

Green Social Work

Opportunities and Collaboration with Outdoor Organisations for Social Work and Human Services Study Program Student Placements

A brief presentation for Outdoors Queensland

Dr. Vinathe Sharma-Brymer

Lecturer in Social Work

University of the Sunshine Coast

Email: vsharmabrymer@usc.edu.au

The Social Work professional principles of social justice mandate that the profession “promotes the protection of the natural environment as inherent to social wellbeing” (AASW, 2020, p. 9). The concept of Green Social Work (GSW) implies a holistic focus on nature-human relationship, placing humans in nature for own wellbeing as well as protecting the natural world. This embraces sustainability and environmental justice. The concept explores human relationship with nature as we become more concerned with issues arising from disconnection with nature. Such issues range from loss of natural landscapes, habitats, climate change, loss and grief from natural disasters, and disrespect for life forms other than human resulting in species extinction. Disconnection from nature affects humans in their psychological wellbeing.

Green Social Work as a practice area focuses on how social work students and practitioners can encourage, reinforce and practise direct and deeper connections with the natural world. Opportunities range from community gardening, environmental education, outdoor adventure to various types of outdoor-oriented therapies (Forest Bathing, Forest School, Bush Therapy, Adventure Therapy, Wilderness Therapy and so on) and also various nature-related activities at the community level.

Social Work students and practitioners get involved in these opportunities through collaborations with relevant organisations. They will practise and promote diverse ways of connecting to nature. They may also focus on improving health and wellbeing through specific interventions sustaining nature-human relationship.

Green Social Work practice connects well with Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the United Nations. It addresses human connection to nature in various ways to understand and contribute towards sustainability through conscious change in attitude and behaviour. This may encourage holistic improvements in protecting local natural environments, improving human wellbeing and efforts towards sustaining the natural world.

Green Social Work – Opportunities and Collaboration with Outdoor Organisations for Social Work and Human Services Study Program Student Placements

- The students of Social Work and Human Services must undertake and complete Field Placements with organisations to learn professional practice skills, ethics and maintain professional standards.
- We are seeking newer opportunities through collaborations with Outdoor-oriented organisations to promote Green Social Work practice.
- This may range from community gardens to conservation, eco-friendly projects, outdoor adventure interventions and activity-based programs, and programs shining natural/organic philosophies of life, and various community-based sustainable ventures.
- It is expected that students are offered opportunities to connect with nature, sustainability and planetary-conscious approaches to life in diverse ways.

The two-way giving back practice of Green Social Work area is expected to encourage human connection with nature and thereby reduce environmental issues; and benefit humans in their health and wellbeing including mental health, community connections and resilience. The Social Work education and practice principles of social justice and social change will be highlighted.