Human Services

Exploring Human Service Careers

Skills
- Good listener
- Compassionate
- Objective
- Insightful
- Empathetic
- Supportive
- Balanced
- Sensitive
- Accepting
- Encouraging
- Analytical
- Creativity

Human services careers fit into two categories: **social services and mental health services**. Social services specialists help people improve their quality of life. Mental health specialists work directly with individuals who are trying to change behavior or achieve a better mental outlook. Whether someone is overcoming an addiction or healing after emotional trauma, a trained mental health specialist can provide the right guidance.

While most counselors and psychologists see clients with a variety of needs, they tend to specialize in one or two areas. Specialties include family, marriage, children, adolescents, career, crisis intervention, substance abuse, and rehabilitation. Some counselors work in hospitals, clinics, schools, or correctional facilities; others venture into private practice. In every state, most types of counselors need some kind of licensing or certification. Getting a license generally requires earning a master’s degree, completing a specific number of supervised hours of practice, and passing an exam.

Sometimes counseling alone is enough to help a person get back on the right track in life; other times, more intensive treatment is needed. A psychologist is qualified to offer treatment that goes beyond guidance and support. He or she is a professional with a doctoral degree (PhD) and is qualified to test, diagnose, and treat a patient. Depression, schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, anxiety problems, personality disorders, and childhood psychological issues are among the problems that psychologists are trained to handle.

Many times, psychologists work in conjunction with other human services professionals. A case manager or a family counselor will refer a client to a psychologist, while a psychologist will rely on a social worker’s reports for detailed background information on the patient. Teamwork is a vital element of the human services industry.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Median Salary</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School Counselor</td>
<td>$55,030</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Substance Abuse Counselor</td>
<td>$41,350</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mental Health Counselor</td>
<td>$41,710</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marriage and Family Therapist</td>
<td>$49,020</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Worker</td>
<td>$50,470</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychologist</td>
<td>$84,220</td>
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From: www.bls.gov/oes/

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Getting Experience in the Human Services Field

Volunteer
Spending time at a clinic or a private social service agency offers valuable hands-on experience along with greater insight into the field of human services. Places such as nursing homes, hospitals, and homeless shelters are always looking for volunteers. In addition to being immersed in an environment similar to what you might work in after graduation, you will be in direct contact with human services specialists. Volunteering where human services professionals are employed also provides the perfect opportunity to find a mentor. Check out idealist.org to find non-profit organizations, jobs/internships, and volunteer opportunities.

Get a Part-time Job or Internship
Any type of part-time job that provides direct contact with people is a good chance to build human services skills. Learning to juggle tasks, schedule time effectively, and deal with people of all backgrounds and personalities will serve you well in your career. Look for opportunities through the WFU Volunteer Service Corps. Try tutoring, peer counseling, or assisting at a health center.

Research
For research opportunities, talk directly with your professors. If you express both an interest and an aptitude in the area an instructor is working in, she may be willing to take you on as an intern or assistant for a research project. If he/she's conducting research on a particular psychological disorder, for example, you may get to interview patients and gather data. Or, if all the interviews are completed, he/she may need help compiling and analyzing the information. Developing a professional relationship with an instructor can lead to additional key contacts within your field of specialty. Research experience looks terrific on a resume and professors provide great references for grad school applications.

Take Science and Service Classes
Take as many courses as possible in behavioral sciences. Classes in psychology and sociology give a strong base in human behavior. Round these out with more specialized courses in social work practice, social research, and social welfare and service.

Take Care of Business
Even though business courses may not be required for your major, take some anyway. They will come in handy if you become a project or programs director one day. Management classes will be an asset for future supervisory roles. Take a class in public speaking as well. Human services specialists give presentations, lead group meetings, and hold training seminars. Check out the Summer Business Management Program for Liberal Arts & Sciences students through the WFU Schools of Business if interested in taking business courses.

Prepare for Grad School
Most counseling and social work positions require a master’s degree or higher. If you plan to go to graduate school right away, get ready now. Apply early. Make sure your grades are good; in some programs, you’ll need at least a B average to even be considered. Start studying for entrance exams (e.g., GRE exam). Use Petersons.com to research graduate programs of interest.

Prepare a Resume and Build Interviewing Skills
Whether you’re going straight to work after you get your bachelor’s degree or to graduate school, you’ll most likely need a resume and have an interview. Make an appointment with a career counselor to review your resume and have a mock interview. See the last page of this handout for tips on preparing a resume for the human services field.

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## The Difference in Degrees

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Degree</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Typical Careers</th>
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</thead>
</table>
| Masters in Counseling (MS, MA, MEd, MAEd)  | Counseling focuses on helping people resolve problems or role issues related to career, school, personal, or family matters. Counseling is generally concerned with "normal" developmental issues and challenges related to mental health and wellness rather than pathological problems. Clients’ issues are often instigated by a significant life transition. Look for graduate programs in counseling that are CACREP accredited. | Community Counselor  
Gerontological Counselor  
Rehabilitation Counselor  
Substance Abuse Counselor  
Marriage and Family Counselor  
School Counselor  
Career Counselor |
| Masters in Social Work (MSW)                | Social work focuses on the relationship between people and their environments or communities. Social workers often work with people who are members of disadvantaged or impoverished groups. Social workers strive to alleviate poverty, address injustices, and support the oppressed. Some social workers also work as therapists, performing roles similar to counselors. | Social Worker  
Case Manager  
Child Abuse Investigator  
Domestic Violence Counselor  
Geriatric Specialist  
School Social Worker |
| Masters in School Psychology (MS)           | School psychologists administer psychological tests and conduct research on the effectiveness of academic programs and behavior management procedures. They also consult with parents, faculty, school administrators, and other mental health professionals. | School Psychologist |
| Masters in Marriage and Family Therapy (MFT)| Marriage and Family Therapists (MFTs) work primarily with families, couples, and individuals and frequently treat anxiety, depression, substance abuse, adjustment disorders, marriage and family conflict, and behavioral disorders in children and adolescents. | Marriage and Family Therapist |
| Doctorate in Counseling and/or Counselor Education (PhD, EdD) | Doctorate programs in counseling most often focus on counselor education and supervision, i.e. teaching and supervising graduate students in counseling programs. | Professor of Counseling Counselor  
Administrator |
| Doctorate in Social Work (PhD, DSW)         | Doctorate programs in social work provide preparation to teach or do research or policy analysis in either academic or non-academic research. | Professor of Social Work  
Administrator  
Social Policy Creator |
| Masters or Doctorate in Industrial-Organizational Psychology (MA, MS, PhD) | Industrial-Organizational (I-O) psychologists study behavior in the workplace. I-O psychologists are particularly interested in the interaction between people in the workplace, leadership development, organization and change, quality of work life, and consumer psychology. | I-O Psychologist  
Researcher  
Trainer  
Human Resources Professional |
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| Doctorate in (General) Psychology (PhD)    | Psychology programs focus on conducting psychological research. Areas of psychological research include cognitive, developmental, behavioral, social, etc.                                                   | Professor
|                                            |                                                                                                                                                | Researcher                                   |
| Doctorate in Counseling Psychology (PhD)   | Counseling psych programs provide training in both psychotherapy and academic/career counseling. These programs also include some training in research methods, but usually are not as rigorous as in clinical psychology programs. The counseling psych model of practice emphasizes solutions and problem-solving, focus on normal lifespan development (as opposed to pathology), and work from a scientist-practitioner model. Master’s degree programs in Counseling Psychology exist but are rare. | College/University Psychologist
|                                            |                                                                                                                                                | Professor
|                                            |                                                                                                                                                | Researcher                                   |
|                                            |                                                                                                                                                | Administrator                                |
| Doctorate in Clinical Psychology (PhD)     | Clinical psychology exemplifies the scientist-practitioner model more so than other types of psychology or counseling, in that clinical psych emphasizes both scientific research and clinical practice. Training in psychotherapy, and psychological testing are also important parts of clinical psychology. Master’s degree programs in Clinical Psychology exist but are rare. | Professor
|                                            |                                                                                                                                                | Researcher                                   |
|                                            |                                                                                                                                                | Psychotherapist                              |
|                                            |                                                                                                                                                | Administrator                                |
| Doctor of Psychology (PsyD)                | The PsyD is a fairly new degree, which focuses almost exclusively on psychotherapy training and minimizes training in research. Some PsyD programs do not require a dissertation and are best for people who are interested in practicing psychology and have no interest in teaching or research. One thing to watch out for with the PsyD: There are a lot of “Professional Schools of Psychology” popping up these days, so be careful about where you apply. It is always risky to apply to a clinical program (be it PsyD or PhD) that is not approved by the American Psychological Association. State licensure as a psychologist may be either very difficult or impossible to obtain if you don’t attend an APA-approved program. | Psychologist
|                                            |                                                                                                                                                | Professor                                    |
| Medical Doctor (Psychiatrist) (MD)         | Psychiatry is actually one of two related fields, the other being Neurology. Whereas, in general terms, counseling, psychology, and social work take a developmental approach to behavior, psychiatrists work from a medical model. Psychiatrists’ patients most often have some sort of physiological chemical imbalance, which results in abnormal behavior. | Psychiatrist
|                                            |                                                                                                                                                | Researcher                                   |
|                                            |                                                                                                                                                | Professor                                    |
| Others                                     | There is a plethora of other specialized degrees and programs related to human services, such as therapeutic recreation, art therapy, dance therapy, and music therapy.                                        |                                             |
Understanding Social Services

Many community members need a helping hand to meet basic needs or to enjoy a higher quality of life. Among these are the developmentally disabled, the elderly, immigrants and refugees, substance abusers, and crime victims and offenders. Social workers play an integral role in improving the lives of these individuals.

At a group home setting for developmentally disabled persons, a social worker might create exercise and recreation programs, oversee daily routines, and arrange medical care.

Professionals in nursing homes and senior community centers give direct care and help with issues related to social security and healthcare, while those working with immigrants and refugees do everything from getting work permits for their clients to finding them inexpensive medical clinics to helping them learn English.

One of the major sectors of social services is family service programs. A social worker involved in family issues helps to create a positive, safe environment within households. Duties of a family service social worker vary with specialties. A case manager often works for government agencies or for private groups funded by religious or fraternal organizations. Both child advocacy and adoption assistance make up especially large service sectors employing case managers. Some family service social workers specialize in counseling individuals within particular categories, such as victims of domestic violence or pregnant teens.

Other specialties include addiction recovery, childcare assistance, and help for low-income families. While there are many different options, the bottom line is that a social worker in family services helps meet a family’s critical needs.

Helpful Websites

American Counseling Assoc.  
www.counseling.org  
Great section for students!  
Lists grad programs

National Board for Certified Counselors info for students interested in becoming counselors  
nbcc.org/student

Council on Social Work Ed.  
www.cswe.org

Advice on Grad School in Social Work  
http://socialworkschool.tripod.com

American Psychological Assoc.  
www.apa.org  
Great section for students!

Careers in Psychology  
www.psychwww.com/careers/index.htm

Psych Web  
www.psychwww.com

Lots of Psych links  
www.uwsp.edu/psych/studentresources/careerlinks.aspx

Human Services Career Network  
www.hscareers.com