

Organising Field Practicum for International Social Work Students through Creative Projects in the Community Sector in Elderly Care: An Evaluation of the Placement Experiences

Authors : Kalpana Goel

Abstract : Australian social work schools are finding it difficult to find appropriate placements for the increasing number of international students enrolled in their Master of Social Work qualifying (MSWQ) programs. Anecdotally, it has been noticed that fewer social work students are ready to work with older people whose numbers are rising globally. An innovative and unique placement for international students enrolled in the MSWQ at one Australian university was organised in partnership with a community-based service working with older clients to meet two objectives: increasing the number of suitable placements for international students and preparing social work students to work with older people. Creative activities and projects were designed to provide meaningful engagement and experience in working with older people in the community. Students participated in a number of projects that were matched with their interest and capability in a 500-hour placement. The students were asked to complete an online survey after all work for the placement had been completed. The areas of assessment were: self-perceived change in perception towards age and older people, valued field placement experiences including reflective practice, knowledge and skill development, and constraints and challenges experienced in the placement. Findings revealed students' increased level of confidence in applying social work theory to practice, developing effective communication and interpersonal skills, and use of innovation and creativity in preparing well-being plans with older adults. Challenges and constraints related to their limited English language ability and lack of cultural knowledge of the host society. It was recognised that extra support for these students and more planning in the beginning phase of placement are vital to placement success. Caution in matching students with clients of similar cultural background must be exercised to ensure that there is equity in task allocation and opportunities for wider experiences.

Keywords : field placement, international students, older people, social work

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