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Book Review

The Enlightened Social Worker: An Introduction to Rights-Focused Practice

By Donald Forrester

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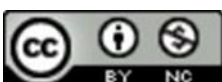
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In *The Enlightened Social Worker*, Forrester skilfully pulls together the themes of conflict vs rights, a dilemma which so often occurs within social work practice and explains not only the complex nature of social work but also the significance of the humanistic part of our work, which directly interlinks with person-centred care as the quintessence of social work practice. The book also explores the complexity of social work practice and a relationship between working to uphold service users' rights and the instances where these rights can become conflicted, demonstrating that it lies within a social worker's role to resolve these conflicts. Therefore, there is a need for social workers to understand human rights and the significance of these being upheld. At the same time, social workers must consider and value service users' views in their practice and must often look beyond the helping part of the profession, as they carry out assessments and weigh up the options available in order to reach the most feasible decisions.

The book concentrates on working with families, but Forrester leaves the discussion open for other professionals and social workers who work in other fields, which can be observed as an invitation to further exploration and discussion on the topic of rights-focused practice. As a newly qualified social worker who now works within the justice field, I could not help but notice the significance and value of rights-focused practice and its complexity. Individuals who are involved in the justice system are often stigmatised and their voices omitted, and *The Enlightened Social Worker* discusses stigma and inequality in terms of individuals being marked as deserving or undeserving of rights, help and support, in the same way that families with social work involvement can be labelled as not good enough parents/carers. This can often be the time when



hostility towards social workers is born, because people do not want the stigma of having a social worker in their life, which can form a major barrier to engagement.

Forrester describes this issue in great detail throughout the book, and mentions the hardship and ethical dilemma of helping people who do not want to be helped, or feel too ashamed to receive any form of help, wherein the statutory nature of social work interventions forces them to engage. This uncomfortable aspect of social work with respect to the conflict resolution required in practice often compels social workers to look beyond individuals' needs in order to allow themselves to explore and understand their perspectives while simultaneously working in line with the policies and procedures set by the organisations they work for. They are expected to advocate for the individuals they work with and to resolve the arising conflicts in a humane and person-centred manner.

Forrester provides an account on what rights-focused practice means for contemporary social work and how it relates to the profession. There are also plenty of practice examples offered to prompt the reader's understanding of the theoretical basis of practice.

Overall, I would highly recommend this book to any newly qualified social worker, as it provides an insightful message to practitioners and allows them to build confidence around working with conflict, explaining how it should be approached. Most importantly, the book prompts the realisation that working with conflict is an everyday occurrence within any social work field, and social workers' ability to skilfully navigate conflict and to encourage individuals towards positive outcomes is a skill in its own right, which is what makes social work practice unique.

About the reviewer

Aleksandra Jadwischczok is a newly qualified social worker who recently started a new post in a justice social work team, where she works with male offenders. Aleksandra also has previous experience in working with refugees and survivors of domestic abuse. Her main areas of interests are criminology and the effects of adverse life experiences and trauma on individuals' involvement in criminal conduct.

The publisher (Bristol University Press) supplied a copy of this book for review.

