**Unit One** addressed the big picture of labor market realities—which industries are growing, which are shrinking, and technology’s impact on the market. They learned about a wide range of direct service careers in Community and Social Services and also consider indirect service provider careers that exist in the industry. They learned about the various kinds of career families and employer types available to employees in the Community and Social Services sector.

**Unit Two** addressed the inner workings of the job-seeker. What are her interests and passions? What kind of work environment will she enjoy? What careers should she consider based on what she knows about herself and what factors might influence someone making a career change? Students also learned to navigate career database websites, assess their own interests and conduct a group research project about careers in the Community and Social Services sector.

In **Unit Three**, students learned what it takes to prepare for a career in Community and Social Services, including the kinds of training and education opportunities that are available for someone interested in this field, the roles of volunteerism, internships, and field placements. Students also learned about the importance of professional licensure in this sector.

In **Unit Four**, students’ research becomes personalized. They hear from Community and Social Service workers themselves, through firsthand accounts and interviews from workers in text and video, and discuss what they learn. They develop informational interview questions and conduct further research on Community and Social Service careers of interest.
1. **VIDEO NARRATIVES IN COMMUNITY AND SOCIAL SERVICES**

Students watch and discuss videos about Community and Social Service careers.

2. **CAREER NARRATIVES IN COMMUNITY AND SOCIAL SERVICES SERIES**

Students practice reading, research and note-taking skills by reading Community and Social Service career narratives, then conducting further research on the Community and Social Service career of their choice.

2.1 • **Using Question Stems as a Reading Strategy: Career Narratives in Community and Social Services**

Students develop and answer questions about career narratives as a reading technique.

2.2 • **Computer Research: Career Narratives in Community and Social Services**

After reading a Community and Social Services career narrative, students learn more about the career by reading descriptions of it on a career database, such as the Bureau of Labor Statistics, for example.
Video Narratives in Community and Social Services

Students view short videos about workers describing their jobs in the Community and Social Services sector and write responses to questions about the videos. The following page describes and provides links to short videos on various careers in the sector. YouTube has hundreds of short videos on dozens of careers. Teachers may use the ones listed or find new ones.

PREP

- Pre-screen and select a video that students will view, using the recommended lists on the following pages or other videos that you find.
- Adapt the Written Response: Community and Social Service Career Video Narratives worksheet to the video you choose.

MATERIALS

- Requires use of a computer and projector.
- Written Response: Community and Social Service Career Video Narratives worksheet*

EXPLAIN

1. Analyzing data about careers is important, but it’s also helpful to hear about how workers in the field experience their jobs. If you met someone who works in a field you are interested in, what questions would you ask them?
   - What they do at work, how they got their job, what they like and don’t like about it, and advice for newcomers to the field.

2. Today we are going to watch a video about working as a ______________. We are going to watch it twice. The first time, listen for the main ideas. Which career does the video describe? Does the worker seem to like his/her job? How do you know? Then, you are going to read a series of questions about the video, and listen with answering the questions in mind. After watching a second time, you are going to write responses to the questions. This is known as Constructed Response and is a type of question used on the TASC exam.

3. Play the video. Have a brief discussion about what students learned about the career and the worker’s experience of it.

4. Distribute the Written Response worksheet. Ask students to read the questions, but not write anything yet.
Section 1

5. Play the video a second time.

6. Ask students to complete the *Written Response* worksheet.

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**Video Narratives About Careers in Community and Social Services**

The videos listed below depict Community and Social Service careers from the worker’s perspective. YouTube has hundreds more which can be found by conducting keywords searches for “_________ career,” for example “substance abuse counselor career.”

**Careers in Social Services**

1. **What Are Human Services?**
   
   This video, from the Social Services Council, provides a glimpse into the many careers that comprise the Human Services field. *(6:04)*
   
   https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q4XrBTBN2Ew

2. **Social Workers in a Variety of Settings**
   
   2A. This video provides an overview of different types of social work, from social workers who work with the elderly or children and families, to social workers in private practice. *(6:02)*
   
   https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=77UGDj48oHs

   2B. This overview can be watched together with this detailed look at the daily work of a youth case manager working at a bilingual middle school. *(10:22)*
   
   https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d-lIpBTpEl4

   2C. Or this Child Protective Services worker: *(4:39)*
   
   https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a9fBrd2J8XQ

3. **Rehabilitation Counselors**
   
   This video offers an overview of the requirements and daily responsibilities of rehabilitation counselors, who work with people with disabilities. *(1:58)*
   
   https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1lFsqTMLtz4

   It can be watched together with this video about teenage breakdancer, Luca Patuelli, who has disabilities in his legs and used vocational rehabilitation to pursue his goals. *(15:48)*
   
   https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oBfSSWlcFbM
4. **Social and Human Services Assistants**
   This video provides an overview of jobs as social and human services assistants. *(2:00)*
   https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6sTNekf6NnA
   In this accompanying video, you can hear from direct care services workers about their work with clients, and what it takes to do the job well. *(8:41)*
   https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ccaoe-MwTVo

**CAREERS AS COMMUNITY WORKERS**

5. **A Day in the Life of a Dog Walker**
   A dog walker describes her typical day, as well as safety precautions she follows when working with clients. *(3:08)*
   https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hTLeRh2CnJw

6. **Working in the Fire Department**
   This video shows firefighters as well as other careers within the fire department, including EMTs and bomb specialists. *(8:38)*
   https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8YQhsRJ-Zsg

7. **Women in the Department of Sanitation of NYC**
   This video shows the stories of dozens of women within DSNY, including garbage collectors, engineers, electricians, chiefs and other management personnel. It shows entry-level workers and paths for advancement within the department. *(9:48)*
   https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0q2dNsMnHe8

   **Requirements for the Department of Sanitation of NYC Exam**
   A brief video that outlines the requirements for taking the DSNY exam. The dates listed in the video are not current, and the video is intended to highlight exam requirements. *(3:00)*
   https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hM0ehFfEKYI

8. **How Barbering Changed My Life**
   A young barber discusses his path to becoming a barber, from being a bag boy in a supermarket, to working in fast food, construction, and finally realizing his passion for barbering. *(5:45)*
   https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yxEbD_GvDtg
Written Response: Community and Social Service Career Video Narratives

Write complete responses to the questions below, based on the video narrative.

1. Which career(s) does this video describe?

2. What does the person/people in the video do at work?

3. In addition to what they describe doing at work, what additional tasks do you think they do at work?

4. Does the main speaker in the video enjoy his/her job? Provide evidence from the video that supports your claim.
5. What kind of preparation is required for this career?

6. What are some advantages and disadvantages of working in this field?

7. Which additional careers does this career interact act with?

8. Is this a career you would be interested in? Why or why not?
Career Narratives in Community and Social Services Series

Students learn about Community and Social Service careers from workers themselves, while practicing reading strategies such as developing and answering questions from question stems.

ACTIVITIES IN THIS SERIES

2.1 • Using Question Stems as a Reading Strategy:
Career Narratives in Community and Social Services
- Domestic Violence Shelter Advocate
- Recreation Counselor
- Personal Trainer
- Elder Caregiver
- Social Worker

2.2 • Computer Research: Career Narratives in Community and Social Services
Using Question Stems as a Reading Strategy: Career Narratives in Community and Social Services

Students read one or more Community and Social Service career narratives, then develop and answer questions as a reading strategy.

PREP

In the preceding class, have students sign up to read the Community and Social Service narrative of their choice. It’s okay if there is a career that no one signs up for. Be prepared to discuss the utility of this activity for students who are interested in sectors other than Community and Social Services.

Examples of uses include improving reading skills, practicing developing questions about reading, expanding vocabulary, learning about Community and Social Service professions they may come in contact with as a user for themselves, a family member or friend.

MATERIALS

- Career Narratives in Community and Social Services Sign-up
- Career Narrative Questions handout
- Career Narratives

EXPLAIN

1. Distribute the Career Narrative Questions handout. Ask students to complete the first three prompts explaining why they chose the story, what they predict it will be about and what they expect to learn from reading it.

2. Ask students to annotate their reading, marking parts they thought were important, interesting, surprising or confusing.

3. Distribute the career narratives, and give students time to read and annotate.

4. When students have finished reading, direct them back to the questions page. Explain that research shows that when people ask their own questions, they remember more of what they read. Here, part of the question is written for them, and part of the question they will have to fill in. Ask students to complete the questions. You may want to have students read aloud a few of the questions once they are completed, or you can circulate to check progress.

5. After students write the questions, ask them to answer the questions.
# Career Narrative Sign-up

In the space below, sign up to read a story about one of the following careers:

- Domestic Violence Shelter Advocate
- Recreation Counselor
- Personal Trainer
- Elder Caregiver
- Social Worker

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Career Narrative</th>
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Career Narrative Questions

Before reading the story, complete the statements below:

1. I chose the story about being a ____________ because ____________________________

2. I predict this narrative is about ____________________________

3. I expect to learn ____________________________ from reading this narrative.

After reading the narrative, complete and answer the following questions:

1. What does a ______________ do every day?

2. What are the best parts of being a ______________?
3. What are the challenges of being a ________________?

4. Why did ________________ say ________________? What does it mean, and why is it important?

5. What is one surprising and/or interesting thing you learned about being a ________________?

6. What else do you want to find out about being a ________________ that’s not explained in the article?

7. Do you think you would want to be a ________________? Why or why not?
I Want To…
Work At a Domestic Violence Shelter
Adapted from http://galadarling.com/article/i-want-to-work-at-a-domestic-violence-shelter/

Tell us about what you do.
I work as a resident advocate in a domestic violence (DV) shelter for a non-profit organization that runs three shelters (two for homeless people and one DV). What that means is that I’m essentially a house mom/counselor/crisis line operator_office assistant/jane-of-all-trades.

What does an average day at work look like for you?
I tend to work the evening shift, which means my day starts in the middle of the afternoon. The shifts overlap a little bit so that the person finishing their shift can meet with the person coming on, and let them know what happened within the house, what the general energy is, if there was any drama amongst the women, if we’re expecting any new intakes, if anyone exited the shelter for good, and anything else that seems pertinent. After that, I do a walkthrough of the shelter, say hi to the ladies who are home, and go back to the office to settle in for my shift. Usually at that point, I call to check the availability of the other shelters (the DV shelter runs the crisis line that does all of the intakes for our organization), I check in to see if there’s any other important information left from other co-workers regarding the shelter, and prioritize what I need to get done for the day.

Like any other non-profit, we have a strong team that works really hard on keeping things running smoothly, but there’s so much work to be done that it can feel like we’re constantly playing catch up. Usually I have my own little projects I assign to myself, since I can’t stand to be bored—whether that’s reorganizing a closet, cleaning up client files, updating signs/referrals, etc., I’m always trying to do something with myself that can help all of our team have one less thing to deal with.

The clients often come in and ask for things (to look up directions, to brainstorm on job/house searching, or for basic little stuff, like toiletries or cleaning supplies), and whoever is on staff does a walkthrough of the premises.
regularly to ensure that everything is calm and safe. The vast majority of time on shift, though, is spent listening. Whether the ladies in the shelter are having a day full of triumph or disaster, they often want to talk about it, and part of my job is just to be available for them to vent, rant, cry, share their frustrations or their successes. It is simultaneously one of the most difficult and most rewarding aspects of my job.

Other than that, everything else is in a constant flux, and never predictable. Sometimes there will be major conflict between residents that can require staff mediation. One of our staff members does an amazing job of planning celebrations (birthdays, baby showers), and she makes it a party for everyone, staff and residents alike, and so when one of those goes down, whoever is there is running around trying to help and wrangle people. Often I’ll have to pick up an intake, which can take a good amount of time; the first few days in the shelter are the hardest, and usually a woman coming in has a very high level of anxiety and stress, which means that a good chunk of that shift will be spent with her, doing paperwork and talking out the situation that she’s coming from. Sometimes I’ll have to deliver an exit letter, which is essentially telling the resident that they have to leave. Each day can range from relaxed to completely insane, depending on the dynamic of the house, how busy the crisis line is, how each woman’s day went, and what decisions are being made by the higher ups in the program.

Is this what you wanted to do as a child? Did you end up in this job by “accident” or was it a planned career choice?

This is DEFINITELY not what I saw myself doing as a child! I grew up in the arts, and for a long time, it seemed obvious that an artistic pathway was my calling. I started doing theatre and dance at three, played piano from seven until about fourteen, went to a performing & fine arts high school, and eventually went to a private arts university for photography. I ended up dropping out of that private arts university for financial and family health reasons, which was devastating. I worked a series of awful, unsatisfying jobs (ranging from a bookstore to a restaurant to a semi-corporate job in a hotel’s sales office), and kept trying to go back to school, but with little success. My setbacks were huge, and I didn’t have the emotional capacity to take on the gravity of the events in my personal life while focusing on school.

I’d always been an avid reader, even when not immersed in academia, and I spent a lot of time reading books from the sociology and women’s studies section of the bookstore, which planted the seed in my head. When I returned to school, all that I’d read encouraged me to immerse myself in a Sociology course or two, which in turn, made me realize how much I wanted to improve the lives of others. Despite my love for the arts, it became clear to me that if
I was going to be a broke, working class chick for the rest of my life, I might as well do something to improve the world while I’m at it. I had a professor who was also working as an advocate for sexual assault survivors (specifically women and children) in a local district attorney’s office. When she told our class a little bit about what she did, I thought, “That is exactly what I want to be doing.” I talked to her, she gave me some referrals for volunteering, and that led me here!

**How long ago did you start on this path?**

Although I didn’t realize it at the time, I believe that this path started back when I became a survivor of domestic violence. It took me a long time to recognize that what happened within my relationship was abusive and absolutely not okay. Reconciling the idea that someone who I loved, and who I thought loved me, could do such terrible, destructive things to me (and to themselves) was extremely difficult. However, once I did, I stepped on the pathway to women’s advocacy. The first step was becoming an advocate for myself.

**What kind of education do you have?**

I am currently a four-time college dropout. After dropping out of the private university, I kept trying to go back to community college while working two (or three) jobs at the same time, and really struggled. After taking two years off, it got harder. What they say is true: It really is much more difficult to go back to school after working. I’ve made it a priority to keep reading and researching on my own, and I’ve made it possible to return back to school in the Spring, which I’m eagerly looking forward to.

Other than that: I’m a state certified domestic violence counselor, which means I went through forty hours of training that included peer counseling techniques, statistical and historical facts, detailed information about Battered Women’s Syndrome and the specific psychology surrounding intimate partner violence.

**Do you think official qualifications are important for someone entering your industry?**

Many of my co-workers do not have degrees. Instead, they have work experience and a passion for working with women who need help. However, I think you usually need a post-secondary degree to advance. It’s fantastic to get involved and get the work experience, but to advance and make a career out of this kind of job, one should get an education.

**Did you enjoy studying? Could you see where it might lead you at the time? What advice would you give to someone else who might be studying to get into your industry?**

The classes I have taken, even General Education classes, have significantly improved my ability to succeed at my job. Communications classes? The best
way to help people is to know how to communicate with them, and that means all of them. Sociology classes? Knowing about privilege and the way society is socially constructed is hugely important to empathizing and understanding what each of our clients face when they try to re-enter the world as autonomous women. Any class that requires you to research? I have used so much of this skill in a huge variety of ways, whether it’s looking up the answer to an obscure question about work or housing or state law, or learning more about mental illness and substance abuse, or additional counseling techniques. The way that this job made these classes more meaningful is a huge factor in my decision to return to school.

What is your number one suggestion for someone who wants to do what you do? Start learning about domestic violence. I’d bet that there are things about DV that you do not know, and never guessed. Even if you are a well-versed feminist, I would be shocked if you don’t learn a thing or two that challenges your own prejudices and the way you approach the world.

How about number two? Start volunteering! Even if it’s only for an hour or two a week, or a couple times a month. The best thing you can do is get involved with your local organizations that work with women and children. You can see if you like it, ease into it, and start getting a feel for what aspect of this world you’d like to be a part of. Plus, your best way to get experience and make the connections required to get a job is to volunteer, volunteer, volunteer.

Is there much career progression available to you? What would you like to do next? There is definitely room for advancement, both within this organization and others, but most of the advancement does require an education. What I’d like to do next is get at least an Associate’s Degree–that’s a start! Other than that, I’d love to get involved in case management, and I’d love to learn more about non-profit business management so that I can start writing grants. Those are my goals for the next few years.

Do you think you’ll continue doing this for the rest of your life? In one way or another, absolutely. Even if my career path changes, I see myself always volunteering or otherwise being involved in this world. It is both the hardest and most gratifying thing I have ever done. I am indebted to these women for what they have given me, and how they allow me to help them to the best of my abilities. I am indebted to the agency I work for because of the opportunities they’ve given me. This job constantly reminds me that the world is here, this is my life, and it is amazing.
What It’s Really Like to be a Recreation Counselor

By Andy Bankin


AVERY has worked as a camp counselor in New Jersey, and has returned to the job every year for the past three years.

I worked at Stonebrook Park in Monmouth County for the past three summers, mostly as a camp counselor. I heard about it through a magazine in my town. I applied for an arts position.

My coworkers are mainly college and high school students. Sometimes, teachers do this as a summer job as well. Everyone here is pretty outgoing and easygoing. I started out shy. Through being a counselor I definitely opened up, and I’m able to lead a group a lot better than I was before. Everyone gets along really well. People here are pretty creative. They come up with games and challenges on the spot if they have to. It’s a good skill to have if anything should come up. I think the most important part is that they’re good with kids.

I work with a lot of university undergrads and high school seniors who are about to go to college. People are trying to build up their resume to reflect things like organizational and leadership skills.

Each week, I get a group of about 15 kids. I’ll have them from 8:00 am until 4:00 pm. Basically, I teach them games and exercises all day. Some weeks I teach them how to cook. Occasionally, we do a craft project. We also take field trips. We’ve gone to the beach. We’ve gone berry picking. We’ve gone to Sandy Hook to see the lighthouses. A lot of their parents work, so they need someone to watch and occupy them. The day camp itself is kind of between a public service and a private endeavor. It’s run by the county park system, but parents have to pay for it.

I’ve worked with kids from kindergarten up to seventh grade (the system is organized by age levels). The younger groups are better at listening and taking direction, but they can’t do complex activities as well as the older groups. And the older groups have more of an issue with obedience, but once you can gain their trust and they respect you, they start to learn so quickly.

I love the fact that my job pays well for something I enjoy doing. As a camp counselor, you’re always outside, having fun.

We took a trip to the beach this past summer. There were only two counselors. There should have been three, but the kids turned out to be really well behaved. We all just hung out in the water together. It was fun because they hadn’t been very well behaved prior to that, but that day something strange happened. It didn’t feel like we were there to babysit them. It was more like having fun together.

BRETT was an independent contractor for New Jersey Parks for a summer, supervising kids and hosting events.

I was a camp counselor, which is an independent contractor position. I was hired by the Monmouth County Parks Department to do random jobs, such as hosting camps,
birthday parties, and events. I went on their website to find the job. I was interested in theatre, and they had an opening. I was living in New Jersey, and needed a way to make money that I felt was productive both to myself and to my community.

The camps run about a week long. We are assigned a co-counselor. Together, we plan the week, in terms of craft projects, games, or field trips. Once, we got old books from the eighties, with crafting ideas for milk cartons and pipe cleaners.

I’d show up at about 8:00 am, clock in, and drop my phone into a special bin because they didn’t want us using our phones. It makes sense if you’re in charge of a bunch of high school students who just want to stare at their phones the whole time, but it was also a problem because sometimes there would be an accident and we were physically unable to call anyone.

Sometimes we had staff meetings, around 9:00 am, where we planned camps that were coming in. From 9:30 am to 3:00 pm we’d be in camp.

I worked with some great kids. Children of all backgrounds and abilities were represented in this camp, since it was the most affordable and most accessible. Some kids had developmental disorders. Others were deaf or blind, which I was not specially qualified to handle, but it always worked out fine.

Once, we built a community garden with lots of vegetables. The vegetables grew, but no one ended up eating them. Then, all the plants died. Another time, a kid went into anaphylactic shock. He wasn’t even one of our kids. He was just visiting with his family. And our radios weren’t working. One of my co-workers ran to the main building to get help because they had a lot of medical supplies. Luckily, the kid lived.

**TERRY worked as a playground associate in New York nine years ago.**

I was a playground associate in New York. Every summer, in each borough, they hire people to be at the playground all day, and put on programs for kids. I think they had about 20 people in each borough, usually one or two per park depending on the size. I was by myself. They give you a whole bunch of art supplies and sports equipment and you’re basically supposed to create a program—they don’t really give you any guidelines or hold you that closely to them. As long as you’re doing something to attract kids to the park and create a positive environment, you’re fine.

It’s essentially camp counseling, but with less formality, in terms of whether or not the kids have to stay there for certain hours of the day or even overnight. It’s up to the kids to come and go as they please. At any point, they can
just be like, “I’m done. I’m going home.” Mostly my co-workers were other young people who were in high school or college. A lot of them had relatives who worked in the Parks Department. I started about 8:00 or 9:00 am, and worked Tuesday to Saturday. There were a lot of kids in the park on Saturdays. Some people were a little more serious about setting up a program. I was on a small playground so there weren’t a ton of kids, but if a group of them wanted to do arts and crafts stuff, I would get the supplies and oversee it. Or, if it was a bunch of teenage kids who want to play basketball, then I’d do that. The kids were coming all summer, so after the first day I knew most of them. I was wearing my Parks shirt the whole time—I was there to promote the park.

The people in the park I worked at varied hugely. I’d worked in a couple of other parks, and it was a culture shock. If you’re in a park in Harlem or Bed Stuy, it’s a totally different story from a park in Tribeca or Park Slope or other wealthy neighborhoods. In the nicer neighborhoods, every single kid has a nanny or is with whichever parent isn’t working. But if you’re in a poorer area, you’ll never see any parents, and the kids will always be alone.

What I loved about New York City parks is that they’re open to everyone. It’s especially rewarding to work with poor kids whose main form of recreation is going to the park and hanging out all day. Or, you could go to another park, a mile or two away, and hang with some of the richest kids in the world. Parks bring people together, but unfortunately they’re also the first place where the city cuts funding.

There was one time I was in a nicer park on the Upper West Side. Generally, parents are okay, but in that part of town, a lot of them are really uptight. I was hanging out and joking around with the kids, and I started riding this girl’s Razor Scooter. She was maybe eight or so, and I thought it would be hilarious because I’m about 6’4”. This girl’s grandmother comes over like, “What are you doing? You’re gonna break it!” So I was like, “Alright. Alright. I’ll get off.” Later the girl came back to say she thought me riding the scooter was hilarious. So the woman returned, angrier than ever, and I realized she must’ve thought I was a child molester—never mind that I was wearing a T-shirt with a huge Parks logo. That’s one thing you’re always afraid of. That’s the perils of being a grown man whose job is essentially to approach children on playgrounds.

There were instances where I had to kick out adults. That was one of the more difficult parts of the job. Sometimes you’d have a crazy or creepy looking dude weirding out all the kids, and you had to try to get them to leave the park.

The pay was pretty good for what it was—I think I was making $14 an hour. And it was a lot of fun. If there was nobody in the park, I would just play basketball on the clock. It’s nice being outside. You get to meet people and hang out. One of my favorite parts was chatting with the au pairs. Most of them were older Caribbean women. They were funny. I’d chat with them. All in all, it was one of the best jobs I’ve ever had. It was easy and it was fun.

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### New York City recreation employees by the numbers

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<td>The number of recreation</td>
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<td>employees working in New York</td>
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<tr>
<td>The mean hourly wage of New</td>
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<td>York City recreation employees:</td>
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<td>The mean annual wage of New</td>
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<td>York City recreation employees:</td>
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Bureau of Labor Statistic
Becoming a Personal Trainer

by Al Kavadlo | 09/28/12

Adapted from https://www.t-nation.com/training/becoming-a-personal-trainer

In my early twenties, I made the decision to change careers and become a personal trainer. I wasn’t happy with my job and with each passing year my teenage dream of becoming a rock star was looking less likely to come true. In other words, I needed to find a fallback dream! By that point in my life, having already spent nearly a decade in the gym pumping iron, working as a personal trainer seemed like an excellent second choice after rock star. On the surface, being a personal trainer is a dream job. Instead of being cooped up in some office, trainers get to walk around and stay active. Instead of wearing stuffy business clothes, trainers wear comfy track pants and a t-shirt. Instead of spending hours with boring old men in suits, trainers get to hang around with people at the gym all day. Where do I sign up?

Reality Check

Unfortunately, the truth of the fitness industry is very different from that idealized view. Being a personal trainer is still a job, and like all jobs, it requires work. With that in mind, the first piece of work any new trainer needs to take care of is getting certified. Depending on how much fitness knowledge you start out with, the preparation process for becoming a certified personal trainer can take anywhere from a few weeks to several months, or possibly years. Even if you’re in great shape and have good form on all your exercises, you’ll still need to study up on anatomy and kinesiology. I’m sure you can locate the biceps and pectorals on an anatomy chart, but what about lesser-known muscles like the supraspinatus and quadratus lumborum?

You’ll also need to memorize various formulas for calculating target heart rates, measuring body fat percentages, predicting hypothetical one-rep maxes, and other such academic trivialities that don’t matter much when you’re actually working with the general public.

While even the most knowledgeable gym rat will still need to study at least a little to pass any respectable personal trainer exam, after you get certified is when the real learning begins. There are a lot of things you’ll need to memorize and regurgitate in order to pass a certification test that you can forget about once you start working as a personal trainer. It’s like how during your road test you need to keep your hands at ten and two in order to get your driver’s license, but nobody actually drives that way. Sure I picked up a few useful tidbits studying for exams, but it’s nothing compared to what I learned from actually training people.
Section 2.1

Though there are many different certifications to choose from, none are unanimously considered the gold standard. ACE, NSCA, NASM, and ACSM are four of the most widely accepted personal trainer certifications in the USA, but different gyms have different affiliations. (If there's a particular gym where you want to apply, first inquire about what certifications they accept.) You’ll need a high school diploma to apply for most fitness certifications, and in the case of the NSCA-CSCS, you’ll also need a college degree, though not necessarily in a related field (mine is in English).

No matter which certification you choose, however, be prepared to spend several hundred dollars between the study materials and the actual exam fee. You’ll also need to become certified in CPR/AED, which will cost $50-100 depending on where you go (as well as costing you 5 hours of your life). Once you’ve done all that, a lot of gyms will even make you pay for a uniform after you get hired. Hey, you gotta spend money to make money, right?

Speaking of making money, don’t expect to be making a lot of it for quite a while. Once you get your certification and get hired by a gym, you’re looking at a solid six months (or longer) of paying your dues and learning the business before you can expect to take home a sizable paycheck. You’ll need to spend considerable time just being there, getting to know the members and the feel of the club. You’ll also have to give away a lot of free sessions in order to attract paying customers.

While you could go into business for yourself instead of trying to get hired by someone else, there are many benefits to working for a gym. For starters, you’ll get to be around other trainers with more experience, so you can see firsthand what works and what doesn’t. You’ll also have a manager who can help build your client base. Working at a gym will allow you to pitch your services to new people every day. Anyone at your gym who doesn’t already have a trainer is a potential client. After all, if they’re going to the gym, chances are they want to get in better shape!

While working for a gym is the best way for a new trainer to get started and learn the business, going independent definitely has its perks as well. You don’t have to share as much of your profits, or worry about quotas, meetings, and other aspects of the big-box gym bureaucracy. Plus, there’s no uniform or nametag (I’ve always found nametags degrading) and no minimum amount of hours you have to work to remain full-time.

On the other hand, there’s also no medical and dental benefits, and more importantly, no pool of fresh members joining the gym every day who might be in need of a trainer. I’m happy to be working for myself now, but I’m glad I spent almost seven years learning the business working for the big chain gyms.
Every new trainer can benefit from working at a commercial facility (though not necessarily for as long as I did) before going into business for herself. It takes time to become a good trainer and even longer to establish a reputation that will follow you into the great unknown.

**Mass Appeal**
When I started out in the fitness industry, I thought I needed to look like a bodybuilder to be taken seriously. I soon found out, however, that most personal training clients aren’t interested in putting on mass. Fact is, most are usually much more interested in losing weight. As absurd as it seems in retrospect, before I entered the world of personal training, I wasn’t even aware that simply being thin could be a desirable body type. It took working for a commercial gym to realize that my fitness goals weren’t the same as those of the general public. I soon found out that personal training isn’t about how great you look in a tight shirt or how much you can lift—it’s about your clients! Your job is to be there for them. Just like a good parent must put the needs of their child before their own, a good trainer always puts their clients’ needs first. Since most of the people you’ll wind up training are not going to be athletically inclined, the workouts that you do yourself are rarely going to have much relevance for your client. If I took a new client and tried to get them to do a difficult move, or even a basic pull-up, it would likely be an embarrassing failure for both of us. You must understand the beginner’s mind as well as their capabilities. Just because an exercise is easy for you, doesn’t mean it’s going to be easy (or appropriate) for your client.

**Make it Personal**
To be a successful personal trainer, you must remember that your product is you. Anyone can stand there while someone does squats and presses; what sets me apart from other trainers is my personality. So if you’re a nice guy, don’t try to be a drill sergeant. And if you are one of those drill sergeant types, there will be certain people who’ll need you to get in their face and push them. Not everyone needs the same thing—embrace who you are and you’ll attract clients that you’ll click with.

It also helps to be outgoing and introduce yourself to new people in your gym. Tell them how you can help clients achieve their goals, and offer them a complimentary training session so they can see for themselves. Don’t be shy about marketing yourself—you’re not going to get clients by waiting for them to come to you. Some folks find personal trainers intimidating, especially if they feel out of shape. These people need the help of a trainer the most, yet they’ll often be the least likely to ask for it.

**Know Your Role**
While I encourage you to be bold in pitching prospective clients, it’s best to be honest about what to expect from a personal trainer. In spite of what the majority of trainers are trying to
sell people (I’ve been guilty of this too), we’re not capable of guaranteeing results. Getting results is up to the client. The trainer’s job is to help. We hold them accountable and we provide encouragement, but we can’t do it for them.

Don’t get frustrated with yourself if not all of your clients are progressing. You can’t force someone to change if they aren’t willing to take full responsibility. It’s important to have realistic expectations if you want long-term clients. Selling people on a lie might get them to buy into that first package of training sessions, but they won’t stick around if you don’t hold up your end of the agreement.

Being a trainer is a fulfilling job when you get through to people and make a difference in their lives, but remember that personal trainers are part of the service industry. You have to treat your clients with professionalism and respect, even if some of them annoy you at times. Our job is to give people a positive experience as well as a safe, effective workout.

**Be Patient**

Just like getting in great shape takes dedication and consistency, establishing a reputation as a quality trainer takes years to accomplish. And that translates to the level of income you can expect to earn, too. I barely made 20K during my first year in the fitness industry, but by my third year I was earning over 50K. After a decade working as a trainer, I’m finally earning what most people would consider a comfortable living, but it’s taken a long time to get there.

If you think personal training is going to make you lots of money without having to work hard, you’re in for a rude awakening. However, if you’re genuinely passionate about health and fitness, personal training can be an enjoyable, rewarding career. Plus, you get to wear sweatpants to work.
My Life as A Caregiver

By Jess McLaughlin, Caregiver at Emeritus at Orchard Park Memory Care Neighborhood, Posted Tuesday, June 25, 2013

Adapted from https://www.brookdale.com/resources/life-caregiver/

It's so unsatisfactory to say, “I work in a Memory Care unit at an Assisted Living Facility.” It's not enough to say, “I help the elderly.” Because for me, it's about so much more than that. It's about helping people I truly care about live a more fulfilling and productive life.

I get to work at 6:00 a.m. When I arrive, I see that your favorite grandma is wandering the halls, picking up baby dolls and cleaning counters. She sits on the couch and falls asleep because she doesn’t know where else to go. She has a room right down the hall, which we’ve done our best to fill with things she knows and feels comfortable with, but she doesn’t feel completely at home there. She doesn’t know where she is. But the couch is a safe place, so there she sits, and she falls asleep. I let her sleep for a while because I know she’s been up all night, and I don’t want to take away the rest she’s getting there, in that safe spot.

While she sleeps, someone's father is waking up in his room. I help him get out of bed. I walk him to the restroom. I offer him the option of taking a shower, and sometimes he says yes, but mostly he says no because he could've sworn he just took one yesterday. I put out clothes so that he may choose what to wear, and together we dress him. I shave his face, I brush his thinning hair, I help put in his dentures. I take great joy in doing this—not because these tasks are inherently enjoyable, but because this is someone I care about. I'm happy when I see him ready to face another day feeling good about himself. I walk him to the dining room so that he can have his cup of coffee and enjoy the bright sunshine peeking through the windows. Three minutes later, he gets up and walks back to bed, because he has forgotten that he just woke up.

At this time your grandma is up again, rubbing the sleep out of her eyes and going into each and every room and waking up people, because she is a mom and these are her children and she just wants to take care of them. So I redirect her to the laundry, ask her to fold some towels while I prepare a snack to offer...
her. She has already forgotten about waking her children, and happily folds the laundry.

As I'm making a snack, I hear the early morning screams of someone's favorite great-aunt. She is calling for her dad because she wants some water. “Dad! DAD! I need water, dad!” A coworker takes over the snack-making while I run to give her the water. “Thank you, dad, I was choking,” she says to me. I tell her, “You're welcome, I love you,” and tuck her back into bed. She is 87, but in this moment, she's eight and afraid. She says, “I love you too, dad” and she falls back to sleep.

I walk into another room and the woman who cannot walk has her feet halfway off of the bed, because she can't remember that she can't walk, and she has places to be this morning. She can't see me yet, so she yells at the closet doors to help her walk to the store, because we need to go now and it's an emergency. She is frantic and has tears streaming down her cheeks. I lower my voice to just above a whisper and I say her name. She is quiet for a moment and I say, “Good morning, beautiful!” and she smiles, she relaxes, she says, “Good morning, dear. How are you?” I turn on the radio and a familiar song pours through the speakers, and suddenly this sad, confused woman is singing. I am quiet as I help her feet back onto the bed, and she has her eyes closed. I cover her with her blankets that she had managed to throw off, and she is calm. I let her rest.

It is now only 7:00 a.m. It's been an hour since I got here.

These people, your mothers and fathers, your grandmas and grandpas, your great-uncles and aunts, your favorite people—they are my people, too. I hug them when they're afraid, I comfort them when they're sad, I hold their hands if they're hurting, I bend over backwards just to get them to smile. I clean them up if they have an accident, I help them dress each and every morning. I tuck them into bed and kiss their foreheads. I wash their laundry and make their beds. I make their coffee and snacks. I clean their rooms so that they don't trip on something they've dropped. They don't know me every day, but that's okay, because I am still in a position to provide comfort to them. Sometimes they think I am awful and am poisoning the food I just put in front of them, and sometimes I am their sister and they just want me to paint their nails.

This is my job. Every day. These are my people. And I wouldn't trade it for any other life.
Career Spotlight: What I Do as a Social Worker

by Andy Orin | 7/21/15 2:00pm


We all like to think that we do what we can to make the world a better place and help people in need, but some people choose to make a career of it. Social workers labor tirelessly to help those who need it, without much glamour or glory. To learn a little of what the daily work of a social worker is like, we spoke with Kate Abramson, who currently works with the Lung Cancer Alliance.

Tell us about your current position and how long you’ve been at it.

My name is Kate Abramson. I have been a social worker for seven years. At the start of my 7th year—lucky seven—I joined Lung Cancer Alliance as the Support Services Manager.

What drove you to choose your career path? Why social work?

Ever since I was a child I have had a desire to “help people.” My parents were very active volunteering with social service agencies when I was younger. When I found out that a big aspect of social work is advocating for those who don’t have a voice and working on their behalf to make positive change happen in their lives, I knew this was the path for me.

How did you go about getting your job? What kind of education and experience did you need? Did you need any licenses or certifications?

Most social workers have a Masters in Social Work degree from an accredited school. Each state has its own individual licensing exam and
process. After graduate school, you take an exam to be a licensed graduate social worker (LGSW). Two years later while working in the field under the supervision of a social worker, you take another exam to become a licensed clinical social worker (LCSW).

The six years I spent at a community mental health center working with mentally ill and medically compromised individuals prepared me to counsel the types of patients I encounter in my current position; lung cancer survivors and their families dealing with a variety of health issues as they battle a disease.

**What kinds of things do you do beyond what most people see? What do you actually spend the majority of your time doing?**

The duties of a social worker vary from job to job and differ greatly depending on who we are trying to help. At my previous job, I was working directly with mentally ill patients and individuals battling major health concerns and most of my time was spent doing things like advocating for their care, helping them maintain their correct mental health, helping acquire proper medications as well as continuing ongoing therapy and skill-building.

In these types of roles, you need to be flexible because your schedule can change very quickly depending on the needs of the individuals who rely on you for support. The counseling skills I learned in my first position help me every day that I take a call from a lung cancer patient who is looking for answers to their questions, whether it is about a new treatment they are seeking or helping them find a support group in their area. If I had to sum it up, I would say basically social workers are master listeners who try to make the lives of people going through tough times just a little bit easier.

**What misconceptions do people often have about your job?**

I think when most people hear the term “social worker” they think of people who show up to take away babies from families like the characters you see on shows like Law & Order. The truth is that people have no idea how broad our work can be. Depending on your particular focus area you can make an impact in a variety of professional settings. For example, I started my career working in a local mental health agency and then moved into the nonprofit world working with lung cancer patients across the U.S. These are two very different work environments, but the desire to help people is the same in both settings. Those skills never change. The bottom line is there are no set rules for what you can do with your social work degree. The professional possibilities are endless and are only limited by personal interest and skill set.

**What are your average work hours?**

Job hours can vary, like many professions, depending on what type of social work you are doing. Now my hours are mostly 9 to 5, but in previous positions I’d have to get up early in the morning to meet clients or get called late at night to go locate someone who hasn’t been seen in weeks.

**What personal tips and shortcuts have made your job easier?**

I’ve learned over the years that being flexible and open to change is one of the most important things you can do as a social worker. You might struggle in this field if you worry about a hard adherence to schedules and expect people to behave in a certain way. I’ve learned to embrace the uncertainty and adjust on the fly.
What do you do differently from your coworkers or peers in the same profession? What do they do instead?

I'm not sure I do anything differently from my coworkers since we all have the same primary goals. As social workers, we are uniquely trained to help people maximize the opportunity for change in themselves and/or their situations. You are affecting change on a daily basis, whether it be big or small. Also, your daily to-do list can change every day. I don’t think I’ve ever said that I was bored doing a social work job.

What's the worst part of the job and how do you deal with it? I imagine this work can take an emotional toll.

Sometimes being a social worker can just be straight up exhausting. There are really good days and there are also really bad days. You are working with people who can be happy, excited, depressed, angry, and frustrated all at the same time. Obviously taking time for yourself and knowing your limits is the best. You also have to understand that some people aren't ready for change and they might have many failures until they have a breakthrough which moves them in a more positive direction.

What's the most enjoyable part of the job?

The most enjoyable part of the job is probably developing meaningful relationships with patients. The process of advocating for a person or family that does not have a voice is very empowering work which falls in line with what I have always wanted to do. Helping someone who other people have looked down upon work towards their goals and reach their potential makes all the effort worth it.

Do you have any advice for people who need to enlist your services?

I think sometimes people see a social worker when they’re not really ready. If you don’t have any desire to change, it will be very hard for us to work with you. It’s okay to not know how to change or what to do to help yourself, but as long as you express that you are ready to move in a positive direction working with a social worker will be effective.

What kind of money can one expect to make at your job?

You will never become a millionaire as a social worker no matter where you work. However, most people who go into this field would probably agree that they aren’t doing it for the money.

How do you “move up” in your field?

As I mentioned before, there is no set “social work” job which actually is a very good thing. The profession offers multiple opportunities for long-term advancement and strong growth potential. Most people straight out of school will work as a case manager, rehabilitation specialist or a similar entry level job. It’s where you will definitely be the most overworked, but it helps you get the best sense of where you’d like to work long-term in a professional setting. Once you figure that out, you need to immerse yourself in that setting to get the necessary counseling skills you will need as you take greater responsibility and acquire a more difficult case load.

For me, Lung Cancer Alliance was an excellent transition and “move up” for my field. I’m working with lung cancer patients from all over the country and able to use my skills...
I developed during my initial social work training. I'm still supporting patients, but I'm also working as a resource for other social workers who are seeking to create support environments at the local level for the individuals they work with on a daily basis.

**What do people under/over value about what you do?**

I think that people undervalue the importance of one-on-one interactions that happen daily between social workers and their patients. If an outsider looks at a social worker’s tasks and actions it might be hard to see that anything meaningful is taking place, but this underscores the importance of the relationships that deepen over time. We really are working to lay a foundation to actually make progress.

On the flip side, I think people overvalue impartiality that needs to happen in a professional setting particularly in the face of difficult circumstances. Sometimes we get angry when we take a personal interest in someone’s life as they battle mental illness or a late stage cancer diagnosis. It’s a normal response to stressful circumstances.

Trust me, we feel it, we know some of these situations suck, and we’re also talking to people after it’s done. People need us to be there “in the moment” with them to fight through problems. It’s important that they know they are not alone when they reach out to us.

**What advice would you give to those aspiring to join your profession?**

I would tell them to make sure they figure out what they are passionate about and how they want to try to make a difference. At the end of the day, social work is a career that speaks to the basic desire to really help others. It isn’t easy work, but it can be so rewarding, impactful and meaningful to so many communities that need open-minded listeners to help solve problems. •
Computer Research: Career Narratives in Community and Social Services

Students conduct additional research on the career they read about in the Career Narrative activity, using a career database.

PREP

• Explore the following career database websites and choose one for this activity:
  www.careerzone.ny.gov—The New York State career database
  www.careercruising.com—A subscription-based career database. Requires a login and password. Many programs have subscriptions to this database.

• Choose a career from the database and be prepared to navigate to, explore and discuss this example career with students.

MATERIALS

• Researching Careers Online worksheet

EXPLAIN

1 If students have not previously used the database you have chosen to use for this activity, give a brief introduction to the website (refer to Career Database Lessons in Unit 2 for database information). Emphasize the ways the database is organized and how students can use it to find careers.

2 Ask students to navigate to the website. Look at a sample career as a class, discussing what information is included and how it is organized.

3 Distribute Researching Careers Online worksheet. Ask students to explore careers related to the one they read about in the Career Narratives and complete the worksheet.

4 If time remains, students can research the career of their choice, paraphrasing the information they find.
Section 2.2

Researching Careers Online

Use the career database to answer the questions below.

1. What are some careers that are similar or related to the career narrative you read in the previous lesson? Find at least 6 and list them below:

2. Choose one of the careers you listed above. Write four questions you would like answered about this career.

3. Research the career listed above, and write the answers, in your own words, to the questions you wrote in #2.
When we’re children, we’re taught by our parents that if we behave, everything will work out fine. So, [we think] people who have a problem must have made a serious mistake. Why should we then help them? If you ever decide to help people who are in trouble you need the courage to face the opposition of your friends and family members.”

—Miep Gies

MIEP GIES, who lived to age 100, was born in Austria and moved to Amsterdam as a child after World War I. During World War II, while working as a secretary in a small office, she hid Otto Frank, her employer, his wife, Edith, and two daughters, Margot and Anne, in addition to four others, from Nazi persecution in a secret room in the office. For two years she fed them and kept them hidden and safe. Anne and Margot were ultimately killed in concentration camps. Gies and Otto Frank remained close throughout their lives. Anne Frank’s book about her time in hiding, The Diary of Anne Frank, was later published and is still widely read today. Gies remained involved in peace and justice causes until the end of her life.