

So you're beginning your social work career? We certainly hope you like variety and change, because you can have plenty of both if you want!

We actually know two social workers who have very varied backgrounds and extremely different ways they came to the profession (i.e. US!).

Here's a peak at a recent conversation we had over a dinner at a Mexican Restaurant to write this very article!

*Regina:* So, Laura, tell me how you got started in social work.

*Laura:* I wandered aimlessly for many years knowing I wanted to do something to help kids but it took a while for me to realize that social work was what I was looking for. I got a BA in Psychology and spent an excruciating 3 years teaching high school before realizing this was not the way I wanted to help kids.

I ended up getting hired as a child abuse investigator.

Within a week of being on the job, I knew that social work was the field for me.

I eventually started my MSW at the age of 30.

*Regina:* Did you continue in child protection while you were getting your MSW?

*Laura:* I continued there for a year while pursuing my Master's and then I was hired as a graduate assistant in a college career counseling office where I met *YOU* and I haven't been the same since.

*Regina:* OK, don't air out any closets right now...where did you intern for your MSW?

*Laura:* My first internship was with a local school board as part of a special education evaluation team. At the time, I thought it was boring, because I didn't get to spend as much time with the kids as I had hoped. However, I learned a lot and loved the people I worked with. My second internship was with a nonprofit family counseling agency. I chose this internship because this was what I thought I wanted to do as a social worker. Scary as it was at first, I learned a lot of effective counseling techniques and, more importantly, realized that this type of social work was not what I wanted to do right away.

*Regina:* And now what do you do?

*Laura:* Well, oddly enough, I now work at the same school board where I completed my first internship! The best parts: I get to work with kids (not as much as I'd like) and I'm off all summer!! How 'bout you? What got you started in social work?

*Regina:* Well, I was raised in a very religious family and my parents always stressed the importance of helping others and being part of a community. I knew I wanted to pursue a career that embodied these values and thought, as I started my freshman year of college, that

law was the way to go.

Of

course, after working at the law school for 2 years, I changed my mind.

So, 5 majors later, I was still searching and a friend suggested I take an introductory social work class to fill an elective requirement.

So, I took it and on the first day, not even halfway through the class, I knew I'd found my calling.

*Laura:* OK drama queen, how did you *KNOW* you'd found your "calling"?

*Regina:* (Recovering from the laughter) Well, as we covered the values of the profession, I realized that this profession was an expression of my upbringing and personal values. So, I changed my major for the last time and got a BSW along with a Bachelor of Arts in Spanish and then at age 23 went right into the advanced standing social work Master's program.

*Laura:* You are the embodiment of social work aren't you (insert sarcastic tone here)? Where did you intern?

*Regina:* Cut it out...my sides are killing me!! My first internship was in a geriatric setting. I enjoyed it and hoped to pursue this field of social work long term.

Then I had a year of coursework for my MSW.

In my program, we were able to choose between a clinical concentration and an administrative concentration.

I pursued the administrative concentration because it focused more on social advocacy, social policy, and research.

As a result of certain life experiences, I found a new “passion.”

So, I ended up interning at the attorney general’s office in the division that oversaw state programming for sexual assault prevention and crisis services.

*Laura:* And you ended up working where?

*Regina:* I burned out quickly and chose to leave the sexual assault field. I wanted more experience in research, so I took a position overseeing a federal grant aimed at preventing teenage pregnancy. At the same time, I was also a health educator for a teen smoking cessation program.

*Laura:* Now wait a minute, when I met you, you were a career counselor at a local university. How did you end up there?

*Regina:* The grant money for my position was about to run out, so I took a position as a career counselor with college students assisting them in choosing a major, planning their careers, and finding employment.

*Laura:* And now?

*Regina:* Now, I'm pursuing my PhD and am working in the field of suicidology.

*Laura:* So even though you're younger than me, you've had more social work experience. It obviously doesn't matter when you start, there are so many ways you can make a difference in this field no matter when you come to it.

As you can see, it doesn't matter what your age, past career moves, or what you think you want to do in the field of social work, the field is full of endless possibilities. And it's never boring.

Here are a few ideas:

**Common Social Work Roles**

School Social Worker

Victim Advocate

Trainer

Private Practitioner

Crisis Worker

Medical Social Worker

Substance Abuse Counselor

Administrator/Executive Director

Clinical Social Worker

Program Manager/Coordinator

Case Manager

Prison Social Worker

Parole Officer

Play Therapist

Group/Family Therapist

Volunteer Coordinator

**Common Social Work Fields**

Education

Child Abuse & Neglect

Crisis Intervention

Medical

Mental Health

Gerontology

Hospice

Substance Abuse

Sexual Assault

Domestic Violence

Employee Assistance Programs

Disabilities

Corrections

**Not So Common Social Work Roles**

Researcher

Grant Writer

Forensic Social Worker

Career Counselor/Career Coach



Professor

Mediator

**Not So Common Fields**

Police Departments

Universities

Public Defender's Office

Suicidology

Political Offices

Divorce Mediation