so much more than that. Parents teach their children right from wrong, give them love, support, and safety, help them learn to read and write, teach them morals, and help them become functional humans in society. Parents or guardians play vital roles in a child's social, emotional, health, and academic development. It is a tragedy that there are so many children in the world who are raising themselves and having to grow up without a parent or guardian.



Orphanage in Kyrgyzstan, courtesy of Wikipedia

In the United States alone, there are over 120,000 young people without parents, and there are at least 400,000 other children in the United States who do not live with permanent families (SOS). In Latin America, over ten million children live on the streets simply trying to survive. Some people might assume that the continent of Africa is home to the highest amount of orphaned children in the world because of the deadly diseases that circulate through Africa. It is true that HIV/AIDS "has orphaned 17.9 million children" (SOS). However, Asia is home to the highest number of orphans in the world. Over 60 million children are growing up without parents or adults in Asia (SOS). The statistics of these children are mind-blowing and highlight that this is a major issue worldwide.

The growing number of abandoned children is a major issue because many children are dying as a result of having no one to raise them or care for them. According to SOS Children's Villages, over 19,000 children under the age of 5 died EVERY DAY in 2011, and the number is increasing. Another difficulty these children face is not being given the appropriate tools to succeed in life. They are left alone to learn how to feed themselves and survive. Worldwide, almost 70 million children between the ages of 5 and 11 do not go to school (SOS). Not getting an education will affect these children for the rest of their lives.

One possible solution to this major issue could be making adoption and foster care in both developing countries and the U.S. more accessible by lowering the cost and simplifying the process. Such a change would make it easier to place orphans in homes where they would hopefully be loved and cared for instead of growing up alone.

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How Old is too Old?

Ansley McCarley

There are many issues in this world which need to be resolved. Some are discussed more than others, but all have importance. One underrated problem in the world today is the problem of children who "age out" of the foster care system. Many people overlook this issue because it does not affect their lives in any way, but it is a problem which needs to be addressed. Children in the foster care system have already been through so much pain and change in their lives and need a stable environment in which to grow up. However, many times this is not the case, and children end up bouncing from one home to another trying to find a place where they belong.

One of the problems of the foster care system is that it lacks the funds and housing to accommodate all of the children in need. Due to this issue, many of the houses where children stay are overcrowded. Also, some families agree to house children in their homes in order to receive money from the government, not because they actually care about the children. This is the sad but harsh reality of foster care. In addition, foster parents can ask that their foster children be removed from their home at any time. This rejection is a problem because the children end up feeling even more unloved and unwanted.

However, I believe that the biggest problem with the foster care system today is that when children turn 18, they are considered adults and no longer able to access foster care. Children who cannot reunite with their biological families and have not found a permanent residence with someone in the system must find somewhere else to live on their own. I would argue that finding one's own housing is a completely unrealistic expectation for a teenager. First of all, just because an individual turns 18, it in no way means that he or she is prepared for the responsibilities which an adult must take on. Second, many children in the foster care system may not have ever been taught how to further their education, how to live on their own, or how to earn money. How can a child be expected to perform as an adult in such a short amount of time without guidance? It is not the children's fault that they are in the foster care system, nor is it their fault that they don't know what to do when they age out of the system.

Kicking children out of the foster care system before they are prepared leads to teen pregnancy, drugs, alcohol, homelessness, and prostitution. In fact, if this pattern continues, 75,000 children who have aged out of the system will experience homelessness by year 2020. Furthermore, only four percent of children who leave foster care this way earn a college degree.

One way to resolve this issue is to adjust the foster care system. If children are tired of living in foster care, I believe that they should have the freedom to leave when they turn 18. However, if they are not ready to enter the adult world on their own, foster care should extend their services to the age of 21. This modified system would help to keep foster care children in school, send them to college, assist in finding employment, and teach them life skills such as how to pay bills.

Many organizations are attempting to utilize such an extended system, but the change will involve a great deal of work. The Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative is making an effort to extend the system and allow young adults aged 18 and above to live together in independent living housing. Although they live independently, the adolescents are not required to pay for their needs, and they have a support system helping them along the way. This initiative is a great beginning to solving the growing problem of adolescents leave foster care prematurely. Overall, I believe that children should not have to fear aging out of the foster care system. They should be provided with a new support system to help them enter the adult world with confidence. Foster care might not appear to be a big issue to some people, but it is one worth fighting for.

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