

Not So Straightforward: Achieving Good Youth And Community Work

Michael Emslie, <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0554-0183>

Abstract

According to much of the relevant literature, achieving good youth and community work is simple, straightforward, and uncomplicated. However, realising good practice may not be so easy in light of the extent of reports of bad practice in social work and human services. This study investigated and critiqued commonplace accounts of how good caring work can be achieved. In particular two problems with the literature were identified and examined. First, I argue that, often, descriptions of good practice in the helping professions are deficient. Second, I make the case that the typical ways of funding and regulating the people professions to achieve good practice are inadequate. These concerns warrant further research on the question: how can good practice in youth and community work be achieved?

Key words

Human services

Helping professions

Good practice

Introduction

A significant body of academic work suggests that good practice in youth and community work is fairly easy to define, identify, and achieve. Robyn Miller, the Chief Practitioner for child protection and youth justice in Victoria, offered a case in point by arguing, “while the work can be complex, the essence of good practice is simple”.¹ This essence of good practice in human services is typically said to include quality relationships, early intervention, a code of ethics, evidence-based practice, and altruism. However, perennial failures in social services including statutory child protection systems, youth justice centers, and out-of-home care services suggest that good practice is not so straightforward.²

In this chapter, I follow Lather's lead and 'trouble' common and popular accounts of good practice in human services.³ I also draw on Bacchi's "what's the problem represented to be?" approach to critically interrogate representations of how good human service practice can be achieved.⁴ These approaches suggest that if we are serious about articulating and achieving good practice in social welfare services, then a good place to start is to investigate the gaps, errors, and failed attempts in the literature to explain what good caring work is and how it can be achieved.

I make the case that descriptions of good practice in fields such as social work, youth work, aged care, and disability care are often flawed. In particular, two problems with the literature are examined and these concerns are illustrated with relevant case studies. First, I identify deficiencies with accounts of good practice in the helping professions. I analyse the Australian Youth Affairs Coalition's (AYAC) definition of youth work to demonstrate the failure in the literature to articulate an adequately complex account of good practice.⁵ Second, I explore shortcomings with the sort of regulation that is characteristically suggested for good practice. The Community Sector Reform project that took place in Victoria, Australia is analysed as a case in point.⁶ This chapter complements my other critiques of what has been written on good practice in youth and community work.⁷ Collectively these criticisms challenge common approaches to theorising, reproducing, and institutionalising good practice in human services.⁸

Accounts of good practice: The AYAC definition of youth work

A significant problem with the literature is that attempts to spell out what good practice in youth and community work looks like are often simplistic, not well thought out, and lack intellectual rigour. Such representations of good practice can be found in official reports, academic literature and social service sector documents. A recent example is the AYAC definition of youth work:

Youth work is a practice that places young people and their interests first. Youth work is a relational practice, where the youth worker operates alongside the person in their context. Youth work is an empowering practice that advocates for and facilitates a young person's independence, participation in society, connectedness and realization of their rights⁹

AYAC's definition of youth work is a typical attempt to describe good human service work and features flaws typically found in such accounts.

AYAC claims that good youth work places young people and their interests first. Prioritising the person being helped as the primary client, constituent or consideration features in accounts of good practice in caring work, and is often described as person- or client-centered care.¹⁰ However, contrary accounts argue that youth and community work serves other interests, regardless of the intent or claim to serve the interests of service users.¹¹ According to Habermas, there are complex links between different types of human interests, knowledges and actions.¹² Habermas's account of knowledge-constitutive interests – the idea that humans have deep-seated interests that are the foundations of how we know the world and how we act in it – suggests that helping-professionals may be deluded when they claim to put clients' interests first. More to the point, and drawing on Grundy, "the coercion of technical [interest] and the possible deceit of the practical [interest]" could be at play in human service work regardless of any claim to client-centredness.¹³ The challenges associated with achieving client-centred care are overlooked or minimised. For example, care workers have to take into consideration and negotiate a vast range of powerful interests in their everyday work. These include service agreement and funding conditions, organisational demands, and the concerns and perspectives of other people such as parents, managers, policymakers, and other practitioners. According to Higgins, good practice in the helping professions relies on securing the interests of the helpers, not just those being helped.¹⁴ Much human service work takes place in involuntary and statutory circumstances or incorporates mutual obligation elements that require people to do nominated activities to be eligible to receive assistance.¹⁵ People who have no choice but to get such services may argue the interventions are punitive and are not serving their interests first.

AYAC claims youth work is a relational practice. The idea that good practice in human service work relies on quality relationships between practitioners and the people they help has been asserted *ad nauseam*.¹⁶ However, this claim is often made with inadequate attention paid to the possible problems of such relationships. This includes how human service relationships can and do contribute to reproducing inequalities and prejudices, and may be used as a way to control and dominate people.¹⁷ According to Foucault, helping relationships are an example of a disciplinary practice that promotes "docile bodies" and normalisation,

and such effects may be contrary to the goods that quality relationships in caring work claim to realise.¹⁸ On a different note, approaches to caring work that focus on relationships, such as case work, counselling, and group work, can individualise the responsibility for problems and fail to engage with, or attempt to change, social and economic conditions that may contribute to producing and exacerbating such problems.¹⁹ Somewhat paradoxically, Szasz suggested relationship-based individual-oriented interventions such as psychotherapy are used to absolve personal responsibility for wrong-doing.²⁰

AYAC argues that youth work is an empowering practice. Accounts of human service practice regularly make reference to empowerment as something worthwhile to pursue.²¹ However, empowerment is not necessarily a good worth securing, and should be pursued critically.²² According to Dean, practices and processes of empowerment can be understood as ways of governing that serve to foster certain forms of self-understanding or subjectivity, and self-rule or conduct.²³ These kinds of subjectivities and types of conduct may not be in the best interests of those being empowered. Representations of empowerment in accounts of good practice in the helping professions too often overlook such critiques.

AYAC suggests a range of actions and goals that youth work should advocate for and facilitate. Accounts of good caring work often feature an assortment of such activities and purposes. However, as the AYAC definition demonstrates, often these lists are incoherent and contradictory. AYAC argues that youth work ought to facilitate goods that can be incompatible: independence and connectedness. For example, should youth work facilitate young people's independence from or connection to their family? AYAC also claims youth work should enable young people's participation in society and realisation of their rights; ends that may also oppose one another. In particular, problems with the concept of society aside, it could well be that 'society' is the problem for young people. Encouraging participation in society may exacerbate rather than address young people's concerns and do nothing to help with realising their rights. The suggestion youth work ought to be rights-based aligns somewhat with diverse accounts of human service work variously described as structural, critical, radical, constructive, and anti-oppressive.²⁴ However, according to McDonald, such perspectives are often abstract and have little relevance to what takes place in practice.²⁵ For example, there is a growing trend in social service provision towards emphasising welfare recipients' responsibilities rather than their rights. This is not to suggest

caring work should not have good intentions. Clarity on the purpose of the helping professions is only one aspect of an account of practice that has integrity.²⁶ Articulating good youth and community work is more complex than the AYAC definition suggests.

Deficiencies with descriptions of good human service work

As well as the aforementioned problems, further shortcomings are found in typical representations of good social service work. For example, descriptions of good practice in the people professions typically lack defensible conceptualisations of the key concepts ‘good’, ‘practice’, and ‘human services’. The ‘good’ in good youth and community work is often conceived as outcomes that are distinct to the processes involved in achieving them.²⁷ However, means and ends may not be separable in good caring work.²⁸ Since Aristotle first argued, “all human activities aim at some good”, there has been debate concerning the goods that practices ought to realise.²⁹ Too often, there is a failure in the literature to adequately deliberate on the goods that good practice in youth and community work should be interested in securing. For example, McDonald is preoccupied with the implications of the changing institutional context for social work, but does not adequately engage in value-rational deliberation on whether emerging kinds of social work practice are desirable, and subsequently what should be done.³⁰

Turning to the concept ‘practice’, accounts of human service work typically fail to engage with the rich and growing practice theory.³¹ According to this literature, the relationship between theory and practice, or knowledge and action, is more complex than is generally suggested in representations of caring work. More to the point, good practice in the human realm is not simply the result of practitioners applying knowledge that has been delivered to them.³² Descriptions of social work also typically lack the kind of discursive articulation or theory that, according to Dunne, is critical for such practice to have integrity.³³ Furthermore, practice in the helping professions is often conceptualised as a ‘science’ or an ‘art’, or a combination of the two, without a clear articulation of what these are, or whether there are other and better conceptualisations of good youth- and community work, for example as a ‘praxis’.³⁴ Even trying to understand or map the field of social services is not an easy task.³⁵ For example, is it unclear whether the terms used in the literature to describe human services, such as caring work, youth and community work, welfare and social work, helping professions, and social intervention work, refer to the same thing.

The literature on good caring work demonstrates a penchant for tame solutions. Textbooks and good practice guides demonstrate this trend that suggests good practice is fairly easily defined, identified, and demonstrated.³⁶ Other examples include claims that the key to good practice in people professions is workers possessing a set of transferable and generalised skills, or implementing a particular intervention or technique such as therapeutic residential care, motivational interviewing, mentoring, cognitive behavioural therapy, or mindfulness.³⁷ These approaches may have something to offer a project interested in achieving good youth and community work outcomes. However, achieving good practice in social welfare is better characterised as a ‘wicked problem’.³⁸ According to the literature on wicked problems, tame solutions to achieving good practice in the helping professions are deficient. For example, tame solutions are represented as the way to achieve good practice and disregard, foreclose, and ignore critiques and other possibilities. Tame solutions are reductionist and fail to adequately acknowledge or deal with the complexity of good practice in human services. Proponents of complexity theory provide useful characterisations and comparisons between complicated and complex systems.³⁹ According to this perspective, tame solutions resonate with a complicated account on achieving good caring work, which suggests that all the components and their relationships can be isolated, and known to enable linear causal explanations and subsequently universal predictive theory. According to Flyvbjerg, this is where the value of complexity theory ends for the social sciences and for answering the question: how can good practice in youth and community work be achieved?⁴⁰ Tame solutions also insist that caring workers obey and follow instructions rather than think carefully about what they are doing and whether it is the good or right thing to do. In other words, they lack a substantial ethical or moral dimension.

Accounts of good youth and community work have a contradictory tendency towards being simultaneously relativist and universalist.⁴¹ The trend to relativism or nihilism is demonstrated by claims that there is no correct or wrong way of doing human service work, and that any account of good practice is as good as any other.⁴² For example, Belton argues, “youth work is not what one person says it is, youth work is what all youth workers do”.⁴³ The suggestion that anything can or should count as good practice in the helping professions is problematic. Often, this point of view corresponds to a belief that people should not impose their values or morality on others. However, this is a moral position that aligns with

liberalism and therefore is an imposition of a moral framework. It is also difficult to defend the idea that good practice is all about individual preferences and people doing whatever they want, particularly when social service interventions harm, oppress, exploit, deceive, or control people. The affinity with universalism aligns with an interest in discovering rationally and universally grounded norms and predictive theories of human action.⁴⁴ The penchant for rules, laws, codes of ethics, evidence-based practice, and replicable interventions is evidence of a trend that, according to Dunne, Flyvbjerg, and Polkinghorne, demonstrates the inappropriate use of methods commonly found in, and privileged by, the natural sciences, which are unreflectively adopted by those working in the social sciences.⁴⁵ To claim value judgments cannot be made about good social welfare work or to argue the opposite – that good practice is dependent on context-independent norms – represents a failure to argue a defensible conceptualisation of the good. Moreover, it demonstrates a failure to provide a solid answer to the moral, practical, or ethical question: what should one do?

Representations of good practice in the people professions too often fail to explore the critical philosophical question that does and should shape conceptualisations of good human service practice: who or what are we? For example, some writers have argued that the way young people, or adolescents, are constructed and understood, is fundamental to understanding youth work.⁴⁶ However, most of the time no attention is given to such concepts, their criteria, or the implications of how they are used to describe what youth work is. Also typically absent in the literature on human service work is a consideration of the relationships between how practitioners should be understood and achieving good practice. According to Freire, “every educational practice implies a concept of man [sic] and the world”.⁴⁷ In the same way, any description of caring work entails a conceptualisation of the things that the practice is dealing with. Similarly, Dean argues, we “govern others and ourselves according to various truths about our existence and nature as human beings”.⁴⁸ Accounts of good human service work typically overlook articulating ‘truths’ about how people are and ought to be constituted or known, as well as the implications of these constructions for understanding and achieving good practice.⁴⁹ These flaws demonstrate a failure in the literature to articulate an adequately complex account of good practice in youth and community work.

Regulating for good practice: The Community Sector Reform project

Another key problem found in the relevant literature is that the sort of regulation typically suggested to achieve good practice in the helping professions is inadequate. In an advanced industrial country such as Australia, the funding and regulation of human services is extensive and encompasses laws, policies, and approaches operating in different jurisdictions as they apply to various activities. These include government processes and budgets, industrial relations and workplace related matters, the planning and administration of social services, the care and protection of specific populations (for example: children, families, people with disabilities and mental health concerns), and the professional organisation of particular occupations. A recent example is the Victorian Government's Service Sector Reform Project.⁵⁰ This initiative provides a good illustration of four strategies that feature in such projects.

Plans to regulate social services tend to focus on achieving economic efficiency and not burdening government with added expenditure. This is demonstrated by an obsession with the budget bottom line, cost-cutting, pursuing lower costs, reducing waste, securing value for money, ensuring the good management of scarce resources, getting a return on investment, and creating public value.⁵¹ This practice is aligned with the use of market mechanisms that supposedly reduce the financial liability on governments such as privatisation, corporatisation, competitive tendering, contracting, contestability, procurement, commissioning, social finance, social enterprise, efficiency dividends, and enhancing productivity. Similarly, Shergold argues, "more effort is needed to leverage private capital for public good," and techniques to achieve this include introducing market processes and for-profit providers into the welfare sector.⁵² According to this approach to regulating the human service sector, governments do not have the revenue, capacity, or willingness to fund and invest in welfare services to meet demand. Therefore, funding models are proposed that prioritise constraints on public spending and reduce pressure on government expenditure.⁵³ These models are based on two assumptions. First, that the private sector is more efficient at delivering social services compared to the public sector. Second, that competition leads to better quality goods and services. These strategies also rely on a conception of government as best suited to act as a 'steward' and play particular roles such as policy developer and service planner, contractor and purchaser, and leave the responsibility of service delivery to others.⁵⁴

Human service regulatory projects generally emphasise attaining predetermined targets or outcomes. For example, Shergold argues, “an outcomes framework should be developed to establish metrics against which impact performance will be audited, monitored, measured and reported over time”.⁵⁵ Other techniques suggested to secure planned results include benchmarking, comparative performance reporting, quality auditing, provider oversight, accountability regimes, service standards, evidence-based practice, behavioural objectives models, and funding outputs.⁵⁶ An enthusiasm for defining, measuring, and evaluating outcomes in human services corresponds to the production of instruments and methods that claim to be able to do just that, which include Results Based Accountability, Social Return on Investment, and the Australian Government’s ‘RoGS’.⁵⁷ This approach to regulating caring work suggests social welfare services lack accountability and transparency, and youth and community workers can and should be more carefully controlled to reduce waste and secure good practice. The emphasis on outcomes frameworks also demonstrates an interest in improving social services by “shifting the focus from [increasing] the level of resources to the efficient and effective use of those [available] resources”.⁵⁸

Initiatives interested in regulating the helping professions to achieve good practice are typically fixated on enhancing integration and partnerships between stakeholders. This preoccupation is variously described as: better and increasing collaboration; embedded partnerships; holistic planning and coordinated provision; a joined-up approach; interagency cooperation; networked governance; a whole of government approach; and players cooperating and working together.⁵⁹ In addition, Shergold suggests “intergovernmental cross-sectoral collaboration” and that “services need to be wrapped around the individual”.⁶⁰ The focus on integration relies to some extent on a particular problem-framing exercise. The service system is criticised for operating with silos, dealing with problems in an isolated manner, being fragmented, lacking coordination, and exhibiting duplication.⁶¹

Finally, projects aimed at regulating good human service practice usually have an interest in improving workforce capabilities and skills. At times, this is represented as a workforce strategy or a workforce capability framework.⁶² This proposal recognises that caring work is increasingly complex and requires a high level of knowledge and expertise. Shergold identifies a number of examples of changes to practice that place significant demands on practitioners, including new models of public administration such as individualised funding

and place-based solutions, the adoption of new technology, and the need for culturally competent practices.⁶³ In this instance, the relationship between achieving good practice and having a quality workforce is acknowledged, but is limited to skills gaps or care workers lacking the required competencies.

These key approaches to regulating the people professions may contribute to achieving good practice. However, these strategies are often proposed and pursued without adequate scrutiny. At the same time, other kinds of regulation are overlooked.

Problems with social service regulatory projects

The sorts of regulation typically suggested to achieve good practice in youth and community work are inadequate. One significant problem is the failure to understand, explain, and address chronic under-resourcing. The underfunding of welfare services is well documented; however, this is typically ignored or downplayed by official social sector reform projects.⁶⁴ The obsession with reducing the burden on public funding and cost-cutting overshadows any investigation on the question: is cheaper better? The negative implications of short-term funding contracts and erratic changes to funding and service models that often follow election cycles are overlooked.⁶⁵ Failing to get a mention is the fact that insufficient funding impairs the capacity of the helping professions to deliver quality services. Also missing is any reference to how inadequately funding welfare services can end up costing governments and care providers more in the long run. An example of such a false economy is the plethora of government inquiries and compensation schemes for survivors of institutional abuse; costly exercises which may have been avoided if quality social services were funded and delivered in the first place.⁶⁶

On a similar note, social service regulatory projects fail to examine whether human services should simply be treated as another form of business.⁶⁷ In the quest to reduce pressure on public expenditure, it is assumed that the welfare sector can and should mimic the private sector. However, the rationalisation for reforming social services using market-oriented principles and processes, fails to acknowledge that the ideal purpose of the helping professions should not be to maximise profit but to provide care. Since the 1970s, Australian governments have increasingly been using market-based mechanisms in the public sector as a way to cut costs.⁶⁸ However, human service sector regulatory projects fail to provide an

adequate assessment of whether such reforms secure more effective and efficient services.⁶⁹ At the same time, they overlook the negative impacts of welfare reform, including government outsourcing and commissioning, on service providers and service users, particularly in cases where less than full cost funding is provided.⁷⁰ Most recently, the Australian Government's commissioned Competition Policy Review recommended the further extension of competition policy in human services.⁷¹ This is a curious proposition in light of the role of the community welfare sector to address the flaws of free markets; the proposal for a 'fully marketised' social service system has received criticism for promoting inequality.⁷² The logic of bounded rationality suggests contracting processes fail to take into account the benefits of social services that are difficult to observe and measure. These include positive externalities and goods, such as human service providers' mission to promote the common good, reducing inequality, and incidental improvements to wellbeing associated with human contact and relationships. Another problem typically not considered is the cost of privatisation and performance regulation. Often, not-for-profit and welfare services incur contract procurement and management cost burdens.⁷³ Priority is given to transferring financial and other risks away from the public sector over ensuring the delivery of quality services. Meaningful deliberation on the role of the state to invest in social services is evaded in the enthusiasm to transform welfare services into another form of business. A key question that fails to be answered is this: should governments be shirking their responsibilities to deliver civic staples such as good youth and community work?

Plans to regulate the people professions typically ignore shortcomings with outcomes frameworks. A substantial body of work critical of the preoccupation with achieving clearly defined and measurable outcomes in helping professions is disregarded.⁷⁴ According to critics, outcomes-oriented practice aligns with a technical or instrumental rationality that may not be best suited for good practice in the human realm. For example, the emphasis on a technical approach to caring work and all that it entails, such as controlling practice to produce pre-determined goals, overshadows practical reasoning as well as the roles played by intuition, good timing, and luck. The eagerness to employ a technical rationality to achieve good practice in youth and community work forgets that the 'material' being dealt with are unique and complex human beings, and not stable or passive objects that can or should be fashioned into 'outcomes'. We need to adequately consider the potentially harmful consequences of rigidly implementing outcomes frameworks into the lives of human beings.

The limits and contradictions associated with evidence-based practice raise another range of complications for outcomes frameworks.⁷⁵ The critiques of evidence-based practice suggest good practice in human services relies on the fine-tuned adjustment of decision-making and service provision to context. This is in stark contrast to the imposition of interventions or “cookie-cutter, top-down, one-size-fits-all approaches” to social welfare that often characterise outcomes- and evidence-based approaches.⁷⁶ Paradoxically, as Cox observes, governments have ignored the evidence on outcomes from social welfare interventions.⁷⁷ The challenges and limits associated with ascertaining, quantifying, and tracking outcomes and impacts are also often overlooked. For example, any representation of an outcome in human services is interpretive and contestable, and not everything of value can be measured or calculated. Outcomes frameworks are generally associated with empirically tested and rationally grounded evidence and as a result are presented as scientific, value-neutral, and objective. However, the interest in defining, measuring, and evaluating outcomes in the people professions typically aligns with a focus on managing scarce resources and attaining cost savings rather than pursuing adequate investment or questioning under-resourcing.

Orienting practice to achieve tightly defined outcomes typically relies on hierarchical modes of organisation that comply with inflexible procedures and prescriptions.⁷⁸ This runs counter to the idea that good practice in human services requires *phronesis* and workers exercising good professional judgment.⁷⁹ It also ignores the pitfalls and dangers associated with being compliant in the helping professions.⁸⁰ According to Schwartz and Sharpe, “rules can kill skill”, and demanding compliance in practice of care can erode practitioners’ moral skill and capacity to provide good care.⁸¹ Generally missing from lists of pre-determined measurable outcomes are the vital role youth and community workers ought to play in critiquing government policy, critically questioning public institutions, and publicly advocating for social change when appropriate.

Outcomes frameworks usually ignore the value of ongoing deliberation on worthwhile ends. Outcomes are typically decided well in advance of practice taking place. Subsequently, the focus of practice becomes figuring out the most efficient and effective way to achieve the pre-determined outcomes. In other words, the means become the ends. However, identifying techniques to secure outcomes may not be ends worth pursuing. Rutter and Brown make the

salient point, “we need to not only ask if we are doing things right, but also if we are doing the right thing and how do we decide what is right”?⁸² Practitioners and service users should be adequately supported so they can actively engage in shaping and debating the goods that human services should pursue. It may well be that a fundamental purpose of good social service work is to promote democracy, which includes encouraging and enabling people to think deeply about, critically examine, and publicly discuss living well and having a good life.

The fixation with enhancing integration between stakeholders is incoherent. For example, it ignores the inherent tensions between and among government departments and service providers competing for scarce resources, at the same time as demanding that they all cooperate and work together. The extensive networking, partnerships, and collaboration taking place is disregarded.⁸³ The value in having a diversity of service providers, including the choice this offers service users, is overlooked. At the same time government-commissioned regulatory projects criticise social services for lacking coordination, they fail to mention governments’ role in defunding and devaluing networks. Networking is not seen as direct service delivery and is therefore generally not considered a funding priority. According to Ryan, “there is actually very little objective evidence that integrating services leads to measurable changes for people”.⁸⁴ Focusing on enhanced integration also fails to adequately address the complexity and challenges associated with interagency collaborations and partnerships.⁸⁵ Finally, promoting collaboration between all stakeholders can sideline, marginalise, or drown out the voices or role of those people who should be central or critical – the people who the work is meant to help. However, are service users simply another stakeholder?

The concern with skills gaps in the workforce is insufficient. There is a failure to acknowledge and address inadequate wages and working conditions in caring work. Well-documented workforce concerns missing from social service regulatory projects include job insecurity, casualisation, underemployment, unmanageable workloads, the lack of career structures, and poor quality supervision.⁸⁶ The poor recognition and low status of caring work does not receive enough, if any, attention. This is surprising in light of the significant acknowledgment this issue was accorded in Australia as part of the Social and Community Service Workers Equal Remuneration Case.⁸⁷ Associated concerns such as workforce

shortages, and challenges with recruitment, retention, and staff turnover, are similarly overlooked.⁸⁸ A false economy is produced by underfunding a low paid, inexperienced, demoralised, churning workforce – but this fails to rate a mention. The social service workforce is unprofessionalised and unregulated; the implications of this to achieving good practice are ignored.⁸⁹ Many workers lack credentials or have only a vocational level certificate, but competency-based training is insufficient.⁹⁰ Much more needs to be done to recruit, develop, and retain a high quality workforce than is typically suggested.⁹¹ Basically, the point missed in official social sector regulatory projects is that a good quality, high capacity, and sustainable welfare sector relies on good quality carers who are well educated, well paid, and well supported.

These silences, omissions, inadequacies, gaps, contradictions, uncertainties, and oversights demonstrate the failure in the literature to argue a good case for the kind of regulation needed to achieve good practice in youth and community work.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have argued that representations of good youth and community work are often deficient. In particular, too often descriptions of good caring work are overly simplistic and not well thought out. I have suggested that far more complex accounts of practices of care are warranted. These should draw on the expanding literature on practice theory that offers valuable intellectual resources for thinking about and articulating good human service work.

I have also made the case that common approaches to funding and regulating the helping professions to achieve good practice are inadequate. In particular, I have critiqued a number of strategies that typically feature in human service regulatory projects. I have observed the types of regulation that are often overlooked but could go a long way towards achieving good social welfare work, including investing in a well-educated, well paid, and well supported workforce.

Understanding and achieving good practice in human services is not as simple or straightforward as much of the literature suggests. These problems warrant further research into the question: how can good practice in youth and community work be achieved?

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