

Episode 181 - Chad Allee: Leadership in Social Work

[00:00:08] Welcome to IN SOCIAL WORK the podcast series of the University of Buffalo School of Social Work at www.insocialwork.org. We're glad you could join us today. The purpose of social work is to engage practitioners and researchers and lifelong learning and to promote research to practice and practice research. We educate we connect. We care. We are in social work. Hello this is in social work. I am your host for this episode. Charles Syms the idea of leadership is finding its way more often into the discussions of professional social work practice in agencies mission statements or often identify that agency as a leader in their particular field of service in the mission statements of colleges and universities that are educating social workers. One can find references to training tomorrow's leaders. But what does this really mean in practice. What is leadership. What does leadership mean in and for social work. Our guest for this podcast has thoughts about these questions and offers us his insights. Mr. Chad Allee is a licensed master's social worker and adjunct professor in the School of Social Work at Wayne State University in Detroit Michigan. Licensed in both clinical and macro social work practice his teaching interests include practice based research intervention and program planning and bridging the gap between academic research and real world practice. Mr. Allee is the clinical director at a community based therapy practice and serves his local community by working to eliminate child abuse and neglect through education and awareness. In this podcast our guest considers a number of elements he thinks important when talking about leadership.

[00:02:09] He identifies two kinds of leadership and describes the different types of leaders he addresses the differences among three leadership roles supervisors managers and leaders. Mr. Allee points out the need for social work to develop and cultivate more leaders saying that while social work is providing the service to those in need they are often absent from the decision making tables. He also wonders whether in the professions movement towards a more clinical focus we have moved away from our historical mission of advocating for economic and social justice. And might this have implications for the development of leadership within the profession. Mr. Allee finishes the discussion by offering ideas for transferring micro oriented skills to leadership and additionally identifying next steps he was interviewed in September of 2015 by Steve Schwartz I want to welcome our guest today Chad Allee to our podcast audience. And today we're going to be talking about the main area of his topic of interest which is leadership and social work. So first Chad can you tell us how did you first get interested in the issue of leadership in social work. All right well thanks Steve. Back in 2003 I started working in a residential treatment Hall and it was working with kids that were between the ages of 10 and 21. And all of the kids had been abused and neglected and that with the community based home. And I didn't realize then that I was working with really good people doing really good work.

[00:03:50] Like something was missing something was up and it really kind of felt like that tangible teeth all the way back that was missing was hope hope that things could be different hope that the outcomes for the kids could be different than a pipeline into prison. The hope that the system itself could be different. The idea overall that anything could be different kind of half the time they didn't realize what was missing was the idea that change could be made. I didn't know what it was and who's frustrated with these good people had to come and go lucky to get a mentor who supported and was able to complete my BSW and complete my MSW and have wonderful internship experience. Executive director of a large social service agency I had a bit of the internal experience for both of my MSW or social work degrees. Able to work with clients and work in management work and find an advocate for students change experience a little bit of international social work. But even after all that my school felt something was missing. I really experienced the disconnect between academic research and practice. I went back to school and got a business degree and

original leadership and business administration and then I ended up with a greater certificate. Social Welfare Research and Evaluation to help complement and build on the strength of social work and I still thought that something was missing. But I don't want to portray that it was the deficit. I don't think that the deficit at all. I remember sitting in class and learning but you there's great people that monitor feel and change the world. I wasn't sure I knew how to connect that to how I could do those aspects.

[00:05:22] So it sounds like that you began to observe that there might be a lack of leadership in social work or at least a lack in it being visible. I was just going to ask who were are who are the social work leaders that you identified. One of the things that you're right I did begin to kind of experience that you know maybe there was something missing from leaders to convince those or especially when I got my business degree. We're very focused on that. And I myself am advocating class our field overall. I was you know one student out of many as the only person in kind of those people feel that we work with and then we start to think like you know what are we doing as a profession. Just like when we work with clients my thoughts are never about deficits. And so when we look at the profession it's not about deafness the time I remember sitting in class and I wanted to find ways to engage social workers to develop our strengths. Most of my class work at the time was how can we work as a profession that really works. It came from big city in class. How do we do this together. How do we do best. So we start asking where we are and how we got here and then how do we work collaboratively come together organize and invest in our field and really kind of enhancing our leadership potential. And what I notice when we talk about social work leaders were are the sorts of leaders in our state here in Michigan Debbie Stabenow who's a U.S. senator and really is an amazing champion for families. We have a strong NSW State chapter that's working to really engage on both the state and local level.

[00:06:59] We hear about from history. Florence Kelly and Mary Richmond and Helen star Frances Perkins where we take a second look back at the founder of the profession Jane Adams. Think about so Jane Adams you know engaged looking for safe Labor laws and immigration policies and family and poverty fair wages unions the right to vote education and the lazy. Winning even Nobel Peace Prize homosocial concerns. And I remember thinking that I would challenge you now to show that if we compare the social issues that John Adams was advocating and trying to resolve that her time how are things that we're facing right now really that are different. They don't sound a lot different to the solutions may be different but the problems still remain. You have talked with me about examples of kinds of leadership that you're teaching and research has focused on race. Steve so there are a couple of things to think about when we look at the kind of definitions of literacy. So kind of that broad definition you know taking a person or a group from where they are to a place they wouldn't go under. It really is kind of the embodiment of leadership helping people get somewhere they wouldn't be able to go under. So these kind of two main areas of leadership is transformational and there's transactional transformational changes the leader change of the hour and it impacts the world. I like to describe this when I talk about the youth people the idea of you can look at Jane Addams and look at Gandhi. You can look at JFK and look at Martin Luther King and those types of leaders that transforms the world.

[00:08:41] You know transformational leader is someone that's not limited. They want to change. They want to transform. They want to shape the thinking of their hours. They challenge their powers. It's either their powers. And there's a sense of purpose. One of the key things with transformational leadership is vision. They have a vision. They know what they want to get to. They're able to kind of communicate that vision to others. There's also transactional leaders in this office. For me the type of leadership that makes the world go round keeps the trains on time keeps the bills paid transactional leaders focus their leadership on motivating people. They oftentimes egotism of rewards and punishments in our field to make it a token economy or even behavior modification. They're concerned about following the rules. They don't make up new rules. We keep

things the way they are in a transactional leader or someone else's. And standardized ideas and practices. It really is the kind of person that we need to kind of keep the wheels move counsellor like the transformational leaders are fairly unique and not very common but it may well be that I think as you've mentioned before that social work has a history of transactional leadership that it can rely on. And you've also talked about different kind of subtypes may help some of the listeners understand some other kinds of leadership or characteristics of leadership that you've taken a look at. Well there are many different kinds of subtypes of leadership but there are three that I think are important to rate.

[00:10:14] They tend to be the three that come up most or they look at authoritarian leaders with the paternalistic leaders and we look at Democratic leaders so just briefly explain authoritarian leadership. It's very strict lot of control. It's ball calling regulations and policies and procedures is about really kind of making sure the leaders stays the leader. They have very professional relationships with them a lot of personal permissions. You can think of kind of direct supervision and we can talk about ways that the workers in this type of environment. Clearly there to make sure the vision happens. This is the kind of boss that a lot of us and social workers don't care to work for. We've all probably have people in our life where very authoritarian and there's not a lot of room to kind of step out of winds or even express ideas. Another type of Lear that kind of comes up often is turn holistically or set in some ways we're talking about a father figure taking care of their support. It's really about trust and loyalty. And in this type of leadership role the powers are very committed to the leader because they're taking care of a lot of ways. That to me was social work either because we want to be able to advocate not only for ourselves. For our clients. This idea of Democratic leadership in the midst the leader shares decision the most likely share decision making with our client. Promote the interests of the groups has a lot of equality to happen in this. There's a lot of discussion that takes place and there's a lot of debates and sharing of ideas and encouragement.

[00:11:50] People feel good going to be able to kind of advocate and take ownership of the process that have no boundaries especially compared to authoritarian professionals are more open that tends to be more personal. This is kind of the type of leaders that seem to fit pretty well with social work in the kind of culture of thinking that the social order was made or probably drawn to and would like to work in. So you're really advocating for a democratic subtype of a transactional kind of leadership that would fit both the experience and training and the needs of social workers. In my experience like having a more democratic process it really kind of affects not only the people that work there but leaders and supervisors and managers. The culture of the agencies is all the influence because there's ownership in really when you mention transitional leadership that is a great way to keep things moving. But I like the idea of also adding and transformational leadership when we talk about the field overall so that we can build our field together and really kind of change the way we think about things. Not only do the things that change the way we think about things and move forward as a profession. So the transformational leader is one who can inspire change in the transactional leader also is the one who kind of makes it happen. The democratic model is the most effective way in order to make that happen. That makes good sense. You've also if you could help us understand some of the differences or distinctions that you're making between supervision managers and leaders. Right. So those words tend to be used pretty interchangeably.

[00:13:30] A lot of people look at those in the call you know maybe call you a supervisor call your manager and call you a leader. There's a couple different ways that we can kind of distinctly talk about that. So supervisors tend to be the people that do the direct line supervision. Those are the people that can help push the paper towel the processors make sure things get done on time the deadlines are out. Usually it's kind of the first line managers then are the ones that set up those processes. The other ones in the middle level that make sure that the overall function of the agency is to tap that potentially be more decision making of our demands. Supervisors go to managers to get assistance and clarification isn't direction. Then when we look at the other reasons are the ones

that the top leaders are the ones that should be sharing the vision they should be setting that purpose. They should be setting the direction. Most leaders are concerned with the supervision and management fees because they hire good people to do good work and they know that work is getting done and they allow people to work. This is where the idea of transactional and transformational come together. Supervision and Management really would be more transactional transformational than would be that leader. What I'm looking at in social work is that we do a pretty good job at that transactional. We do a pretty good driver talking our clients and advocating for things that will only tend to turn the lens on ourselves and what we're doing here. And I think we need both transactional leadership to move us forward and transformational leadership we're going to enhance who we are as a profession.

[00:15:12] Well this reminds me of a discussion you and I had about the leaders being the architect and the managers and supervisors being the builder and both are critical you need the vision and the blueprint to set a direction. But you also need to make sure that there is movement toward getting there and the way in which you've described supervision management leaders is fairly consistent and it doesn't make one more important than the other. It says that it's the synergy of them together that helps the organization move. And I would assume by extension make the field move that Stephen would agree and actually that would be a good place. That makes me think about some things that I've observed in social work and again the deficit but we have noticed that if you know interact with community members it is social work in a lot of ways of doing the work. Then is often absent from the decision making. Kippen I teach a class or a speech group. I always ask Who are the social work leaders who are the people leading social work right now. And I always say look if we were to say is there one person to come up with that most people in the room would know who that is. They recognize the need to and honestly some 2000 probably five have never had a name that has come up that most people would know. And so when you just mentioned you know transactional transformational leadership there are always regional and local people that come up because social work have leaders.

[00:16:38] We have lots of leaders but because of the profession we're not actively grooming and developing and supporting our leaders on a large scale. I really think that we're doing ourselves a disservice. We do the transactional stuff very low that transformational stuff is a field that we need to work on to think if we really cannot think back to the roots of social work in a broad scale micro mezo and macro level impact that Jane Adams said and then our shift kind of as a profession to the majority clinical focus. I think that we really stepped away from a large part of our mission to fully engage an advocate for social and economic justice on all levels hand away from advocating for our field in our current structure of a more silo focused education more silo focused academic roles question the social workers have to be macro or in management or investor and also to learn leadership skills. It's not about whether there's a deficit in leadership and social work but whether or not we're kind of perpetuating this idea. Wouldn't the Funchal be anything other than transactional Africanness like has a feel. Can we move into that transformational people part of things so help us identify what the transferable skill set that would help a social worker move into leadership and strength leadership skills inherent in social work that would allow what you've just offered to happen. Well I think when we look at transferable skills we as a profession advocate for other people. So I think right there we already know how to advocate for others. How do we advocate for ourselves. This is about a place at the table for us about framing the debate process. We're a strength Bayfield we can do this.

[00:18:26] We can create a climate to find and develop social work leaders we can advocate for ourselves our clients in our society and really this is a parallel process. We're doing these things right now helping others help themselves. I think that we can easily help our. Now you know in a lot of ways social work has a negative connotation because we're borrowers of knowledge. We can go to almost any academic journal and search for an article or research on foster care or poverty

when we have a really hard time finding something written by a social worker. And so I would like to really kind of see us move to take our practice mileage insert contributing that to the knowledge base about transferable skills. Social work is about bringing people together. It's about helping others help themselves. Leadership is inherent to that process. I think that we're already doing these things when we look back at those definitions of transformational leadership Heartfield embodies change our field embodies transformation bodies redirecting and helping people. Ships are thinking we already are challenging inspiring our clients. That's what we're there with a sense of purpose. We do the thing you know it's really hard to go out and find a social worker that doesn't love the job. We create that vision for others and we communicate this idea to others. What I'm saying is that I think that we have those inherent skills. I mean even question whether they need to be transferable or not. I think the album. I think what we need to do with each of us about our own inner Jane Adams.

[00:20:01] You've talked about the next steps in very creative language would you like to share it with our listeners. So Steve one of the things that I like to champion and advocate for is this concept of being positively frustrated. And I would love people kind of leave are talking after listening and then we'll positively frustrated the curious about what's moving forward be translated about the things that are happening but be positive about that and to think about the next steps. The one thing you can do what's one thing you can learn what can you contribute to building on your natural curiosity to move away from the idea of being positively frustrated towards new skills towards new answers and a new way of doing. Identifying strength in the strength of others working together. We need a model for social work leadership a model that fits the strength and unique skill sets that are inherent in social. I think it's not about suiting social work into leadership. It's about developing leadership that enhances social and we do that together. We do learn from starting out being positively fostered. Well I think if summarized it better than I could really use the strength base optimistic hopeful approach to be able to kind of give direction and final advice to practitioners teachers researchers and anyone else is listening today and I appreciate your creativity the way you frame things in a positive way and I hope we will hear from you again in the near future. Thank you very much. I live my final thought would be for people not to win leaders it's not about to take action and what can you do to build your own skills and look in you to help others help themselves. That's wonderful.

[00:21:44] Well thank you for sharing with us today and I hope that we can have a talk with you again. Thank you. You have been listening to Mr. Chad Allee talk about leadership and social work. We hope you have enjoyed the discussion. Please join us again at in social work. Hi I'm Nancy Smyth Professor and dean of the University of Buffalo School of Social Work. Thanks for listening to our podcast. We look forward to your continued support of the series. For more information about who we are as a school our history our online and on the ground degree and continuing education programs we invite you to visit our Web site at www.socialwork.buffalo.edu and while you're there check out our technology and social work research center you'll find it under the Community Resources menu.