Activity Journal 1 (Jenna Lee)

Social Welfare History

As a social work student, it has been my mission to enhance people's welfare and wellbeing. Although I have studied clinical social work with a goal of becoming a mental health worker in the near future, it has been equally critical for me to be a change agent to support the welfare state in the United States. I have realized that improving mental health is impossible without improving people's socioeconomic status.

In this vein, it was quite instructive to review social welfare history in the United States. I noticed that social welfare refers to the well-being of society as a whole. This includes all the systems necessary for a society to maintain the health and general wellbeing of its members. According to Barker (2003), social welfare is the system of programs, benefits, and services that help people meet their social, economic, educational, and health needs fundamental to the maintenance of society. The state of collective well-being of a community or society.

Trattner (1999) also purported that the basic tenants and programs of any social welfare system reflect the values of the society in which the system functions. Like all other human institutions, social welfare systems do not arise in a vacuum; they stem from the customs, statues, and practices of the past.

Throughout human history, there have been various laws and services provided for the poor in a society. For example, the poor laws established in 1601 were a codified system to bring order and political stability to England. It determined who was eligible for work or aid from society. There were three major categories of dependents: children, the able-bodied, and the impotent. Children received apprenticeship programs, the able-bodied received jobs, and those incapacitated, helpless or "worthy poor" received relief (outdoor or institutional help) (Trattner, 1999)

Especially in the Bible, the Law of Moses required the care of the poor (Leviticus 19:9- 10) as well as other provisions for the poor (Leviticus 25). Caring for the poor was also consistent with Christian belief (Galatians 2:10). Throughout the centuries, Christianity has influenced social welfare for the west, and even beyond.

The Great Awakenings were "a series of emotional religious revivals that began in the late 1720s and reached a climax about 15 years later" (Trattner, 1999). Human responsibility and free will were very much emphasized. The focus of these movements was on personal faith, repentance, and the need to be born again. Many people would come from many places to hear preachers outside of churches. There was also a large push for improving the conditions of society.

 Another movement that spread through the Church beginning in the 19th century was a movement called the Social Gospel Movement. This movement sought to make traditional Christian beliefs line up with the scientific thought of the day. Social reform was the goal of this movement (Trattner,1999).)

In the 1870's, about 3 million laborers were put out of work due to a series of riots that were instigated, though ultimately unsuccessful, to force large cities to implement public work programs for their citizens (Trattner, 1999).

 The settlement house movement began in the 19th century in London under Samuel Barnett, an Anglican priest. The settlement house was called Toynbee Hall. Stanton Coit founded the first settlement house in New York City called the Neighborhood Guild of New York City. Settlement houses were community centers that focused on social reform and services for needed communities (McCarthy, 1982).

The settlement house movement combined social advocacy and social services to respond to the social disorganization that resulted from widespread industrialization and urbanization and the large influx of immigrants to America at the turn of the century (Digital Public Library of America, n.d.).

By reviewing chapter 2 and resources I found on websites, I was able to understand more about the history of social welfare in the United States. I also understood the role of Christian beliefs in forming the social work profession. It was significant to note that many social workers have helped shape the direction of American social welfare (Karger & Stoesz, 2017). There is no doubt in my mind that social workers will continue to support and advocate for the welfare of all the people that they serve throughout their careers.

References

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