

90th Anniversary Volume in 2009

Families in Society: The Journal of Contemporary Social Services was launched nine decades ago to gauge existing conditions in the burgeoning field of social work while tracking trends that would direct its future. The journal's mission remains unchanged 90 years later. Originally published as *The Family* by Mary E. Richmond—widely considered the founder of social casework practice—the journal will celebrate this anniversary throughout the 2009 volume.

With the upcoming volume of *Families in Society* we begin our 90th continual year of publication. We are, metaphorically, the wise elder of the profession's journals. We are full of life and asking again the question put forth by Mary Richmond in the inaugural issue of this journal: "What are you thinking?" It was important then and more so now.

In 1920, *The Family* debuted when social work was in its early youth. It was soon after the first "World's War" and the nation, figuratively, looked in a mirror and asked what are we, what are we to be, and how do we address the impulse toward the *commonwealth*—the common good? It was a time of soaring riches for a select few but presaged a time of poverty and economic collapse for the many a decade later. It was a time when we were invigorated by the pioneering work of Jane Addams and anticipated the thought and ideas of Bertha Capen Reynolds. In that auspicious year Mary Richmond began, not by telling, but by asking. As one of my editorial predecessors, Ralph Burant, noted on the evolution of the journal in its 75th anniversary issue:

The 1920 editorial's promise that the journal would change in time as circumstances required was both an inspiration for and vindication of [the changes in] the journal. Our challenge was—and is—to be as young in spirit and derring-do as were *The Family's* founders.

Approaching the milestone next year, we similarly begin by asking for thought as Richmond did. We know full well that thought and discourse and communication is orchestral in the sense that when conveyed in its fullest it contains words, emotions, intonations, facts separated from opinions, nods and gestures, rhythm and pacing, resonance and mirroring, feedback, empathy and appreciation, and subtle richness. The best thought "gives birth to its own mother"—it evokes further thought. Do we, for example, still feel obliged to share thought or even safe *saying* what we *think*? How does thought shape our art and our science and how do they, in turn, shape our philosophy? Do we fear attack for saying something others might see as being trite or improper or do we assume

that all thought must be backed up with innumerable references so that we are merely cognitive messengers whose own thoughts merely embellish others' work? Are imaginative thoughts, particular and innovative ways of framing things, or the complex nature of human thought still allowed anywhere other than the privacy of one's own home? What if we step afield into other realms of work and inquiry and import new knowledge—is that allowed and is it "professional"? In short, what exactly do we think about and what do we think about thinking itself? What are the rules for handling and sharing thought? Do we educate students to think and does our professional culture thrive on it?

In anticipation of our 90th year we issued a call for simple ideas, or imaginative and evocative thoughts. Our intent has been to add to the existing rich panoply of subjects and issues which we normally include in this journal. We also seek to strengthen the profession we serve and love. Our customary articles and essays are rich offerings but can that array of offerings be broadened? We want to add to the palette of ideas and fields of future study and knew that, if prompted, readers and professionals in the field and in academia could suggest topics that can only enrich our imaginations. We have included some of these initial musings on the next page as a foundation for future editorial submissions from the field.

What are we missing or neglecting? What would make us stronger? What would help us become more a more potent force for social justice? What could jar or jiggle our minds into reframing what it is that we are about as a profession? What is the state of our collective heart and soul?

When we ask what you think we do so to encourage thought now but also to stimulate your imaginative and creative work in coming years—to improve our science and our art. We want to develop a true wisdom of the profession. This is also a call in anticipation of our centennial year of publication in 2019—ten years from now. Will the call for thought and ideas this year result in a richer and more diverse array of topical matter a decade from now? Can we do it? What do you think?

—William E. Powell, Editor

Social Work: Reflections for the Future

Readers like you have molded and shaped this publication throughout its history as *The Family*, *Social Casework*, and *Families in Society: The Journal of Contemporary Social Services*. Share your suggestions, insights, and observations on past, present, and future social work themes. Visit www.FamiliesInSociety.org/New/Anniversary.asp for information on how you can contribute *your* ideas.

Below is a summary of some initial categorical suggestions and feedback from contributors who were asked, “What does the future hold for social work and what should we better understand?”

Family Demographics and Dynamics

The significant diversity of families and family structure, along with insight into what constitutes kin and community, will require social workers to re-conceptualize family treatment plans.

Research and Advancements in Biology and Genetics

The increasing knowledge base in genomics and a growing awareness of the influences of biology and neurobiology are quickly changing the understanding of human development and behavior. Social workers must be familiar with new knowledge and the scientific/medical interventions that will become routine in traditional assessment and service plans.

Alternative Methods and Interventions

In tandem with the advances in biological interventions, there are numerous influences on practice that will also become routine in work with individuals and families. Spirituality, yoga, meditation, energy medicine, holistic healing, and similar activities will be incorporated into treatment, along with findings from the sciences and a greater focus on ecological practice.

Globalization and Economic/Environmental Sustainability

Significant changes at multiple levels (personal, community, and global) are taking place due to a rapidly interconnected and interdependent world. Increasingly, environmental and economic priorities must be paired at a personal level with individual well-being and community welfare.

Immigration and Transnationalism

With sizable migrations of families from one culture to a new one, the practice paradigm will evolve to “person-in-two-environments”. Private lives, daily needs, and legal and financial issues all have implications across borders. In the U.S., practice and policy on local, state, national, and international levels must take into account relocation changes in the face of global realities.

Technology and Service Delivery

The “Information Society” will continue to evolve and its reliance on technology and the Internet will provide greater opportunities—and challenges—to service delivery. Indirect client treatment can contribute to more efficient and responsive care, but should be conditional to prevailing ethical and legal issues such as client rights, privacy, confidentiality, and accountability.

Identity Crisis and De-professionalization

Social work’s identity as a profession will face more challenges to its perceived efficacy and relevance. Social workers are continually asked to demonstrate how their practice wisdom and methods are distinct from (and thus equally important to) psychologists, psychiatrists, clinical counselors, and behaviorists. Conversely, social work as a distinct art and practice is reportedly facing operationalization downgrades with reliance on non-professional workers in service delivery. There is a growing need to clarify what the art of practice and practice wisdom mean and how they can be employed for effective and humane practice and, by extension, the common good.

Advocacy, Social Justice, and Community Work

Once predominant in the field’s identity, advocacy and social justice must be returned to their place of importance in family and community social work. It is suggested that the profession needs a new comprehension of the place of morality in our social mission. A growing emphasis on social work’s therapeutic value should not override the field’s origins in working with, and on behalf of, vulnerable populations. Traditional challenges on family functioning and individual well-being, such as the lack of financial resources and social capital, need to be reframed in light of the interconnectedness and interdependencies between social groups and cultures. We need a livelier understanding of how opportunity and justice can be promoted in society.