



THE ROLE OF SOCIAL WORKERS

The Child Care and Protection Act provides many duties for social workers. Most of these duties can be carried out by any social worker, including state social workers, private social workers or social workers employed by child protection organisations. The government must ensure that there are enough social workers to carry out the functions in the law.

What is a child protection organisation?

This is a non-governmental organisation which employs private social workers. An example is the Church Benevolence Board. Child protection organisations successfully performed statutory functions under the previous law, taking some of the pressure off of state social workers. This system continues under the Child Care and Protection Act. The Minister will designate the child protection organisations authorised to perform duties under the Child Care and Protection Act.

Some social workers may be authorised to perform all of the functions given to social workers under the law, while others may be authorised to perform only specific duties. For example, some tasks might be reserved for state-employed social workers, or for social workers who have a certain level of experience.

The Minister responsible for child welfare determines the criteria that social workers must meet for different duties under the law. The Ministry will provide each designated social worker with a certificate indicating what functions and duties that social worker can perform. Social workers must renew their certificates every two years. The Ministry also has the power to revoke a certificate if necessary – such as in a case where a social worker has not been performing tasks competently.

The law also provides for two categories of persons who can assist social workers with some of their duties:

- (1) social auxiliary workers, who may in future be registered by the Social Work and Psychology Council after appropriate training
- (2) community child care workers, staff members of the Ministry designated by the Minister as “community child care workers” (regardless of their actual job titles).

These persons work under the supervision of social workers and help with their workload. However, some tasks – such as facilitating adoptions and preparing court reports – must be performed personally by social workers.



PROBATION OFFICERS

Some social workers also function as probation officers. A probation officer is a state-employed social worker who works with people accused or convicted of crimes. For example, a probation officer may make recommendations to a magistrate or judge on the appropriate sentence to impose, or monitor convicted criminals who have been released on parole. Probation officers work with both children and adults.

The duties of a probation officer who works with children may include the following responsibilities:

- ⑨ to investigate the circumstances of a child who has committed a crime
- ⑨ to provide a pre-trial report with recommendations on whether or not prosecution should proceed
- ⑨ to provide information to the court which can guide sentencing
- ⑨ to assist children in conflict with the law and their families, including services such as mediation and family meetings where appropriate
- ⑨ to supervise children who have been convicted of crimes, or to monitor convicted children who are confined in a correctional services facility or other institution
- ⑨ to monitor children's compliance with probation conditions.

The previous law used the term "probation officer" to refer to any social worker who was authorised to do statutory work under the Children's Act. This conflicts with the general international use of the term. The Child Care and Protection Act uses the term "designated social workers" for social workers who are authorised to perform various functions under the Act, while "probation officers" are social workers who work specifically with criminal matters. A single social worker may perform both functions, or there may be specialisation.

The Child Care and Protection Act is designed to make it possible for social workers to focus less on administrative work so that they can spend more time on true child protection work – such as preventative interventions and support to families who are experiencing problems.

