

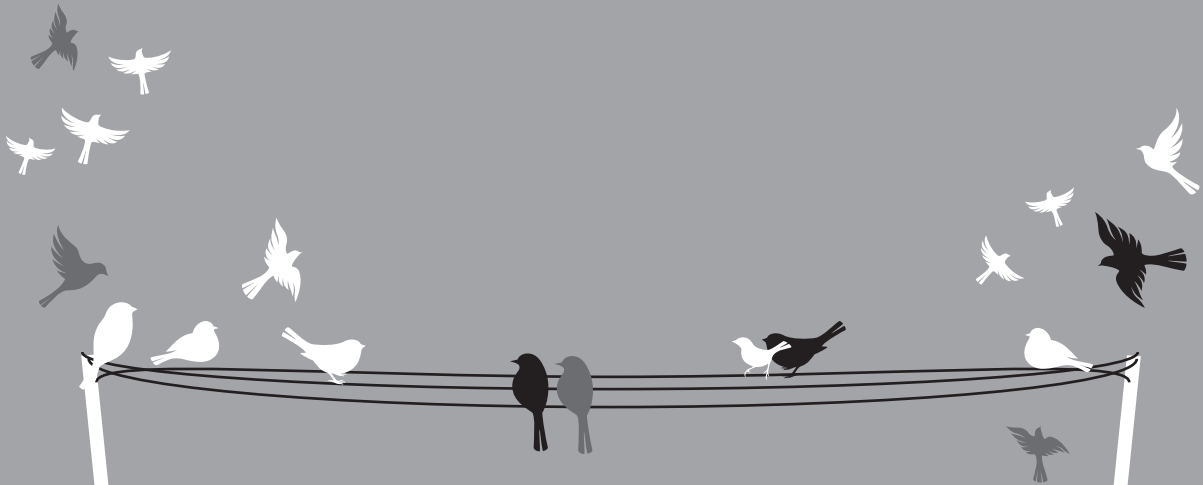
# SOCIAL WORK

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# SOCIAL WORK

*From Assessment to Intervention*



PHILIP HESLOP  
CATHRYN MEREDITH

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# ABOUT THE AUTHORS

## PHILIP HESLOP (PHIL)

I have been a social worker since 1992 and chose social work as a profession to challenge inequality and discrimination. I have worked mainly in childcare social work, and from 1995, specifically in fostering and adoption. I have worked in statutory, voluntary and independent social work and have worked in all four countries of the UK. I developed a specialism working with male carers, as well as caring for children on the autism spectrum. Having held a wide range of practice, training, reviewing and management roles, I am also a passionate educator. I am qualified to teach adults and children, have been an NVQ assessor and am a Fellow of the Higher Education Academy. I completed a PhD on foster fathers through Durham University, and joined Northumbria University's teaching team in 2013. I teach across all social work programmes, focusing particularly on social work assessments and interventions. I supervise PhD students, and I am currently principal investigator on an evaluation of simulation-based learning in social work programmes.

## CATHRYN MEREDITH (CAT)

I qualified as a social worker in 2001, and went on to practise in a variety of mental health settings. I became an Approved Social Worker (ASW) and later an Approved Mental Health Professional (AMHP). I developed a specialism in working with people diagnosed with emotionally unstable personality disorder and self-harming and suicidal behaviours. I qualified as a Best Interests Assessor (BIA), and went on to become a local authority Mental Capacity Act lead. From 2013 until its closure, I was a College of Social Work accredited Expert Safeguarding Adults Practitioner. I left practice in 2013, to teach and research at Northumbria University. I teach across all qualifying and post-qualifying social work programmes, focusing particularly on social work with adults, mental capacity, adult safeguarding and mental health. I am a Fellow of the Higher Education Academy and I am currently completing a PhD, which explores how adult safeguarding is performed with people experiencing dementia.

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

**Philip** ~ For Cath and my adult children Joe, Simon and Siobhan and my granddaughter Lucy Heslop and her mam, Kayleigh. Thank you. Also in memory of Maureen Heslop, Brian and Maureen Dowling.

**Cathryn** ~ For my loves, Stew and Mia, and for Sarah Beer and Alan C. who taught me most about social work. Thank you.

We would both like to thank Kate Keers for getting us here!

# INTRODUCTION

Social work is about making sense of complex and difficult situations so that we can understand how to navigate towards solutions. We assess to inform decisions about how to intervene with people in situations of need and risk, and the decisions that we make can have an enormous impact on their lives. We need to understand how to skilfully incorporate a range of knowledge, theories and interventions so that our practice is robust and informed, and results in credible, evidenced-based judgements. This book is an accessible, comprehensive resource that will support you develop in-depth knowledge and understanding of social work assessment and interventions. Whether you are undertaking your social work training, are in the early years of practice, or are a more experienced social worker attending to your continuing professional development (CPD), this book will equip you with the skills you need to assess and intervene effectively. We reference a range of key theories that can inform and enhance assessment and intervention, drawing particularly on contemporary knowledge about social work practice. Initiatives and innovations age, alter and change; however, a constant feature of social work is making sense of complex problems and intervening to make a positive difference. In short: assessing to intervene.

## SOCIAL WORK IS EVOLVING

It is rather clichéd to say social work is in flux; our professional history has been about change. Social work exists at the crossroads where social issues and social change intersect, and whilst there is a need for the profession, it always will. Whilst there is much political debate about the extent, nature and cause of social issues, there is no doubt that they are complex and problematic. Social work takes a central role in helping society to address these issues. It has progressed from its origins as a voluntary, charitable activity, to a highly regulated profession. Our role has become increasingly focused on safeguarding vulnerable children and adults from abuse and neglect, and in situations where significant harm or fatality occur, the profession comes under intense scrutiny and criticism.

To ensure that social workers are accountable and equipped for increasingly complex practice, professional standards and guidance have rapidly expanded. The Professional Capabilities Framework (PCF), first implemented by The College of Social Work in 2012, sets out consistent expectations for social workers at every stage in their career, from initial social work training, through to continuing professional development after qualification (BASW, 2018). Since 2014, the Chief Social Workers for England have been introducing a series of Knowledge and Skills



Statements (KSS) setting out the expectations for social workers in specific roles and settings (Department for Education, 2014; Department of Health, 2015). The PCF and the KSS emphasise that in every practice setting, and at every career stage, social workers must be able to use their knowledge and skills to assess and intervene effectively in people's lives.

Social work education must provide conditions that enable students to apply knowledge and skills in practice. Until 2010, traditional university programmes consisting of teaching and practice placements presented the sole route to qualifying as a social worker; however UK social work education is evolving at a rapid pace and several models and routes are now available. *Step Up to Social Work*, *Frontline* and *Think Ahead* are all fast track, work-based, postgraduate routes. *Social Work Teaching Partnerships* are accredited collaborations between Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) and statutory employers, which aim to ensure teaching is informed by the contemporary demands and requirements of practice, and employers are committed to creating and sustaining learning cultures for their social work workforce. Social work apprenticeships will provide a further, undergraduate, work-based route to qualification.

The context of social work practice has never been more challenging. The political and economic climate of austerity has created an increased demand for social work interventions, and reduced public spending means that we are required to do more with less. A United Nations inquiry found that people with disabilities have been disproportionately affected by UK austerity policies (United Nations Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, 2016). Across the UK, people who are disabled are more likely to be unemployed, live in poverty, experience crime, and die than non-disabled people (EHRC, 2017a). UK citizens are living longer, requiring more support to maintain independence and quality of life; however, many local authorities have seen their adult social care budgets cut by up to 30% in real terms (ADASS, 2017). Early preventative support for children and families has been reduced, and since 2004 there has been an 18% increase in the number of looked after children (The Children's Society, 2015). During 2016/2017 an estimated 1.2 million people used food banks (Trussell Trust, 2017).

In 2017 the British Association of Social Workers (BASW) produced a Manifesto for Social Work, calling on the government to support the profession to better meet people's needs by ending austerity and ensuring that social workers have manageable workloads, effective organisational models and the right working conditions for best practice (BASW, 2017). In January 2018, the Department of Health was renamed the Department of Health and Social Care. This development has been positively received within the profession, seeming to demonstrate that central government is at last recognising the importance of social care, and its intrinsic relationship with health care (Dennis, 2018).

## OUR MOTIVATION

This book has been written by two people of different genders and ages, who qualified as social workers in different decades, and practised in very different fields. We began teaching on Northumbria University's social work programmes during the same academic year, located in the same office. Like most social workers we are great talkers, and it naturally followed that we began to share our experiences and reflect together on the process of transitioning from *doing to teaching* social work. We found we shared many commonalities which motivated us

to write this book. When reflecting on our teaching experiences, we noticed that many students approached assessment as a task to be completed as quickly as possible in order to get onto doing what they perceived as ‘real social work’ – intervening. We also found that when we visited students during their practice placements, although they could describe their practice in great detail, they struggled to relate theory to it. People who are drawn to a career in social work are invariably problem solvers, but we suspected that some students were attempting to resolve situations before they had made sense of them. As social work educators and the authors of this book, our strong commitment is to demonstrate that effective interventions are constructed when they are informed by analytical assessments and theoretical knowledge.

We recognise that it can feel uncomfortable to stay in that space of not knowing. Social workers never have the luxury of time, and can feel enormous pressure to fix a situation and move onto the next. However, a fix is unlikely to be effective if it is not based on evidence and tailored to the individual situation. Professional curiosity is one of a social worker’s most important tools. In our practice, we reach points where we have to take decisions based on the evidence that we have, but this does not mean that we have nothing more to discover and our understanding is complete. Throughout the full duration of our involvement with a person or family, we must continue to be curious, gathering and analysing information that may challenge and cause us to change our previous understandings.

## STRUCTURE OF THE TEXT

Assessments and interventions are not linear processes, they overlap and repeat. Whilst assessing we intervene, and each intervention model invariably involves assessment in some form. The structure of this book reflects its title: *From Assessment to Intervention*. Part I, *Assessments: Making Sense and Planning to Act*, builds clearly and logically through to Part II, *Interventions: Now Let’s Go and Help People*. There is enormous pressure on social workers to ‘get things right’, but we do not develop an ability to do this simply by qualifying to practise. Social workers never stop professionally developing; our practice and our thinking evolve over time in response to our experiences. Throughout this book, we share examples from our own practice in sections called **Author’s Experience**, to model how reflection supports practice. You will see that we did not always get things right; however, reflection, supervision and tapping into further sources of knowledge helped us to learn and improve.

As social work educators, we understand that learning is more effective when knowledge is contextualised, allowing consideration of how skills, theory and research are applied in practice situations. To give life and context to the learning offered, we have populated this book with case studies involving the residents of a cul-de-sac and entitled these **Residents’ Experiences**. We take an *across social work* approach, exploring social issues and experiences which may bring the residents into contact with social workers within local authorities, the National Health Service and Private and Voluntary Organisations, and a *through the life course* approach, visiting residents at different points of their lives to demonstrate how their needs and responses change over time. At the beginning of each chapter, we set out how its content relates to the current professional standards frameworks for social work – the British Association of Social Workers (BASW) Professional Capabilities Framework (PCF) and the Department of Health and Social Care Knowledge and Skills Statements (KSS).

## Contents

### PART I Assessments: Making Sense and Planning to Act

#### Chapter 1: Definitions and principles of assessment

This chapter explores the expectations of our profession, and considers just what the task of assessment is. We explore key approaches, models and principles, and define key values and concepts that will be referred to throughout the book.

#### Chapter 2: Social work's evolving context: a brief history

This chapter offers insights into social work's contemporary identity by considering its historical evolution. We follow social work from its charitable beginnings, through to the establishment of the welfare state, regulation and professionalisation, demonstrating how assessment practice has been shaped by changing times, attitudes and social policy.

#### Chapter 3: Risk and professional judgement

This chapter considers how concepts of risk are constructed and recognises the circumstances that can result in defensive practice and act as a barrier to effective professional decisions. We explore features of professional judgements, notions of professional autonomy and accountability, and discuss approaches and models of decision making.

#### Chapter 4: Assessing children, young people and families

This chapter begins with a brief history of childcare social work practice, highlighting key legislation and exploring public debates. We consider safeguarding children, young people and their families from risk and harm, reflect on assessment perspectives, and explore notions of childhood, family and gender.

#### Chapter 5: Assessing adults' needs

This chapter briefly outlines the history of adult social work policy and practice and considers human rights. It sets out how adults and carers are assessed, exploring key concepts of wellbeing, autonomy, personalisation and mental capacity. We then consider critical issues when assessing people with disabilities, older people, people experiencing mental distress and safeguarding adults.

#### Chapter 6: Planning, reviews, flexibility and supervision

This chapter sets out the principles for planning responses, explaining how to incorporate outcomes and considering plans for children and adults. We recognise the need to be flexible, as well as process savvy, and then move on to explore integrated and concurrent elements of our practice, reviews and supervision.

## Part II Interventions: Now Let's Go and Help People

### Chapter 7: Intervening as a social worker

This chapter includes information on key professional skills and values for social work interventions. We recognise social work practice can be challenging as well as rewarding, and reflect on professional resilience and the need for social workers to consider their personal wellbeing.

### Chapter 8: Relationships, systems and complexity

This chapter provides a practice-orientated summary of systemic approaches. We focus on relationships in professional practice, offering different theoretical perspectives including general systems theory, family therapy, ecological systems theory, attachment, complexity, chaos and intersectionality. We detail how to use practice tools, such as genograms and ecomaps.

### Chapter 9: Intervening during a crisis

This chapter explores the nature and stages of crisis and considers social work responsibilities and responses. We detail knowledge and approaches that social workers can use to support people when intervening during a crisis.

### Chapter 10: Task-centred interventions

In this chapter, we identify how task-centred approaches were developed. We explore the concept of recovery, and reflect on the power imbalance between social workers and people who use services to consider how we should construct our professional response. We then explore each of the interlinking stages of task-centred practice in detail.

### Chapter 11: Strengths and solution-focused interventions

This chapter recognises how strengths and solution-focused approaches can present social workers with the opportunities to be catalysts of change, empowering people by encouraging hope and identifying and suggesting ways forward. We consider a wide range of different tools and techniques including Signs of Safety, Motivational Interviewing, Brief Solution-Focused Therapy, Inquiry and Three Conversations.

### Chapter 12: Working with groups and group work

In this chapter, we identify how social workers operate within multiple groups and argue that awareness of the theoretical perspectives of groups is essential to contemporary practice. We provide guidance on different group work skills which can inform professional social work practice whether or not we are undertaking formal group work.

# THE CUL-DE-SAC



This book is rooted in practice, and we have populated it with case studies involving the residents of an urban cul-de-sac who represent a cross section of the UK population. The cul-de-sac comprises of six ex-local authority homes in a post-industrial city, some rented, some owner-occupied. The narratives and experiences of the residents and their extended networks give life and context to the learning offered, enabling you to consider how theory, research and practice experience can be applied to their situations.



## NUMBER 1

Mary lives alone.



## NUMBER 2

Alfie and Suzie are a different gender couple of foster carers who offer placements for up to three children.



## NUMBER 3

Maureen and Claire are a same gender couple who have a blended family made up of their children from previous relationships, Harry, Sam and Asif.



## NUMBER 4

Olivia lives with her children, Matty and Georgia. Georgia has learning disabilities and Olivia is her full time carer.



## NUMBER 5

Max and Samantha are a different gender couple with a daughter, Tyra



## HOUSE 6

Liam, Sally and Adnan are three young adult care leavers with multiple occupant tenancy.

