

***All in a Day's Work:  
Reflecting on the Work of Family Service  
Warren Co. Children and Youth Services & Family Services of Warren Co.***

*Sponsored by  
The Project on Civic Reflection  
at Valparaiso University  
with funding from Lilly Endowment, Inc.*

On our “good days” at work, it is just a stone’s throw from what we’ve learned in our training to what we experience day in and day out – the practice model helps the client, the family agrees to the goals of the family service plan, and the results of the outcome study reveal that the program “works.” However, on the “bad days,” the theory just doesn’t soothe a client’s distress, the report of abuse is unequivocally founded, the law doesn’t seem fair, and, as providers, we feel worn out.

Though we may ask, we’re often too discouraged, angry or disoriented to consider questions like, “*Why serve others? What do we expect of those we serve? What motivates us to continue? What good can social service professionals do that no one else can do?*” And the overarching question, “*What is the larger good we are seeking through this work?*”

Alternately, we don’t ask because the answers defy logical explanations anyway. Sometimes resiliency in the face of the worst of circumstances is as irrational as senseless violence. However, what is certain is that, at some point and on some level, we all confront these questions in direct service work.

Civic reflection isn’t a support group, nor does it mimic clinical supervision – rather it opens up a conversation that deepens and broadens the context of our ongoing training and experience. Using selections of short fiction and poetry helps us to see our connections to other people in other times and places who have experienced similar thoughts, feelings and dilemmas. And, hopefully, the process will leave some landmarks that will help us to regain our direction as we carry on with our work, day after day.

**Session I. The Work of Caring: How Do We Understand Our Work?**  
*How do we define ourselves as caring professionals? Where do we locate our professional obligations? How does “hindsight” both inform and preclude our understanding of our roles and responsibilities?*

“Old Woman Magoun,” Mary Wilkins Freeman

**Session II. Traditions of Service: What Are We Trying to Do?**  
*What are some ways of describing the larger context of social services work? Whom do we serve and care for in this work and to what end? When our hopes for “the end” change, what accounts for those changes – something about our clients? about ourselves?*

“Places for the Night,” Bertolt Brecht

“Toward a Fourth Philanthropic Response,” E. Lynn and S. Wisely

**Session III. The Waiting List: When There’s Not Enough to Go Around**  
*What notions inform our decisions about who will receive service? How do conceptions of fairness, of liability, of compassion or of mandate influence our decisions? How does enforcing those determinations affect us?*

“Saving the Crippled Boy,” Jan Beatty

“The Eleventh,” Henri Barbusse

**Session IV. Motivations and Expectations**  
*What motivates us to do our work? What happens to those motivations over time? What defines our expectations – of ourselves and of our clients? What happens when they are not met? For whom is that a problem?*

“The History Teacher,” Billy Collins

“Another Case of Ingratitude,” John Reed

**Session V. Returning from the Point of No Return**  
*How do we continue in our work when we encounter events that defy human sense-making -- Suffering? Loneliness? Abandonment? Evil?*

“Nuit of the Living Dead,” David Sedaris

“Questions About Angels,” Billy Collins

**Session VI. Living with Resiliency: Living a “Strengths-Based Model”**  
*What does it really mean to be resilient? Does a focus on strengths ever oversimplify complicated problems? Are strengths always positive?*

Ellen Foster, Kaye Gibbons

“What the Living Do,” Marie Howe