

What Social Workers Make

The dinner guests were sitting around the table discussing life. One man decided to explain the problem with social services. He argued, “How’s a person going to benefit from someone who decided his best option in life was to become a social worker?” He reminded the other dinner guests what they say about social workers—“bleeding heart liberals.” To stress his point, he said to one of the guests, “You’re a social worker, Bonnie. Be honest. What do you make?”

Bonnie, who had a reputation for honesty and frankness, replied, “You want to know what I make?” She paused for a second, and then began.

“Well, my colleagues and I make safe places for abused children and battered wives. In the process, we do our best to make them feel that they didn’t deserve the treatment they got, so they can go out and do better in their lives.

“We make arrangements for the elderly to go home from hospitals with adequate care, and run support groups so their caregivers don’t burn out.

“When a young widow or single mother doesn’t know where to turn, my colleagues and I make sure that she knows—whether people like it or not—what benefits she’s eligible for. And we do the best we can to make sure she doesn’t get lost in the bureaucracy.

“We make plans with clients so they can get jobs and homes. And this is only a start.

“You want to know what social workers make?” Bonnie asked again. She paused and looked at every person at the table.

“We make visits in neighborhoods that a lot of people wouldn’t go to on a bet, because we know that people there are in need. And we make friends there who invite us back to their weddings, their luaus, and the opening of the community center that we campaigned for.

“We make time to listen to the elderly, the mentally ill, the lonely. And we have knowledge and skills to help them make real improvements in their lives.

“We make appointments with officials and testify before the legislature to get everyone in the community a fair shake.

“Some of us teach, to make the next generation’s social workers.

“And sometimes, we make plans with our friends and families—and then have to break them because there’s an accident, a fire, a disaster here or in another state or even another country, and a social worker is needed.”

Bonnie paused one last time and then continued. “So when people want to judge us by what we make, we can hold our heads up high and say, ‘I make a difference. . . . What do you make?’”

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