



# Social and Community Work

People, diversity, community – mana tangata

**“You have to be role models; to learn to balance what you have with what you’ve learned in order to provide support and advocacy to people and to families.”**

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Human troubles are endemic in today’s societies. Many people in our world struggle with social and personal problems caused by complex, interacting systems and forces. A social work education prepares you to respond to these problems thoughtfully, creatively and practically. You will be asked to look beyond the individual to the systems impacting upon them.

If you are concerned with issues of justice and desire pragmatic, hands-on responses to human needs and suffering, then social work is for you. A social work education will prepare you for learning and engagement in diverse fields beyond the world of academia.

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## Why study Social Work?

People who are interested in helping others and their community will be drawn to studying social work. The purpose of social work is to enable people to develop their potential, promote their human rights and pursue social justice. Professional social work focuses on problem-solving and change. Social workers are change agents in the lives of individuals, families and communities, as people's problems are often related to factors in all these domains.

Social work ranges from direct work with individuals and working with organisations to become more responsive to people's needs, right through to the development of social policy and legislation. The various roles include counselling, clinical social work, family therapy, helping people obtain services and resources, agency administration, community work, social policy, and political organising.

## Background required

No specialist knowledge is required, but an interest in working with people is important. Subjects to take at school include English, Māori, and other social science subjects. To go on to the professional programmes, some experience with a social service organisation such as the Buddy Programme, Youthline, Women's Refuge, IHC, or similar is needed.

## Career opportunities

Job opportunities arise in both policy and practice in a range of human services in education, health, welfare and justice sectors. These include government social service agencies, voluntary, and community agencies. Graduates work as health workers, social workers, teachers, probation officers, counsellors, advocates, community workers, policy advisers and analysts, and researchers.

Students are encouraged to tailor courses to their career aspirations by combining social work courses with other subjects to open up new fields of opportunity such as:

- Community development
- Cultural services
- Correctional services and Police
- Health services
- Individual care and counselling
- Law
- Māori and Iwi development
- Management
- Policy advice and development
- Political studies
- Treaty-based services.

## Social and Community Work at Otago

Otago's involvement in social work and community development began in 1978. The programme has grown from a work-based certificate into a full undergraduate degree and postgraduate, master's, and PhD qualifications. Our professional qualifications are recognised by the Social Workers Registration Board for social work registration (Social Workers Registration Act 2003).

A distinctive element of our majors is the attention to intervention skills and methods, which lead to versatile career paths, particularly when taken with other social science disciplines. The combination of different academic subjects and hands-on skills and methods provides many career opportunities.

## Study pathways

Our Bachelor of Social Work (BSW) is a four-year degree and students apply for entry at the end of year two (200-level). Otago also provides a distance-taught option of the BSW at third- and fourth-year level for students who already have a relevant BA (e.g. in Psychology, Sociology, or Education).

## Your first year of study

Introductory papers outline the models and concepts of the social sciences. These are applied to the social and human services in the New Zealand context from a Treaty-based perspective, and a study of selected fields of social service practice. Students who want to go into social work must also take some Sociology papers, Māori papers and one human development paper (see website).

## Continuing your studies

Second-year papers cover a range of the sociological bases of social work as well as the various fields of practice and ethical basis of social work. Finally, advanced papers focus on the theories and methods of actually achieving change across individual, family, organisational and community levels. At third- and fourth-year level, students will have the opportunity to practise their skills in supervised fieldwork settings.

We offer a taught master's that can be completed after a relevant first degree (e.g. in Psychology, Sociology, or Education). The Master in Social and Community Work (Applied) degree includes papers and fieldwork placements, enabling you to become a fully registered social worker on completion. It is taught alongside the BSW. In addition to these degree programmes, Otago offers a full range of postgraduate research courses to PhD level.

## PROFILE

### Monica Singh

Bachelor of Social and Community Work  
Social Worker, Ara Poutama Aotearoa Department of Corrections,  
Arohata Women's Prison

"I initially wanted to do Medicine, but explored papers in Psychology, Sociology and Social Work. Social Work sounded more like me because it was hands-on. You were right in there instead of sitting and making judgements about people; letting clients decide what they want to do and how, helping them get there.

"My first placement was with Arai Te Uru Whare Hauora, which I really enjoyed as it was very much tailored to individual needs, and my second placement was with a government organisation, which taught me tolerance and patience.

"Take Social Work if you enjoy working with people. You'll be working with them all the time, every day. When you leave university give yourself some time to find your feet. The job is quite challenging but it is also very rewarding.

"In the Social Work programme, the lecturers are quite giving and very helpful. You know that you are always well-supported by the staff and by your classmates."



For questions about  
Social and Community Work  
[otago.ac.nz/social-community-work](https://otago.ac.nz/social-community-work)

