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## An Exploration of Service-Oriented Fields

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## An Exploration of Service-Oriented Fields

Eliza Murray<sup>6</sup>

*Community psychology, nonprofit administration, and social work are service-oriented fields that seek to understand and solve a variety of social problems. All of these fields are value-oriented, but they use a variety of approaches to understand social issues facing individuals, families, and communities. Community psychology uses participatory action research to understand the relationships between individuals and their communities, social work is practice-oriented and seeks to empower and liberate all people, and nonprofit administration explores the governance and leadership of nonprofit organizations. Information about the basic duties of professionals in these fields is readily available; however, individuals interested in the aforementioned fields may desire to learn more about the skills and best practices of professionals in service-oriented fields. To address this need, five interviews were conducted with professionals in community psychology, nonprofit administration, and social work to ascertain information about the professional skills, strategies, and tools required for success in their fields. The interviews revealed the importance of critical thinking, written, and oral communication skills, in addition to building culturally relevant relationships/partnerships with communities and/or clients.*

Human service fields, such as community psychology, nonprofit administration, and social work have a major role in the development of community-based programs for individuals, families, and communities. These fields use similar and dissimilar approaches to understand problems and develop solutions for a variety of societal issues, such as discrimination and poverty. Community psychology is an emerging field with an emphasis on research and prevention in order to eliminate suffering and oppression (Kagan, Burton, Duckett, Lawthom, & Siddiquee, 2011). The field of social work seeks to solve social problems and empower and

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liberate the disadvantaged (International Federation of Social Workers, 2012) and nonprofit administration explores nonprofit management, leadership, and governance (Lindenwood University, 2013). The history and values of these fields highlights the specialized ways in which community psychologists, social workers, and nonprofit administrators work to create change. Five interviews were conducted throughout this study with professionals to ascertain more information about the skills, best practices, policy and historical implications, and recommendations of professionals in community psychology, social work, and nonprofit administration.

### **Community Psychology**

Community psychology is a value-centered field that focuses on diversity, critical perspectives, and action research (Kagan et al., 2011). The field aims to examine the relationships between individuals, their communities, and the larger society through the use of research, service, and collaboration (American Psychological Association, 2014). Additionally, community psychology seeks to work with individuals and communities to prevent and solve problems using a strengths-based approach. Community psychology began in the 1960s at the Swampscott conference in Boston in which psychologists met to examine their role in community-based mental health services (Kagan et al., 2011). The conference prompted psychologists to widen their focus to working with communities through service development and action-oriented research. At this time, there were also a variety of social movements gaining traction, such as the anti-war movement and the civil rights movement. These socio-historical factors were crucial for the development of community psychology as the field is devoted to solving problems related to oppression and discrimination (Kagan et al., 2011).

In the 1970s and 1980s other countries also began to develop their own forms of community psychology. For instance, Latin American community psychology developed as a result of social problems endemic to Latin America and the need for solutions. In addition, there was a shift away from the perspective that characterized individuals as being unable to develop solutions for their deteriorating condition towards a perspective that believed individuals were “social actors” who had the resources to change their circumstances (Montero, 2008, p. 664). As a result, Latin American community psychology is focused on participatory action research in which subjects and researchers are interdependent and as such community psychology is made with the people, not just for them (Montero & Varas-Diaz, as cited in Kagan et al., 2011). In South Africa, community psychology arose as a result of societal issues such as apartheid, racism, and poverty and like Latin America, it focused on empowering citizens to organize for liberation (Montero, 2008).

Central to community psychology in the U.S., Latin America, and South Africa are the values of community, stewardship, and social justice (Kagan et al., 2011). Community as a value consists of a steadfast dedication to bridge communities and to encourage a sense of belonging within and between communities. Stewardship is the duty to make a significant long-term change in the world and social justice is the concern for people’s right to self-determination, fair treatment, and access to resources (Kagan et al., 2011). All three values guide community psychologists in their work in a variety of areas, such as community-based participatory research, community development, advocacy, and program implementation. Community psychologists may specialize in public health, education, or mental health. For instance, a community psychologist specializing in public health may use community-based participatory

research to identify the needs of community members with limited access to affordable healthy food, as well as to develop and implement programs to solve this problem.

In order to ascertain more information about the skills, duties, and best practices of community psychologists, a 10-item interview (see Appendices A-D) was conducted with a licensed clinical psychologist, TCP, working in public health and community-based research. She noted that the history of psychology, specifically in the last three decades, has influenced her current work as a professor, researcher, and community practitioner (T., personal communication, May 7, 2014). Specifically, TCP cited psychology's recent focus on multiculturalism, which she believes makes her work as a community-based researcher in minority populations more acceptable. She also mentioned that in recent years, psychology is becoming known as being universal and specific at the same time. However, she noted that recent changes in reimbursement rates and the time demands for clerical work in clinical practice have negatively influenced her willingness and desire to re-enter the clinical field.

TCP also mentioned the skills necessary for success in community psychology, in addition to the rewarding and challenging aspects of her career. She noted that one should have skills in statistical analysis, observation, assessment, research methodology, and a complex knowledge of human behavior. She also noted that the challenges associated with her work as a researcher were mainly related to the fast pace at which she must conduct research. Despite the pace of her work, TCP finds the service aspect of her profession to be the most rewarding.

When asked how community psychologists can better engage their target communities, TCP noted that the importance of cultural competency training of which she said, "Psychologists are often at the forefront of these discussions, but psychology also lags behind" (T., personal communication, May 7, 2014). She also mentioned that there are a growing number of

disciplines that have emerged in psychology; however, there is often a narrow focus that characterizes the research of these disciplines. She noted that the questions of interest to many (e.g. bias and discrimination) are limited and do not take into consideration important factors, such as socioeconomic status. Lastly, TCP mentioned that those interested in pursuing a career in community psychology should have excellent evaluation skills and should be flexible, creative, and comfortable working with others from diverse backgrounds.

Community psychology is committed to empowering communities and solving social problems. The values of community, stewardship, and social justice were clear throughout the interview with a community-based researcher and practitioner. The interview revealed that skills in observation, evaluation, and cultural competency are crucial for success in this field.

### **Social Work**

Like community psychology, the field of social work is dedicated to promoting social change and empowering communities through the understanding of social, cultural, and economic institutions (National Association of Social Workers, 2014). The origins of social work began after the Civil War as a result of economic inequality, racism, and poor working conditions. A number of movements and organizations, such as the settlement house movement, the Women's Trade Union and the National Association for the Advancement for Colored People focused on developing solutions to poverty and discrimination (Glicker, 2011). Specifically, the settlement house movement throughout the early 1900s consisted of programs for the working poor along with an explicit focus on creating policies to reduce economic inequality. The settlement house movement was an example of macro social work, which focuses on solving social problems at the community and societal levels (Bruggemann, 2002). After World War I and II, social workers were enlisted to help returning soldiers with physical

and mental war-related injuries. It was not until the 1950s that social work had a clear set of professional standards and guidelines with the formation of the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) (Glicken, 2011).

The 1960s was marked by the war on poverty which was characterized by a variety of reforms and programs, such as Head Start, Medicaid, and Medicare (Glicken, 2011). Social workers worked in anti-poverty organizations and lobbied elected officials. During the 1970s, social reform was stagnated because of growing social unrest; however social work expanded by taking interest in gender equality, public health, and education (Glicken, 2011). In the 1980s, there was a growing sentiment of welfare dependency and a number of laws were designed to promote individual responsibility despite growing rates of poverty. As a result, social workers took jobs in the nonprofit sector as many Americans believed that nonprofit organizations could provide services more effectively than the government (Glicken, 2011). Today, social workers are employed in a variety of fields, such as mental health, education, violence prevention, and public health.

Social work is remarkably similar to community psychology in its value-centered orientation. Social work's core values include service, social justice, dignity of individuals, integrity, importance of human relationships, and competence (NASW, 2008). The values of service, social justice, dignity of individuals and the importance of human relationships are similar to community psychology's values of community and stewardship in that there is a strong emphasis on empowering individuals and communities to create long-lasting social change. Similar to community psychology, social workers may also use research, their own expertise, and their clients' values to determine the most effective treatment for clients and communities; this is termed evidence-based practice (EBP) (University of Michigan, 2013). EBP also stresses

transparency between clients and communities regarding their research findings. For instance, a social worker who works in the area of economic development may research current best practices, assess the community's needs and wants, and integrate his/her findings into planning and implementing an evidence-based program. Social workers often work as clinicians, community organizers, policy analysts, consultants, and program developers (Bruggemann, 2002).

Interviews with three social workers revealed that being creative and possessing excellent critical-thinking, oral, and written communication skills were the key strategies required to be successful in their profession. For instance, one social worker, DSW, whose primary job duties were crisis intervention, individual, and group counseling in a school setting, noted that it is important to build rapport and build relationships among students (D., personal communication, April, 23, 2014). She also said, "It is important to listen objectively and to really hear what they are saying and help them identify what they are feeling" (D., personal communication).

DSW discussed the ways in which social workers can engage their clients more effectively. For instance, she emphasized the importance of exploring students' interests and incorporating them into sessions. To illustrate this, she recounted the story of a student who was very withdrawn and when she noticed he was interested in the Twilight book series, she also decided to read the entire series. With another student, she role-played as a wizard in order to connect with him. While she emphasized the success of her approach with students, she also noted that it was difficult to work with students who did not believe they needed help.

DSW also mentioned the challenges of her work and the influence of policy on the profession as a whole. She recalled times in which there was an overwhelming amount of tasks assigned to her which required some areas of her work to suffer. She also discussed difficulties



associated with changes in policy. For instance, currently there is less funding for school social workers given the decrease in students qualifying for special education. And as a result, some schools have funds for only one social worker to provide services to students in crisis. She mentioned that the scarcity of social workers in school may have negative ramifications.

Lastly, DSW stated that the history of social work's had a positive impact on her passion for helping others and she recommended that those interested in pursuing a career should shadow social workers and that there are a variety of career options, such as private practice, policy, medical social work, and research.

An interview with a social worker and college professor, KSW, also revealed that the most important professional skills required for success include excellent written and oral communication skills, critical-thinking skills, and ethical decision-making at all times (K., personal communication, April 24, 2014). KSW also noted that while there are challenges, social workers should stay healthy and carefully organize their day-to-day activities. In order to engage their target communities and/or clients more effectively, she suggested that social workers use a strength-based approach in their work in which communities and/or clients are viewed as the experts. In addition, she noted that social workers should promote their clients' self-determination in that their perspectives and goals should guide all decision-making.

KSW also emphasized the influence of policy on her work and gave advice for those interested in the field. KSW mentioned that as whole, policies that fund children and elderly programs are crucial for social workers in these areas. In addition, she emphasized the duty that all social workers have to be actively involved in policy development. Lastly, she emphasized that social work is a diverse field and those interested in pursuing a career should seek out a variety of opportunities. As an example, KSW noted that she advises social work students, who

are required to do community service and practicum internships, to choose a diverse range of opportunities in order to gain more experience.

Lastly, an interview with a social worker (with a background in psychology), TSW, working in research and geriatric services, revealed similar insights regarding the skills and best practices of the profession. TSW noted that the history of social work and psychology has positively influenced her work because it has enabled her to develop meaningful relationships with her clients (T., personal communication, May 12, 2014). Additionally, understanding the different factors that affect individuals allows her to obtain the best resources for her clients. She also described the rewarding facets of her profession, which included making a difference in someone's life even in the smallest of ways (e.g. a brief conversation or providing them with a valuable community resource).

TSW also discussed the challenging aspects of her work and the negative impact of policy on her profession. She noted that the most challenging aspect of her work was not feeling as if she is being helpful or that she does not have a good answer. Additionally, TSW stated that there are often limited resources available, which often limits the services she can provide for her clients. For instance, decreases in funding for mental health impact her ability to provide quality services for her clients. She also noted that changes in policy impact the scope of services social workers are able to provide and their compensation.

In terms of the strategies and skills she uses daily in her work, TSW noted that she uses the internet to find resources for her clients and she also brainstorms with her co-workers about different strategies and approaches. TSW also stated that patience, communication and interpersonal skills, and computer literacy are the most important professional skills required to be successful in social work. TSW also mentioned that a commitment to continued education in

social work is extremely important. In terms of community engagement, TSW noted that it is important to get to know the target community and “they have to believe that you are really there to help, and that you understand what they are experiencing” (T., personal communication).

Lastly, TSW gave five recommendations for those interested in pursuing a career in social work, which included understanding why you are interested in social work, recognizing the challenges of the field, participating in internships while in school, finding good mentorships, and keeping in contact with past co-workers and supervisors.

Social work promotes social change and the empowerment of individuals and communities. The values of social justice, service, dignity of individuals, and the importance of human worth were exemplified throughout DSW’s, KSW’s, and TSW’s description of their profession and the best practices and strategies used daily. Oral, written communication, and interpersonal skills, in addition to forming meaningful relationships with clients and communities were heavily recommended for success in social work.

### **Nonprofit Administration**

The field of nonprofit administration explores the leadership and governance of nonprofit organizations (Lindenwood University, 2013). The nonprofit sector emerged from the ideology of classical liberalism or limited interference from the government (Anheier, 2005). Classical liberalism was closely related to the collective action taken by membership organizations and was exemplified by numerous social movements, such as the civil rights movement and the women’s movement. Formally, the nonprofit sector developed after the Great Depression. During this time there were a number of government-sponsored reforms however, many of its programs were incomplete, and Americans searched for alternatives to government intervention (Anheier, 2005). As a result, the nonprofit sector blossomed as the state withdrew its role in

providing welfare related services and there was a growing emphasis on personal responsibility. Furthermore, the Commission on Private Philanthropy and Public Needs, which detailed the history of American philanthropy, generated further interest in the formal study of nonprofit organizations (Anheier, 2005). After its publication, the Program on Non-Profit Organizations at Yale University was founded in 1978 to study the contexts in which nonprofits function (Anheier, 2005).

Nonprofit administration and management became of interest in the 1990s as the result of an increasing need for training in the leadership of nonprofit organizations (Anheier, 2005). Despite this interest, there has only been recent attention given to a formalized nonprofit management approach. Traditionally, the management of for-profit organizations was adapted for nonprofit organizations, and courses in the strategic management of nonprofits were taught in business schools (Worth, 2013). Some theorists argue that the management approaches in the for-profit sector can be applied to the non-profit sector; however, university professors in nonprofit management assert nonprofits have different values, mission, and goals than for-profit organizations (Worth, 2013). Currently, there are trainings hosted by universities, for-profit organizations, and nonprofit associations designed to train professionals in the best practices of nonprofit management.

Nonprofit administration professionals are impacted by daily by the values of the nonprofit sector, which include productivity, empowerment, effectiveness, enrichment, empowerment, reliability, responsiveness, and care (Salamon, Geller, & Newhouse, 2012). The values of empowerment (i.e. mobilizing citizens for change), effectiveness (i.e. providing services at a reasonable cost and making a difference in the community), enrichment (i.e. preserve and promote cultural diversity), reliability (i.e. operating in a trust-worthy manner), and

care (i.e. community-driven and community-focused) align with the values of community psychology and social work. All three fields emphasize the importance of working with underserved communities to develop solutions. The values of productivity (i.e. creating jobs and mobilizing assets) and responsiveness (i.e. meeting needs that the government does not meet) are least like the values of community psychology and social work in that they refer to nonprofits offering a viable economic contribution and the provision of cost-effective services (Salamon, Geller, & Newhouse, 2012). However, community psychologists and social workers may work in the nonprofit sector and as a result; the aforementioned values would greatly influence their daily work.

These values are crucial for guiding nonprofit administration professionals' (i.e. executive directors, board members, and program directors) decision-making processes about their organization's mission, vision, and long-term impact in the community. For instance, an executive director of a housing organization may spearhead an evaluative process to determine the effectiveness of the organization's current programming in a particular community and recommend changes for the organization's current programs and services.

In order to gain more information about nonprofit administration and management, a professional in nonprofit administration was interviewed about the skills and best practices required for effective management. When asked what strategies and/or tools are required to be successful in nonprofit administration, a nonprofit professional, WNPA, stated that the three main strategies include effective management, legal frameworks, and strategic planning (W., personal communication, April 15, 2014). WNPA heavily emphasized the importance of having strong management. He notes, "If they aren't the right systems and structures to manage the enterprise, if they aren't the right skilled people, if they aren't a part of the right network, it is not

going to make a difference, and money is going to waste. You can't just show up, everything has to be managed" (W., personal communication). He also thought it was crucial that legal frameworks were in place to maintain systems of governance and to minimize legal risk given that nonprofits' main focus should be to protect the people they serve. WNPA also discussed the importance of strategic planning saying that people should have some idea of where they want to go and what they want to accomplish in order to successfully fulfill their goals and purpose.

WNPA also discussed his ideas about the most important professional skills required to be successful in nonprofit administration. He noted that it is important to believe in the possibility of change and that people should have first align themselves with others doing similar work. Through partnership, nonprofit administration professionals can work together to solve problems. As an example, he discussed the contradiction of having a large number of churches working towards the same goal and yet not being able to solve major social problems, such as homelessness. WNPA suggested that nonprofit professionals collaborate with one another to solve problems instead of creating more nonprofits that are not addressing the root cause of the problem. In addition to partnering with similar nonprofits, he noted that it was important that nonprofit professionals listen and understand their stakeholders' (i.e. community members, volunteers, employees, etc.) needs in order to develop innovative programs that address various components of a social problem.

WNPA also discussed the numerous challenges that are associated with working in the nonprofit sector in addition and provided recommendations for those interested in the field. One of the challenges of working in the nonprofit sector is that it is difficult to change individuals' perspectives in order to work for social change. In addition, he noted that traditionally the nonprofit sector was focused on temporary solutions, but not sustainability. WNPA believes that

what is truly needed is a paradigm shift towards system-oriented solutions. When asked about the influence of policy on his work, he noted that policy's influence on his profession was mostly in terms of the legal ramifications (i.e. tax exemption) for nonprofits. Lastly, WNPA recommended that individuals interested in nonprofit administration possess boldness, resilience, open-mindedness, and determination.

Nonprofit administration is characterized by a value-centered commitment to the effective management of nonprofit organizations in order to provide community-focused services. An interview with a nonprofit administration professor revealed the importance of effective management and strategic planning, in addition to collaborating with other nonprofit organizations and community members to solve social problems.

### **Summary**

Community psychology, social work, and nonprofit administration share a value-centered commitment to service, community engagement, and social justice. Each field approaches these issues differently; community psychology uses participatory action research, social work emphasizes evidenced-based practice, and nonprofit administration focuses on providing cost-effective, culturally relevant services and programs to the public.

Interviews with professionals in each of these fields succinctly described the professional skills and strategies needed for success in each field in general, as well as the skills needed for the successful engagement of target communities. An interview with a community psychologist revealed the importance of cultural competency training for effective community engagement, in addition to having excellent statistical, assessment, and observational skills. Interviews with social workers revealed that it is crucial to build relationships with clients and/or communities as they are the experts. To do so, social workers should also possess excellent oral and written

communication skills, while also utilizing creative and organizational processes. An interview with a professional in nonprofit administration revealed that effective management, legal systems, and strategic planning are essential for nonprofit professionals working in administrative capacities. Furthermore, solving complex social issues, such as poverty, requires collaborating with communities and other nonprofit organizations.

Each professional also noted that the most rewarding component of their work was making a measurable difference in the lives of their communities and clients. These professionals also noted the tremendous challenges associated with their work, which in some cases was also connected to the influence of policy on their profession. For instance, two social workers noted that their work was negatively impacted by recent changes in policy (e.g. less funding for school social workers and less funding for community mental health). The community psychologist said that she found the pace of research to be the most challenging aspect of her work, and in terms of policy she noted the tremendous amount of legal and clerical work required to re-enter clinical practice. While she was speaking about two different aspects of her profession (researcher and clinician), in both instances, the challenge was the intense time demand regarding the rate at which she has to conduct and publish research and the time spent on the maintenance of adequate clinical records. However, for the nonprofit professional the challenges associated with his work did not seem directly related to the impact of policy on his profession. The nonprofit administration professional indicated that the most challenging component of his work was trying to change others' perspectives regarding social issues. In terms of policy, he noted that legal policies regarding tax status have a large influence on nonprofits.

The interviews also revealed that the service-oriented fields' history had a positive impact on the professionals' current work. For social workers, the field's devotion to helping others



inspired them to pursue work in school, academic, and community settings. For the community psychologist, the field's multicultural focus in the last three decades made her work more acceptable to other psychologists. The nonprofit administration professional, however mentioned a drawback regarding the field's history. He noted that the field's traditional focus on providing short-term solutions to social problems is not sustainable, and he suggested developing long-term solutions by critically dissecting social problems.

The professionals also gave helpful advice for those interested in their work. The community psychologist recommended having good evaluation skills and a willingness to work with diverse populations. The social workers noted the importance of good internships and mentorships and recommended that those interested in the profession pursue a variety of opportunities. Lastly, the nonprofit administration professional suggested that individuals interested in the field should possess boldness and persistence. Community psychology, social work, and nonprofit administration share similar values and skills, while also utilizing different approaches. Students interested in community psychology, social work, and nonprofit administration should evaluate their interests, skills, and the similarities and differences of each profession in order to make an informed decision about their prospective career choice.

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Appendix A

Recruitment Materials

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

I would like to invite you to participate in a research study conducted by Eliza Murray, Lindenwood University student. The study's purpose is to gather more information about the best practices of professionals in community psychology, nonprofit administration, and social work. There will be a 30-45 minute audio-recorded interview about the skills, duties, and best practices of your profession. You will not receive any compensation; however your insights will be greatly appreciated.

If you are interested in participating please contact the Principal Investigator through email ([eam847@lionmail.lindenwood.edu](mailto:eam847@lionmail.lindenwood.edu)) or phone (314-817-7542). Thank you.

Sincerely,

Eliza Murray, Principal Investigator

Dr. Michiko Nohara-LeClair, Supervising Faculty

## Appendix B

## Informed Consent for Participation in Research Activities

## An Exploration of Service-Oriented Fields

Principal Investigator: Eliza Murray

You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by Eliza Murray under the guidance of Dr. Michiko Nohara-LeClair. The purpose of this research is to explore the best practices of professionals in the fields of community psychology, nonprofit administration, and social work.

Your participation will involve a 30-45 minute interview consisting of ten questions about the skills, duties, and best practices of your profession. Interviews will be audio-recorded. Approximately six participants will be involved in this research.

There are no anticipated risks associated with this research. There are no direct benefits for you participating in this study. However, your participation will contribute to the knowledge about these service-oriented fields.

Your participation is voluntary and you may choose not to participate in this research study or to withdraw your consent at any time. You may choose not to answer any questions that you do not want to answer. You will NOT be penalized in any way should you choose not to participate or to withdraw.

We will do everything we can to protect your privacy. As part of this effort, your identity will not be revealed in any publication or presentation that may result from this study. The interviews will be audio recorded and the recordings will remain in the possession of the investigator in a safe location for three years at which point the recordings will be deleted.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study, or if any problems arise, you may call the Investigator, Eliza Murray (314-817-7542), or the Supervising Faculty, Dr. Michiko Nohara-LeClair (636-949-4371). You may also ask questions of or state concerns regarding your participation to the Lindenwood Institutional Review Board (IRB) through contacting Dr. Jann Weitzel, Vice President for Academic Affairs at 636-949-4846.

**I have read this consent form and have been given the opportunity to ask questions. I will also be given a copy of this consent form for my records. I consent to my participation in the research described above.**

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 Participant's Signature

---

 Date

---

 Participant's Printed Name

---

 Signature of Principal Investigator

---

 Date

---

 Investigator Printed Name

## Appendix C

## Interview Questions

1. How did you become interested in (insert field)? Was there anyone or anything in particular that incited your interest?
2. How has the history of (insert field) influenced your current work?
3. What are your current job duties?
4. What do you find to be the most rewarding and challenging about your work?
5. What strategies/tools do you use daily in order for you to be an effective (insert field)?
6. What do you think are the most important professional skills required to be a successful (insert field)?
7. How can professionals in (insert field) engage their target communities more effectively?
8. What changes have you noticed in (insert field) since you started working as (insert field)?
9. How do changes in policy influence your field and your role as a (insert field)?
10. What advice would you give to those interested in (insert field)?

## Appendix D

### Thank You Letter

Thank you for your participation in this research study. The purpose of this study was to explore the skills, duties, and best practices of professionals in the fields of community psychology, nonprofit administration, and social work. If you would like to receive a copy of the final paper you may contact the PI via email or phone.

#### Contact Information:

Eliza Murray, Principal Investigator

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