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## Social Work Is in Line with Najeeb Kamil's Commitment to Service and Social Justice

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Learning of the profession was fortuitous for this former biotechnologist

"I believe in living a life of service that not only guides my professional work, but guides my whole way of life," says Najeeb Kamil.

For him, that commitment to service began early. "As I was growing up, I did street clean-ups in Oakland, fed the homeless in San Francisco, built homes with Habitat for Humanity, conducted basic health testing in a free clinic, and did prison outreach," he recounts. "I believe that this interest in social service/social justice work stems from my religion, Islam, which emphasizes service and promotes justice for everyone."

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Najeeb was planning for a professional life of service when he entered UC Berkeley to study pre-med. Although those plans changed, he earned a B.A. in Molecular and Cell Biology, never abandoning the idea of a service profession.

While working in biotechnology three years after graduation, Najeeb happened to meet someone who had an MSW. Until then, he says, "I never came across the idea of social work." The encounter proved fortuitous. "That's how I learned about social work and the opportunity to earn a living helping people," he says.

### **CSU, East Bay Provides a Solid Foundation**

Najeeb enrolled as a IV-E stipend recipient in the MSW program at [California State University, East Bay](http://www.csueastbay.edu/class/departments/socialwork/) (<http://www.csueastbay.edu/class/departments/socialwork/>), where, he recalls, "My experience was very informative and helped me gain the knowledge and skills to work in child welfare. CSU, East Bay provided many opportunities through child welfare-focused electives and field classes to learn from each other and bounce off ideas and situations that we encountered in our field placements."

He considered those placements valuable as well. His first year, he interned in a high school counseling students. He spent his second year in the County of Santa Cruz Family and Children's Services—which proved to be a defining turn for him. "My field instructor and supervisor in Santa Cruz County were instrumental in my development as a child welfare social worker," Najeeb says. "It was during this internship that I realized I was in the right place."

### **Gaining a Broad Exposure**

Since graduation, Najeeb has held a number of positions in various settings, where he has honed his skills and developed new ones, and both broadened and deepened his knowledge.

His first post-graduate position was in Shasta County as a senior social worker in Children's Services, where Najeeb received an excellent introduction to the unique challenges of serving clients in a rural setting. "I really delved deep into rural child welfare and being creative when there are not many resources for children and parents," he says.

"Shasta County Children's Services was an amazing agency to work for," he recalls. "It had a very unique setup, where multiple agencies such as child welfare, mental health, drug and alcohol, county office of education, juvenile probation, adult probation, and public health were housed under one roof. I could easily connect with other agencies to facilitate services for families on my caseload."



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*Najeeb's second-year placement with the County of Santa Cruz Family and Children's Services proved to be a defining turn for him: "My field instructor and supervisor in Santa Cruz were instrumental in my development as a child welfare social worker. It was during this internship that I realized I was in the right place."*

In his next position, as a Dependency Investigations child welfare worker in Alameda County, Najeeb was immersed in urban social work and gained insights to the court system as well. "Working for Alameda County was also a great experience," he says, "where I could see the positive impact of the Title IV-E Waiver on creative ways to address child welfare issues and disproportionality."

As a result, his interest in macro-level work was piqued, he notes, "which is why I decided to pursue the child welfare trainer position when it opened."

As a trainer for three years, "I thoroughly enjoyed working with new child welfare workers and helping them develop as engaging, culturally humble, and effective workers," Najeeb says. During this time, he adds, "I became even more aware of system issues and engaged in some county-wide initiatives, such as Safety Organized Practice (SOP), the Legislative Council, and the Fatherhood/Male Engagement Advisory Board."

His cumulative social work experience prompted Najeeb to pursue an MPA, with a Policy-making and Analysis emphasis, "so that I could gain the knowledge and skills related to government agency structures and processes, data analyses, and policy and legislative approaches to change," he says.

### **MPA Provides a Global Understanding of Social Work**

"The MPA has provided me with a more global understanding of social work and the different structures and systems that families are navigating at the same time. It also showed me the different methodologies available to initiate comprehensive and long-lasting change," Najeeb says.

"Some of the most important concepts I learned was the fact that social issues are very complex and multi-faceted, and that to have an effective, positive impact on issues, there needs to cross-sector collaboration to address them. No one agency or field can do the work, and this is very critical for us to understand when we look at child welfare," he observes. "It is a complex issue that needs a cross-system approach to help children stay safe, be healthy, and have permanent connections to their families, friends, and communities."

**RELATED: 5 things you may not know about the IV-E Stipend Program** (<http://calswec.berkeley.edu/what-do-you-know-5-facts-about-title-iv-e-stipend-program>)

The MPA has served Najeeb well. Today, as Senior Human Services Analyst for the County of Santa Cruz Family and Children's Services—where, as an intern, he first perceived his calling—he provides data analysis, policy and legislation analysis, program evaluation, and program management; develops and implements policies to address commercial sexual exploitation of children (CSEC); analyzes legislation and policies at federal and state levels that impact county child welfare practice; and manages the county's System Improvement Plan, among a long list of other responsibilities.

### **Commitment to Volunteer Service Continues**

When he's not working, Najeeb continues his commitment to service as a volunteer. He is on the Steering Committee for the [Racial and Ethnic Mental Health Disparities Coalition \(REMHDCO\)](http://remhdco.org/), that addresses major gaps in access to mental health services for communities of color and to culturally humble services. Giving back to his alma mater, Najeeb is a member of the Title IV-E Advisory Board for [CSU, East Bay](http://www.csueastbay.edu/class/departments/socialwork/), that helps to recruit students to the Title VI-E Stipend Program and aligns itself with requirements in the field. Additionally, he is involved with a local non-profit, [MAS \(Muslim American Society\) Bay Area](https://masbayarea.org/), which provides backpacks full of school supplies to children who are in foster care, homeless, or victims of domestic violence.

"All of these causes are very important to me, as they are all paths to address social justice issues," says Najeeb, who is fully living the life of service he has always believed in.

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