

The Role of Social Work in User-led Organizations

Chairperson: Prof Bong Ho MOK

The self help ethos of cooperative and non-bureaucratic mutual helping has encouraged the growth of user-led organizations in recent decades. In Hong Kong, self-help groups for a wide range of populations including people with disabilities, single parents, senior citizens etc. mushroomed in the 1980s. Social workers used to play a significant role in the formation and development of these self help groups. As the self help ethos favors experience over expertise, the relationship between self help groups and social work professionals is not free from tension. This symposium is a platform for sharing and discussion between social work practitioners and members of self help groups and user-led organizations on the role of social work in the further development of the self help movement.

Presentation 1: The Marriage between social work and self-help - Reconstructing social work professionalism

By: Dr Terry Tse Fong LEUNG

Assistant Professor, Department of Applied Social Studies, City University of Hong Kong

There is often tension between social work professionals and members of user-led organizations as they work together for the self-help movement. The author proposes that the tension can be mitigated by shifting the notion of social work professionalism from an exclusive claim to specialized knowledge to creation of contextual knowledge through a reflexive process.

Presentation 2: When professionals meet experts: The roles of social workers and self help experts in the self-help movement

By: Mr. Pun Yau Wai

Social Worker, Patient Mutual Support Centre, Community Rehabilitation Network
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The vision of PMSC-CRN is to promote self help movement by developing independent self help organizations, and playing the role of public educator and policy change agent. We adopt empowerment as the main conceptual framework and technology transfer as our practice approach, and perform differential roles in different stages of the self help movement. We are organizers and group leaders in the formation of self help groups; enablers and facilitators in organization development; and advocates in public education and policy advocacy. These roles will diminish as the members become self-help experts, who will work and make decisions independently, and may gradually consider the social work profession as the barriers of self-help. These outcomes have led to our reflection on several issues: should social work professionalism be highlighted in the self help movement? What is the most effective way to assist the

development of self help? How should we define our position in service provision and policy advocacy in different stages of the self help movement?

Presentation 3: Working with social workers in the self-help movement

By: Mr CHEUNG Kin Fai

Chairperson, Rehabilitation Alliance Hong Kong