



HOW AND WHY YOU SHOULD SWITCH TO A CAREER IN SOCIAL WORK:

A Guide To Social Work Career Paths



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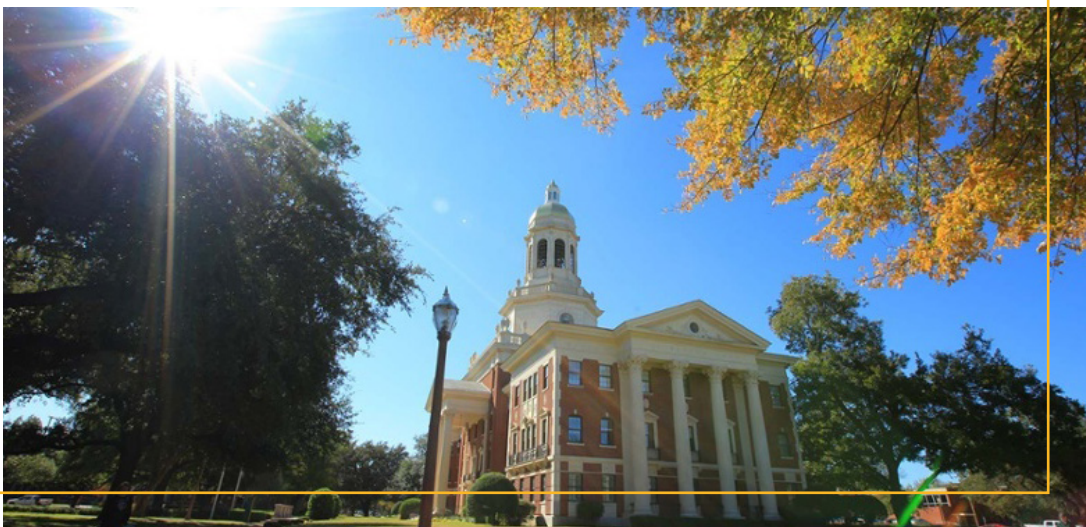
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About this Resource

Changing careers is a natural part of almost every person's professional journey. Some make the change because they are unhappy in their current profession, while others make a switch to grow or find more rewarding work. Making the switch to a new career does not mean you need to start over. You can build on your prior work experience and skills and leverage them into skipping entry-level positions. Whatever your reason for considering a career shift, know that you are in good company, as adults change jobs an average of 11.7 times between age 18 and 48.

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Its flexibility, vast career possibilities, interdisciplinary nature, and ease of entry *make social work the ideal profession* for those looking to make a career change. This guide will explore the field of social work, what makes it a perfect career to transition into, and practical steps for making the switch. Read on to learn how you can get out of your current career and get started in the field of social work.



What Do Social Workers Do?

Social work is a career for people who want to make a meaningful difference in the lives of others. Social workers are needed in almost every area of society and are frequently brought in to help resolve problems, care for individuals and communities, improve processes, and fight for justice for all peoples.

Read more: Get a feel for the particular areas of social work through a volunteer opportunity before investing in a degree or applying for a position in the field.

The following are just some of the careers available to social work professionals, but the career field is broad and the job possibilities are nearly endless. To get you started, here are a few places social work professionals are employed.

Social Work Career Paths

Government Sector

These careers include working in federal programs regarding healthcare, criminal justice, social services, social justice, child welfare, health policy, behavioral health, and more.

- Intimate Partner Violence Social Worker
- U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs: Career Specialist
- Division of Family and Children Services: Specialist

A Day in the Life: Experience the day-to-day responsibilities of a Nonprofit/Government Social worker.

For-Profit Sector

These social work professionals work in private practice and other agencies.

- Board Certified Behavior Analyst
- Adoption Social Worker
- Psychotherapist

Impact Local Communities: Read about Alumna Liz Ligawa's journey from the Baylor MSW program to her current role as Director of Community Engagement.

Nonprofit Sector

Careers in the nonprofit sector deal primarily with charities and organizations that provide support to a community or individuals and rely on donations for the majority of funding.

- Community Impact Program Coordinator
- Substance Use Disorder Program Director
- Abused Women's Shelter: Court and Community Advocate



Health Services

These social workers are based in hospitals, outpatient facilities, and hospice care organizations and help sick individuals and their families get the resources they need.

- Suicide Prevention Case Manager
- Hospice Medical Social Worker
- Mental Health Social Worker

Read More: Learn why social workers are in a unique position to offer hope and healing to those suffering from mental illness.

School Systems

Social work professionals in these careers help children and families at schools with behavior, mental and emotional health, and conflict resolution among other things.

- Crisis Intervention Specialist
- School Counselor
- Family Intervention Specialist

DISCOVER WHAT DO

— social workers —

DO?

Social workers fill many different roles and responsibilities. Explore this unique and multifaceted discipline with endless career opportunities.

[ACCESS THE GUIDE →](#)

Making the Switch: Why Choose a Career in Social Work?

If you are looking to make a career change, you aren't alone. According to data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics Current Population Survey, an estimated 6.4% of workers will change occupations each year. Because of its flexibility, interdisciplinary nature, and wide variety of career paths, social work is a perfect field for individuals looking for a change. Read on to learn how you can get started in a career helping others by transforming lives and communities.

What Is Your *Why*?

What is your why? This is perhaps the most important question to ask yourself when you are planning a career shift. Examining your motivations for leaving your current job will provide you with an opportunity for important self-reflection and can often reveal what matters most to you.

For example, maybe you find your current line of work intellectually or personally unfulfilling. Or perhaps you have a comfortable salary but do not see your work making a difference in the world. Whatever your motivation, it is important to identify what you want out of your career, so you can find fulfillment in your new job.

Here are just a few common reasons people choose to switch into a career in social work:

- They are burned-out and unfulfilled in a corporate job.
- They have a strong desire to make a meaningful impact and do good and cannot find that in their current line of work.

- They are motivated by a (recent) life experience or personal encounter with the social work profession.
- They want to affect social justice reform.

Social Work is Ideal for Career Changers

So, you have identified your motivations for switching careers and what you want out of your new job, but what makes social work a good field for career changers? A few factors are: It is flexible, highly versatile, and interdisciplinary.



Social work careers are flexible, as these professionals spend a lot of their time meeting with clients and operate on a fluid schedule. Additionally, if a social worker opens their own clinical practice, they have the freedom to set their hours to meet their personal obligations.



Social work careers exist in several different job fields and settings including mental health clinics, schools, child welfare and human service agencies, state and local government agencies, hospitals, nursing homes, community development corporations, prisons, and private practices. This means prior job experience can easily transfer to a new line of work, and the plethora of options makes it possible to find a job anywhere in the nation.



A career in social work is interdisciplinary, meaning that it relies on the professional's knowledge of different subjects and how those various disciplines collaborate to achieve the desired outcome. Those who switch into social work come from all different career paths and backgrounds. From government positions and corporate offices, to sales jobs and education professionals, individuals who desire to help others and make a difference in the world around them find a fresh start in social work.



Pro Tip: Any profession can transition easily into a successful social work career. Here are six careers that make the switch to social work particularly smooth.

Social work is one of the easiest professions to transition into because it does not require one specific undergraduate degree. Any undergraduate degree can add value and a unique perspective to social work practice. When combined with a Master of Social Work degree, the necessary field experience, and the proper licensure, individuals from all backgrounds and prior careers can find their niche and make a meaningful impact in this field.

For example, an undergraduate degree in biology gives the person a unique advantage in medical or healthcare social work careers. A degree in sociology or psychology lays much of the groundwork needed to understand human development and reasoning, which is necessary for any social work job. And a bachelor's in political science or legal studies is a perfect transition into a social work career with the local or federal government.

Pro Tip

Pro Tip: If you earned one of these five undergraduate degrees that are a great compliment to an MSW, you may have a better understanding of the graduate coursework than you think!



BOOK
— a —
MEETING

There are many reasons why individuals choose to pursue a career in social work. We encourage you to chat with our MSW Student Ambassadors to explore the various journey's that led to social work (and why this profession is so fulfilling)!

LET'S CHAT →

What to Consider When Switching to Social Work

The process of changing careers can be daunting, after all, there is a lot to consider when making this decision. But don't let the fear of missing something or not knowing exactly how things will turn out, paralyze you into not making any decision. If you are unhappy or unsatisfied with your current job, you have the power to make a change for the better!

That being said, the decision to change careers should not be taken lightly. Here are a few things you should think through when considering a switch to social work.

Finances

Money is often the reason people either stay in a job that makes them unhappy or switch to a new career that offers the opportunity to earn more. While money is an important factor in a job search, it shouldn't be your only consideration. Not only will a career in social work allow you to earn more (the median salary for social workers was \$51,760 in 2020) than the national median for other occupations (\$41,953 in 2020 according to the [Bureau of Labor Statistics](#)), but it is also rich and fulfilling in many ways that are not financial.

It is also important to consider the cost of returning to school for an advanced degree. How much will the degree cost? What is the return-on-investment? Will you enroll part-time or full-time? Will you continue to work while earning your degree? Each of these questions needs to be carefully weighed as you begin your move to the social work profession.



Pro Tip: To help offset (or even cover) the cost of your MSW degree, check out these six social work scholarships you've never heard of!

Lifestyle

As a whole, social work is a fairly flexible career field, which is also one of the factors that attract individuals to the profession. It offers working professionals some variance from the traditional 9-5 and the ability to perform some aspects of the job remotely, such as paperwork and reports. When making the switch to a career in social work, it is important to consider how this profession would fit with your current life situation.

For example, the flexible nature of the job could be a great fit for working mothers and fathers who want to be present in their children's lives. Other questions to consider include: How will returning to school affect me and my family? Are there good social work jobs around me, or will I need to relocate for a career? What is the work-life balance like?



Experience

While no experience is required to return for your MSW, if you are considering a career in social work, it is a good idea to get familiar with the field. Dipping into the career, before quitting your current job or committing to a graduate degree, can help solidify your desire to enter the field, narrow your window of specialization, and give you the confidence needed to pursue the career change you desire.

If you have no first-hand experience of social work — consider volunteering. Look for opportunities within your community, at local schools, government agencies, or places of worship. Although you will not be able to practice as a licensed social worker, the exposure will help you understand what to expect in a career.

Read Her Story: Through an inspiring number of twists and turns, new jobs and challenging situations, alumna Toni Portacci was eventually led to a career in social work.

A Step-By-Step Guide: How to Enter the Field of Social Work

After lots of consideration, reflection, careful planning, and coordinating with your support system, you have decided that making the switch to a career in social work is the right move for you. First, congratulations! Often *making* the decision to get out of a stressful, unhealthy, or unfulfilling job can be the most difficult part.

But what are your next steps? What should you do now?

Once deciding to pursue a career in social work, here are five steps you should take to land a job in the social work profession.



Decide which institution is right for you. To call yourself a social worker, you must hold a social work degree (bachelor's or master's). Not only will a Master of Social Work degree legally allow you to practice, but it will also give you the experience you need to land supervisory roles and other advanced positions. When considering different institutions, look for one with specializations that are of interest to you and faculty who are performing compelling research.



Complete a degree. Pursuing an MSW, either part-time or full-time, will provide you with the opportunity to obtain the skills necessary to advance in the field of social work. During your graduate courses, consider specific coursework and specialized certifications that will train you in the specific area in which you want to practice. For example, if you plan to work as a clinical social worker, take as many clinical classes as possible. If macro social work interests you, choose courses in advocacy and nonprofit management.

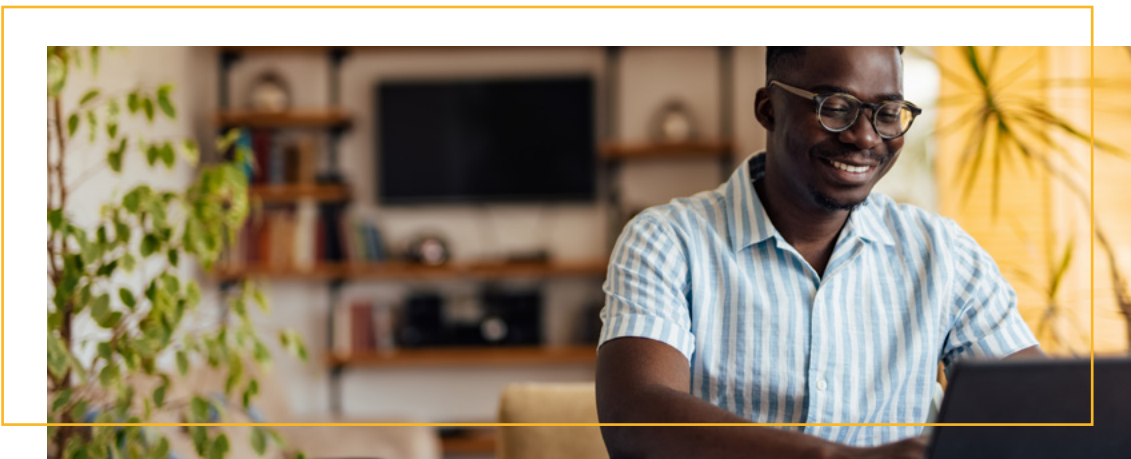


Complete the licensure requirements. If you want to practice and be recognized as a social worker, you will need to become licensed or registered in your jurisdiction. The specific requirements vary by state, so be sure to explore what is needed for licensed practice well before you graduate. Make a plan to complete your degree, pass examinations, finish required hours of supervised experience, become board certified, and any other requirements needed to practice. Also, social work licenses need to be maintained and kept up-to-date with continuing education. Don't forget to check how often your license needs to be renewed and what it will take to keep it active.



Network and Apply. During your time in school, continually update your resume, adding internship and other field placement experiences. It is also important to maintain relationships with your professors and professional colleagues you meet. You will rely on your network to help you land a social work job, immediately out of your graduate degree program. Also, begin your job search before you graduate; don't wait until you have your degree in hand. Scour job listings online, put out feelers to your network, inquire at local schools, nonprofits, agencies, and other advocacy organizations.

Finally, don't forget to leverage your prior work experience when entering the field of social work. Spend some time crafting your resume to highlight applicable skills and experience that will showcase you as a qualified candidate. Use your career and work experience before social work to your advantage. Your career change gives you credibility others do not have and makes you a valuable asset to any social work practice.



What to Look for in an MSW Program

Not all social work degree programs are created equal. When you make the decision to return to school to make a career change possible, your time, energy, and resources are especially precious. We know you want to spend them wisely, so here are five essential elements that should be present in any graduate degree program you consider.



Research-Based Curriculum — Choose a program that emphasizes research. In addition to time-tested methods and modalities, programs that rely heavily on the latest statistics and evidence to inform their curriculum are at the cutting edge of 21st-century social work and problem-solving.

Watch Now: View our recorded session to hear from our Associate Dean about how the research of our MSW faculty is impacting current social work practices.



Integrated Learning Approach — Look for a program that takes an integrated (or holistic) approach to social work. Human beings function best when their mind, body, and soul are all healthy and properly integrated. After all, this is one of the goals of social work: to help clients achieve wellness. Likewise, the best MSW programs prepare students to ethically integrate their religious faith with social work practice, by teaching and observing this practice in the classroom and field work.



Flexible Completion Options — Flexibility is another important trait of top MSW programs. Many students who return for their MSW are also working professionals, some with families. Several MSW programs offer either a fully-online program or a hybrid mix of in-classroom and online learning, allowing students to work at their own pace and in harmony with their many daily obligations.



Expert Faculty — Support from faculty who are experts in the field should also be an important consideration when picking a program. Faculty with hands-on, field experience provide a wealth of practical knowledge and can help students to anticipate the challenges they will face on the job.



Strong Field Placements — Perhaps the most important consideration when choosing an MSW program is the presence of a field placement component. Field placement is a supervised internship with an organization that provides social services. Field placement is a crucial aspect of any MSW program because it provides students with practical tools and experience and teaches them to think and act like social workers.

Watch Now: View our recorded session to hear from our Field team about our unique internship process and how you can secure a high-quality placement.

Much of an MSW education is comprised of this hands-on exposure to fieldwork, and it is important for a student to serve at placements that expose them to different experiences and perspectives. Placements are a result of the school's partnerships and relationships with social work groups and organizations, so look for a well-connected and respected MSW program.

Baylor's Master of Social Work Program

At the Baylor University [Diana R. Garland School of Social Work](#), we know that the next generation of social work professionals can change the world for the better. Our graduate program equips graduates to be compassionate and qualified, and to confidently dive into their chosen area of expertise. Our faculty and student body are one family, made up of individuals who care deeply about helping people.



[Our mission](#) is to prepare students to be social workers who recognize that their work is about service and justice, the dignity of individuals, and the power of relationships, and who can practice their craft with integrity and competence, ethically integrating faith and social work practice to best serve their clients.

— Dean Singletary



The Baylor MSW program consists of 60 course hours and offers two specializations: Clinical Practice and Community Practice, and prepares students to serve as licensed professionals in their communities while learning to ethically integrate faith and values within social work practice. The degree program is fully accredited by the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) and was most recently reviewed in 2021.

[For more information on MSW specializations check out our digital resource, Master of Social Work — The MBA of the Helping Professions.](#)

The MSW offers a full-time, residential experience in Waco, TX as well as online options. **[Hear from our Program Director to explore the curriculum and concepts taught in our residential MSW program.](#)**

Connect with Us

Switching to a career in social work is an excellent idea for those who want meaningful employment that makes a difference in the lives of others. If you are ready to begin your career in social work, the best way to start is with a Master of Social Work degree.

At Baylor University our social work program is designed to support you throughout your journey. We are here to equip you with the tools you need to make a smooth transition into a new career and a lasting impact in the lives of those you serve. To get started contact us today, and best of luck as you pursue your new career!

GET
— *application* —
ADVICE

Applying to graduate school comes with a lot of questions. To help make the application process as simple and easy as possible we're sharing insider information so you can submit your most competitive application!

[EXPLORE THE RESOURCE →](#)



**Connect
with Us**



**Book
a Meeting**



**Watch a Recorded
Webinar**



**Explore Baylor's
MSW Program**



**Discover What Social
Workers Do**

Start Your Journey

Your desire to do good through helping others is a gift worth sharing. Because of people like you, individuals and communities in our world who are struggling are able to find hope and support. To be the best possible advocate that you can be, it is important to arm yourself with the best education and tools. At Baylor University, our Master of Social Work degree is grounded in research, supported by expert faculty, and flexible enough for the busiest working professional.

The resources offered through one of our degree programs will help you to become the most effective advocate you can be for those you wish to serve. We can't wait to meet you and help you get started on your path to bettering the world.

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