Social justice for all:
Social Work, Sociological and Theological insights
by Monica Short.
Abstract

Social justice upholds human rights and ensures an ethical, accessible and fair distribution of benefit to people independent of their location. People living with disabilities’ human rights are advanced when barriers are removed and all aspects of people’s humanity are valued, including their beliefs. A recent research project collected, via collective case studies, narratives from sixteen people identifying as living with disabilities concerning their engagements with their local rural Anglican church. An integrated lens with an epistemological base in social work, theology and sociology supported the project in two ways, in analysing the data and challenging negative dominant discourses about disability. The stories that emerged from the research show how six churches are ensuring people living with disabilities in rural Australia are embraced as equal, image bearers of God, who deserve justice, respect, dignity, care and inclusion. This talk will share examples of people living with disabilities working through ordinary activities to change, challenge and overcome both rural disadvantage and discriminatory labels about disability. Instances of the church in solidarity, intentionally and unintentionally, empowering people living with disabilities will also be outlined. This presentation encourages respect for the unique dignity of all people, and celebrates belonging, faith and social justice.
'As manuhiri I would like to start this talk by paying respect to the mana whenua of Auckland. That is the Ngati Whatua iwi and the hapu of Ngati Whatua ki Orakei'.
Purpose:

1. Outline a recent case study about the Anglican Churches engaging with people living with disabilities,

2. Reflect how ordinary actions can change, challenge and overcome both rural disadvantage and discriminatory labels about disability, and,

3. Posit that it is possible for social work to unite with other disciplines in agitating for social justice.
Aim

To celebrate and promote instances of solidarity, equality and social justice wherever it exists.

Photo by artist Raymond Howes
Social justice

We advance social justice when we remove barriers that people face because of gender, age, race, ethnicity, religion, culture or disability’ (United Nations, 2017).

Photo by artist Jan Stead
Critical activity

What do you think is the most memorable protest or statement of social justice or act of solidarity?
Background Information

Theoretical orientation

PhD applies an integrated lens with an epistemological base in social work, sociology and theology. (Please see reference list for author’s work.)
Poem: ‘The greater sea’

‘Suddenly we heard a voice crying, “This is the sea the deep sea … When we reached the voice it was a man whose back was turned to the sea, and at his ear he held a shell, listening to its murmur. And my soul said, “Let us pass on. He is the realist, who turns his back on the whole he cannot grasp, and busies himself with a fragment.’ (Gibran, 2008)
Social work

Principles of social justice, human rights, collective responsibility and respect for diversities are central to social work.

(International Federation of Social Work, 2014)

Contrasting cousins by artist Jan Stead
Theology

The World Council of Churches explain that justice in its essence is about right relationships. Isaiah writes of the need to learn to do good; seek justice, rescue the oppressed' (Isaiah 1.17) … Justice occurs when every human person is aware that they have a right to sit down at the table without needing to be asked or to seek permission. (World Council of Churches, 2007)
Sociology

Social justice is a belief system that gives high priority to the interests of the least advantaged.

(Germov, 2009, p. 96).

Photo by artist Jan Stead
Social justice

William Cooper story.

Social justice is a global, complex multi-disciplinary issue and intergenerational issue.

Photo by artist Jan Stead
Research project

Illustrative case study method.
Sixteen people.
Ethics approval.
Signed consent forms.
Stories shared about about to be published.

Consent form: “I understand that this project will be submitted for publication in an academic journal and/or a report … and it may also be presented … at conferences …”
Social justice

Ordinary everyday activities can say solidarity and uphold social justice in a community. For example being listed on a church roster.

Standing in solidarity by artist Jan Stead
Social justice continued

- Important.
- Noticed.
- Equality.

Critical story: Joan’s story (name and details anonymised).

All equal before God by artist Jan Stead
Social justice continued

Friendship.
Respects faith.
Honour.
Dignity.
Justice.
Love.

Colours of humanity by artist Jan Stead
Limitations

Small
Does not represent the full spectrum of thinking
Focused on three disciplines, which are social work, sociology and theology.
Focused on engagement and does not explore disengagement.
Recommendations

- Recognise that social justice is a complex issue and that to understand it requires a multi-disciplinary approach.
- Facilitate for all people justice and share resources fairly in day to day activities.
- Recognise social justice is both a global and local issue.
Celebrate Social Justice

Photo by artist Jan Stead
References


References


Questions and chat time

Photo by artist Raymond Howes