

# RESUMES AND COVER LETTERS FOR SOCIAL WORKERS

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For more information, consult our guide,  
*Job Search, Networking, and Interviewing Tips  
for Social Workers.*

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**A resume and cover letter work together to interest an employer in interviewing you.** This important marketing team should always be geared to your specific audience and describe the relevant skills, experience, and accomplishments that qualify you for the position for which you're applying.

### Getting Started on Your Resume

**Ask yourself what populations and settings interest you.** This will help you decide what to include in your resume, what to emphasize, and the appropriate terminology to use.

**Research the organizations where you'll be sending your resume.** Browse their websites, read their written materials, and connect with Smith alums and others who work there. Learn about an organization's programs, population served, and—for clinical settings—theory base.

**Make a master list of all your experiences and skills.** Include education, certifications, and licensing; field placements; projects (community, anti-racism); jobs, internships, and volunteer positions; trainings attended and presentations given; research (thesis); and professional activities (memberships, committee work, conferences); language and computer skills; interests, activities, and travel. Your finished resume may not include all this information, but it's useful to have it written down.

### Choosing a Format and Headings

**List information in reverse chronological order,** from present to past. This format easily identifies recent experiences for employers, and they are most familiar with it.

**Choose headings to emphasize relevant skills and experience.** Those seeking clinical positions typically begin with Education followed by Social Work Experience or Clinical Experience. Other background might simply be called Additional Experience or something more specific such as Teaching Experience, Research Experience, or International Experience. Other sections are summarized on page 3.

**For macro-level positions other headings may be appropriate** such as Human Services Experience, Community Outreach Experience, Administrative Experience, and so forth. To further emphasize the breadth of your skills and experience, you might begin your resume with a Profile or Skills Summary.

**Avoid using a template.** Template resumes often look alike and are hard for most users to modify.

### Describing Your Experience

**Use action verb phrases, not complete sentences.** (Action verb list on page 9.) Omit personal pronouns and "a," "an," and "the" to achieve a concise style that will be easier—and faster—for employers to read.

**Use keywords and details appropriate to your audience. For clinical positions emphasize your clinical skills.** Include details about your client population such as diagnoses or presenting issues, age, ethnicity, and socio-economic status unless certain your reader will know this. Other details may include the number of clients seen individually or in groups, and the length and type of treatment.

**For macro-level positions** stress skills such as supervising others, program development, community organizing, fundraising, teamwork, and budget management. Include details such as the number of people you've supervised or amount of money raised. Use more familiar language for non-clinical positions.

**Stress accomplishments and sequence phrases according to the skills most relevant to your reader.** List less relevant information later in your descriptions, condense it, or omit it.

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## Sections of the Resume

**Your contact information.** Put your name at the top with your address, phone number, and email address below. Include both present and permanent contact information if you like.

**A job objective** is an optional brief statement stating the type of position you're seeking. An objective can limit the use of the resume, so we suggest specifying it in the cover letter.

**A skills summary or profile** may be used at the opening of the resume, but is also optional.

**Education** comes first for most students and recent graduates. Start with your School for Social Work degree, followed by your previous degree(s). You may include relevant courses, your thesis, community and anti-racism projects (these may be presented elsewhere), and committee work.

**Foreign language proficiency, computer skills, and licensure** may be included under Education.

**Experience** categories should be chosen according to the type of position for which you're applying. State that your field placements have been full-time, especially for clinical resumes. You may include volunteer work or internships.

**Personal information** such as age, family status, religion, disability, political affiliation, ethnicity, sexual orientation, or gender identity is not required on a resume. Include personal information only if it makes you a stronger candidate for a particular job.

**Interests and travel** are optional unless they're relevant. For example, if you hope to combine your clinical skills with outdoor education, your outdoor skills and certifications are important.

**Professional activities** such as relevant memberships, awards, trainings and conferences attended, and presentations given should be included.

**References** typically appear on a separate page, "References for Your Name." Include the name, title, address, phone, and email for each reference, and their relation to you. Get permission from your references to list them, and tell them they may be contacted—by whom, and for what position.

## Your Resume's Presentation

**The length of your resume depends on your audience and level of experience.** If you can fit your resume onto one page without crowding, do so. Resumes for clinical positions may be two pages long if you have significant previous experience, but make sure it is at least one-and-a-half pages in length. A C.V. (Curriculum Vitae), required for academic, research, and post-doc positions, may be several pages long. Note: Some employers who ask for a C.V. simply mean a resume.

**Your resume must be easy to read and visually attractive.** Use margins, headings, caps, bullets, italics, bold, and underlining to direct your reader's attention to important content. Good font choices include Arial, Times Roman, Helvetica, and Garamond (11 point preferred). Use white or ivory bond paper with matching paper and envelopes for your cover letter, and be sure your print quality is crisp.

**Your resume is a reflection of you!** Proofread it with care, check your spelling and grammar, and make sure the information is presented consistently and accurately. If you'll be emailing your resume to employers, email it first to yourself and your friends to be certain the format appears as you want it.

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## The Cover Letter

**A cover letter introduces your resume to an employer.** It says why you're writing, where you learned of the position, and how you're qualified. It highlights your relevant skills and experience and shows where the match is between you, the position, and the organization. Send a cover letter with your resume, even if not required.

**Research the organization and position before writing your letter.** Read its materials and website, and speak with Smith alums and others familiar with it. If you've been referred by a contact, mention her/his name (with permission, of course) in the first paragraph.

**When responding to a position with little description,** you may email or phone for more information. Be prepared—you could end up speaking with the person doing the hiring.

**Address your letter to a person by name, preferably the person with hiring authority.** Phone for this information if necessary. If you can't get a name and title, address the letter as indicated in the ad or something like: "Dear Director," "To the Search Committee," or "To Whom it May Concern."

**Use business letter format** with your name, address, phone number, and email blocked left, right, or as a header. Use the same paper as for your resume, and a matching business-size envelope.

**Write in an active, conversational style.** Instead of saying, "My placement at xxx agency afforded me the opportunity to xxx," or "I would be honored to work at your agency," say, "During my placement at xxx agency I provided individual psychotherapy to adolescent substance abuse patients," or, "I would bring strong clinical and administrative skills to your agency." Be specific.

**Keep your letter to one page** unless applying for academic, research, or fellowship positions. There's no set number of paragraphs for a cover letter, but make each one concise. Avoid long, dense blocks of text.

**Pave the way for an interview** by ending your letter with a next step. You might say, "I'll telephone you next week to see if we can find a convenient time to meet," If you prefer, offer the best way of contacting you, and say that you look forward to hearing from the employer.

**When emailing your resume as an attachment,** include your cover letter as a second attachment. In the body of the email be brief: "Dear Ms. Alon: I am writing to apply for the therapist position (#32078) advertised in the July 1 *Boston Globe*. I am receiving my M.S.W. from the Smith College School for Social Work this August and would bring strong clinical skills and experience with at-risk youth to the position. My cover letter and resume are attached; please contact me if you have difficulty opening the attachments. I look forward to meeting you. Sincerely, Philip Lakey." In the subject line, put "Resume and cover letter for therapist position (#32078)." Label the attachments with your name, for example, "PLakey resume.doc."

**Follow up after sending your letter and resume,** unless an ad says, "No calls, please." Ask if your application has been received, if you can provide further information, or arrange an interview.

**Keep track of your applications and contacts** with a spreadsheet or card file so that you can take timely and appropriate follow-up steps. Your goal is to keep your application in the employer's mind.

**Consult the CDO for help any time.** We're happy to assist you in person, by phone, or via email.

# PHILIP LAKEY

35 Elmwood Drive, Stoughton, MA 02130 (617) 555-0000 plakey@smith.edu

## EDUCATION

### **Smith College School for Social Work**, Northampton, MA

MSW, expected August 2008

*Thesis:* Father-Daughter Relationships: The Impact of Divorce on Adolescent Girls

*Courses include:* The Adolescent in Context: Dynamics and Treatment Issues; Group Treatment for Children and Young Adolescents; Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual Identities: Developmental and Treatment Considerations; Clinical Practice With Traumatized Children and Families

### **University of Massachusetts**, Amherst, MA

BA, Psychology and Biology, May 2001

**Licensure:** LCSW Certification expected Fall 2008

**Language Proficiency:** Fluent Spanish

**Computer Skills:** Microsoft Office, Final Cut Pro, iMovie

**Other:** White Water Instructor Certification, CPR, First Aid

## SOCIAL WORK EXPERIENCE

### **Social Work Intern**, Cambridge City Hospital, Cambridge, MA

Full-time field placement, September 2007 - April 2008

#### **Outpatient Psychiatry Department**

- Provided individual assessment, treatment planning, and psychotherapy services to socio-culturally diverse adult population diagnosed with depression, PTSD, and other affective disorders
- Provided crisis intervention and emergency services; co-led bereavement group
- Participated in family therapy seminar, grand rounds, and hospital-wide in-service training
- Served as department representative to Hospital Diversity Committee

### **Social Work Intern**, San Mateo Mental Health, Serramonte Therapeutic Day School, Daly City, CA

Full-time field placement, September 2006 - April 2007

#### **Adolescent Partial Hospitalization Program**

- Provided individual and group psychotherapy services to culturally-diverse adolescents ages 12-18 diagnosed with major psychiatric disorders, attention disturbances, anxiety, depression, and substance abuse; services provided in Spanish and English
- Collaborated with treatment team of clinical social workers, psychiatrists, psychologists, and rehabilitation counselors to develop individualized treatment plans
- Led daily psychotherapy groups using multi-modal approaches: cognitive therapy, dialectical behavioral therapy, psycho-educational, and expressive arts

### **Community Project**, San Mateo High School, San Mateo, CA, 2006 - 2007

- Initiated and facilitated weekly after-school group for GLBTQ youth, grades 9-12
- Helped students explore issues of gender identity through writing and video projects

## ADDITIONAL EXPERIENCE

### **Program Supervisor**, Academy at Swift River, Charlemont, MA, 2003 - 2004

- Supervised five resident counselors in private college preparatory therapeutic boarding school; oversaw training, counseling, treatment, and parent relations
- Initiated outdoor leadership program; implemented individualized student development plans emphasizing outdoor activities and resulting in improved self-esteem, behavior, and academics
- Supervised dorm floor of 15 boys ages 14 -18; oversaw evening study halls and social activities

**Mental Health Worker**, Brattleboro Retreat, Brattleboro, VT, 2002 - 2003

- Performed nursing care responsibilities with supervision on adult, co-ed residential substance abuse unit; ensured safe and consistent quality care
- Documented patients' behavior and treatment; initiated supportive interactions around treatment issues; intervened in crisis situations
- Co-led psycho-educational group for adult substance abusers in collaboration with social worker
- Provided patient transportation to medical appointments

**Assistant Director**, Horizons for Youth, Denver, CO, 2001 - 2002

- Co-led after-school program for low-income, at-risk youth; developed and implemented recreational and career-related programs including legal field shadowing program
- Advocated for, received, and administered \$3000 activities and field trip budget
- Met with youth's family members to discuss behavioral goals and objectives

**Group Leader**, Grant's White River Rafting Company, Boulder, CO, Summer 2001

- Led rafting tours in adventure program for inner city adolescents to help participants build self-esteem and self-reliance
- Trained three junior co-leaders: developed team-building and leadership activities included in program's first staff training manual

**TRAININGS AND CONFERENCES**

Sand Tray Therapy for Teens, Center for Psychological Services, Boston, MA, 2007

The Boston TEE (Total Environmental Education) Party Conference, Boston, MA, 2004

EnvironMentors Training, National Environmental Education and Training Foundation, 2003

**AFFILIATIONS**

National Association of Social Workers

North American Association for Environmental Educators

National Environmental Education and Training Foundation

**INTERESTS**

Hiking, white water kayaking, and rock climbing. Have climbed five of the highest peaks in the U.S.

## PHILIP LAKEY

35 Elmwood Drive, Stoughton, MA 02130 (617) 555-0000 plakey@smith.edu

July 2, 2008

Ms. Josephine Alon, Director  
White Mountain Youth Services  
162 Mountain Street  
White Brook, NH 03577

Dear Ms. Alon:

I was pleased to see your ad for an MSW therapist (position #32078) in the July 1 *Boston Globe*. I will be earning my MSW this August from the Smith College School for Social Work, and I have extensive experience working with adolescents in a variety of settings. I would bring to this position strong clinical skills, outdoor leadership training, fluency in Spanish, and a demonstrated commitment to serving at-risk youth.

As my resume shows, during my clinical field placement at the Serramonte Therapeutic Day School in San Mateo County, CA, I provided individual and group psychotherapy to a culturally-diverse adolescent population in the partial hospitalization program. I offered bilingual services to clients with major psychiatric disorders, anxiety, depression, and substance abuse, and I collaborated with a multi-disciplinary treatment team to develop individualized treatment plans.

My previous experience with adolescents includes two years as a program and dorm supervisor at the Academy at Swift River in Charlemont, MA, a therapeutic boarding school whose curriculum emphasizes environmental education. While at Swift River, I initiated an outdoor leadership program which helped our students achieve individual behavioral, social, and fitness goals that markedly improved their self-esteem as well as their academic performance.

An avid rock climber, hiker, and certified white water kayak instructor, I believe I would be an asset to White Mountain Youth Services given your program's emphasis on outdoor activities. My training and experience as an environmental educator make me well-qualified to develop and lead the new outdoor leadership program mentioned in the position description.

I look forward to discussing my strong interest in this position with you, and I will call shortly to see about arranging a meeting.

Sincerely,

If postal mailing, sign in black ink; if emailing, double-space after closing before name.

Philip Lakey

## Susan Gilmore-Evans

5 Woodside Avenue, Amherst, MA 01002 413-322-1234 sgevans@gmail.com

### **EDUCATION**

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**Smith College School for Social Work**, Northampton, MA M.S.W. (expected 8/08)

*Relevant Coursework:* Beginning Treatment of Children, Clinical Practice with Traumatized Children and Families, Family Therapy, Child Development from Infancy to Adolescence

*Licensure:* LCSW Certification expected Fall 08

**George Jones University**, Newton, OR B.S. in Social Work and B.A. in Writing/Literature (5/05)

*Study Abroad:* Oxford University Honors Program

*Honors and Awards:* Social Work Major of the Year, Steinfeld Peace Scholar, Quaker Leadership Program

### **SOCIAL WORK EXPERIENCE**

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*Social Work Intern, Aurora Mental Health Clinic*, Aurora, CO (full-time field placement, 9/07-4/08)

- Provided individual, home-based, group, case management, and crisis intervention services to diverse population of children and their families in Early Childhood and Family Center; clinical concerns included trauma and loss and wide range of mental health issues often compounded by developmental disorders
- Provided consultation services to teachers, foster care families, and other community service providers
- Participated in multi-disciplinary team of psychiatrists, psychologists, social workers, and case managers
- Completed 10-week training on attachment theory and 2-day training on developmental disorders of infancy and early childhood

*Social Work Intern, Asian Counseling and Referral Services*, Seattle, WA (full-time field placement, 9/06-4/07)

- Provided clinical assessment and long- and short-term treatment to primarily Asian Pacific adult population including immigrants, refugees, and American-born clients
- Co-facilitated weekly art therapy groups in day treatment program for severely and persistently mentally ill clients; led psycho-educational group for clients recovering from substance abuse
- Provided outreach services to local community center

*School Liaison and Residential Counselor, Youth Guidance Association*, Portland, OR (6/04-5/06)

- Supervised at-risk youth in residential treatment home and public school settings
- Provided basic case management; maintained relationships between faculty and treatment home staff
- Organized and led after-school study groups and weekly therapy groups
- Attended to residents' educational and vocational needs: attended IEP meetings, helped clients find and apply for summer jobs, and assisted clients with college searches

*Research Assistant, George Jones University, Department of Social Sciences*, Newton, OR (6/04-5/05)

- Assisted PhD candidate with research on adolescent substance abusers
- Transcribed interviews and entered data using Excel

### **ADDITIONAL EXPERIENCE**

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*Preschool Teacher, Salvation Army Little People Daycare*, Seattle, WA (12/07-5/08)

- Created and taught curriculum one day per week to 18 low-income children ages 3-5
- Supervised class during play and recess activities; led music and art projects

*Summer Job Coach, Idaho Independent Living Services*, Boise, ID (6-8/02)

- Assisted two young adults with development disabilities in their summer jobs
- Supervised activities and outings with clients

*Outreach Volunteer, Youth with a Mission Summer of Service Program*, Amsterdam, Netherlands (6-8/00)

- Worked with street youth, served food to homeless, and assisted with needle exchange program

*Summer Staff/Camp Counselor, Quaker Hill Summer Camp*, McCall, ID (6-8/99)

- Led camps, ropes courses, crafts, and music for campers ages 10-17

## Action Verb List

The verbs listed below are only a few of the many you can use in describing your experience and accomplishments. Make sure you have an action verb for each entry in your resume's "Experience" section.

accelerated	delegated	instituted	reduced
accomplished	demonstrated	instructed	re-established
achieved	designed	interpreted	regulated
adapted	determined	introduced	rehearsed
adjusted	developed	launched	reinforced
aided	devised	led	renegotiated
allocated	devoted	lectured	reorganized
amplified	diagnosed	listed	reported
analyzed	diagrammed	maintained	researched
answered	directed	managed	reshaped
applied	displayed	modified	restored
appointed	distributed	molded	revamped
approved	edited	monitored	reviewed
arbitrated	effected	motivated	revised
arranged	eliminated	negotiated	scheduled
assisted	employed	observed	selected
assumed	encouraged	operated	set up
attained	enlisted	orchestrated	simplified
augmented	established	organized	solved
awarded	estimated	oriented	specialized
began	evaluated	originated	stimulated
brought	examined	oversaw	streamlined
built	expanded	overhauled	structured
catalogued	expedited	participated	substituted
chaired	extended	performed	suggested
co-led	facilitated	persuaded	summarized
compared	focused	planned	supervised
compiled	forecast	pinpointed	supported
completed	fortified	prepared	systematized
conceived	founded	presented	teamed
conducted	generated	preserved	trained
constructed	guided	produced	treated
consulted	handled	programmed	tutored
contracted	harmonized	promoted	unified
contrived	headed	proposed	updated
controlled	implemented	proved	used
cooperated	improved	provided	utilized
coordinated	incorporated	ran	volunteered
counseled	increased	received	widened
created	influenced	recommended	worked
dealt	initiated	reconciled	wrote
defined	inspected	recorded	
	installed	recruited	