

The homeless youth group meets once a week in the county seat because that is where most of the state services are located. For example, if they want to apply for Medicaid or other government assistance, they must do it in the county seat. Transportation is a major problem for these youth because there is no bus. Emma transports some of the youths to the weekly group sessions in the school district's van. Emma has to be creative generating incentives to motivate the youths to come to the group meetings. She has arranged for some of the families in the town to prepare home-cooked meals; she provides support and advocacy services for those youths who want to apply for government assistance when they are in town. Emma has also arranged for the small church in town to collect clothes, blankets, and shoes that she can make available to the youths when they come to meetings.

Emma evaluates her practice in two ways. One is to keep track of the number of youths who come each week and how many she is able to help find temporary housing. The other is to work with the youth to set goals for themselves, and then together they determine whether those goals have been met. As many of these youths have left home because of their parent's drug use, Emma knows that the parents need services as well. However, she is already overwhelmed with her school caseload, so she is not able to provide services to the parents.

Other Types of Groupwork **LO 5**

Support Games Support groups are typically used with people who are in crisis and need help facing it. There are crisis support groups for people surviving the death of a spouse or family member, dealing with divorce, and facing a severe illness, just like Michael in the section "Generalist Social Work Practice with Individuals and Families." For example, although parents who have lost a child may benefit from individual treatment for grief and depression, they may also find solace and comfort among others who understand their feelings from firsthand experience. Such a support group can be an excellent resource for parents trying to find ways to manage the crisis. Other examples of this type of group include children discussing feelings about their parents' divorces, and members of the transgender community who come together to discuss how their experiences of discrimination and exclusion have shaped their lives.

Support groups are increasingly being offered via the Internet (Lawlor & Kirakowski, 2014). Improving technology is allowing people to meet with others, share their experiences, develop connections, and receive support online. Online groups have several benefits not offered by in-person groups. People may experience shame about something occurring in their lives. An online group allows for anonymity that may help some overcome their fear of sharing something they see as shameful. Mobility or transportation issues may keep people from attending in-person groups. Technology can help them to attend from home.

Self-Help Groups Self-help groups have become popular over the past several decades. Their goal is to bring together people who share a specific need,

problem, or concern to provide social and emotional support. Guidance in behavior is also a goal of self-help groups. Alcoholics Anonymous, founded in 1935, is one of the best-known self-help efforts. All members of the group identify themselves as recovering alcoholics, and participants take turns in leadership roles and act as mentors to one another.

The guiding principle of these groups is that participants share a personal involvement in the concern and usually eschew professional leadership in favor of lay leadership. Social workers need to be aware of the services available through self-help groups in order to refer clients to them.

Social Action Groups Group social action is often used to achieve social change when unacceptable societal conditions have been neglected or inadequately addressed by agencies of authority, such as the government (Brueggemann, 2014). Social action groups, also referred to as grassroots efforts, are often used by community organizers. Therefore, the roles of group worker and community organizer intersect in social change groups.

Social change groups bring people together so that participants can become empowered and realize that they can change their environments, and so that people can gain the power needed to change their communities. Although the organizer is active in maintaining the group, he or she works behind the scenes. The members make decisions, speak publicly, choose strategies, and chair meetings. The organizer serves as a facilitator of the group process, helping to ensure that the members can achieve the goal of social change through their own efforts and empowerment (see Box 6.6)

Ethical Challenges in Working with Groups

Confidentiality is the biggest ethical challenge in working with groups. To what extent are people free to discuss information shared during sessions outside the group? If one of the purposes of the group is for members to share intimate feelings and past experiences, how should that information be handled by participants? When groups meet in public settings, as when a support group for recovering drug users meets in a community center where recreation groups also meet, it is difficult to guarantee confidentiality.

Group workers have an obligation to discuss confidentiality with group members and to help the group define what should remain confidential (Prollio, Brower, & Galinsky, 2000). Although the social worker leading a group can never guarantee that each group member will abide by the rules set by the group, it is the social worker's ethical responsibility to ensure that the group discusses confidentiality and develops guidelines.

Box 6.6 What Do You Think?

What kind of problems or concerns would you rather discuss in a group than individually with a social worker? Why? Are there types of groups that feel more useful

to you? Which ones, and why? When and under what circumstances might you refer a friend to participate in a group?