

that you also revise, fill out, expand, illuminate your understanding with the realization that the work to be done, in the end, depends on the resources, reserves, and assets in and around the individual, family or community. (Saleebey, 2001, p. 221)

Applying the strengths perspective requires that the social work practitioner focus on a deficit or pathology Framework to a strengths and possibility perspective. In interacting with clients, we ask ourselves, What is she doing right? What life skills does she possess that she can bring to bear on the challenges at hand? What untapped resources does he hold within him? What other resources reside in her family, friends, and community that can lift her up to meet today's challenges and create a preferred vision of her future?

Empowerment-Based Practice Model

Social work has a long tradition in empowerment practice, dating back to the early settlement houses. In more recent years, empowerment based practice emerged from work with women and people of color and built on the belief that members in groups with limited social and political power suffer personal loss of power and opportunities across systems in mainstream society (Gutierrez, Delouis, & GlenMaye, 1995; Turner & Maschi, 2015). The concept of power in the context of empowerment practice has been defined by Gutierrez et al. (1995) in three ways:

1. The ability to get what one wants
2. The ability to influence how others think, feel, act, or believe
3. The ability to influence the distribution of resources in social systems such as family, organization, community, and society (p. 535)

Power described in this way suggests that practice interventions will need to occur at multiple levels of practice (individual, family, organization, community, and national levels) and that the dimensions of power encompass the personal, interpersonal, and political levels. To have personal power is experienced as a sense of control over one's life and feelings of competence. Individuals who experience internal power feel competent in their ability to take care of themselves, to access resources as needed across systems, and to contribute to community and system resources. When we have interpersonal power, we have the ability to influence others, know ourselves to be effective in interactions with others, and are highly regarded by others (Gutierrez & Ortega, 1991; Miley et al., 2013; Turner & Maschi, 2015). When people experience political power, their interactions with their environment results in access to and control over resources. Box 3.6 illustrates how the client perceives issues of personal power and how the client uses this to meet her needs.



Human Rights and Justice

Behavior: Engage in practices that advance social, economic, and environmental justice

Critical Thinking Question: Identify the central concept of the empowerment model. How is this concept applied and brought to life in direct social work practice?

Activating clients' internal power requires that social workers understand the context of clients' lives (person in environment) and perceive clients as reservoirs of latent power waiting to be awakened (strengths perspective). Helping clients attain personal, interpersonal, and political power requires that social work practitioners collaborate with clients and assist them in structuring interventions at the individual,

Policy to Practice Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing

In cooperation with the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, Veterans Affairs provides assistance to homeless veterans through the Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing (VASH) program. Federal funding is allocated to local public housing authorities, and as of September 2013, more than 58,000 Housing Choice Vouchers were available to assist homeless veterans in acquiring permanent housing. The program also provides clinical and supportive services and intensive case management to homeless veterans (U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs, 2014).

Louis: Kim, there is a shelter program, Safe Harbor, in Indianapolis that offers alcohol treatment, counseling, and medical and vocational services. It is close to the VA clinic. You work at the shelter and get paid. Plus, they only work with vets.

Kim: Okay, I am willing to see the place, but no promises.

Louis: No promises, understood.

Kim: But I could stay there for six months?

Louis: Once you finish the Safe Harbor program, the VA offers a voucher program called VASH, Veteran's Affairs Supportive

Housing. Your apartment is free for the six months. During that time, you are expected to work, but after month 6, you are on your own.

Kim: Then what?

Louis: Once you have a job, you pay for what you can, and the VASH vouchers will cover the rest. You will always have affordable housing.

Watch Case Study #6. In which Louis the social worker offers Kim, a homeless veteran, the opportunity to enroll in VASH (Veteran's Affairs Supportive Housing) program to help turn her life around. Kim completes the Safe Harbor/VASH program. Watch to the video clip as she checks in with Louis following her program completion. In what ways did the VASH policy empower Kim into a new life?

For more information on the VASH program, visit the U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs website.

family, and community levels. The work of social work practitioners is to recognize, facilitate, and promote clients' connections with their internal power (resources) and to mobilize those connections across systems in ways that increase their mastery in shaping their environments in desirable ways. Social workers must also look for ways to enhance clients' feelings of competency and clients' ability to forge effective relationships. Finally, social workers must assist clients in identifying ways to draw on and contribute to community resource pools. To do this, the focus of practice must be on accentuating client potentials and resiliencies and minimizing client vulnerabilities (Miley et al., 2013). In video Case Study #6, Kim the homeless veteran is empowered through the Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing program.

This program also empowers social workers in helping clients access community resources and in turn improve their lives. See the policy to practice box below, which provides an example of how policy can empower social workers and clients.

SUMMARY

- Effective and accountable social work practitioners ground their practice in evidence-based practice strategies that are supported by a wide range of practice theories, perspectives, and models appropriate to their specific area of practice.
- Whether social workers are working from a meta-theoretical Framework of ecological perspective, a strength-based practice, or an empowerment model, they will

2 Assess your understanding of meta-frameworks for practicing social work by taking this brief quiz.