

Another ethical challenge for group workers is to determine when to interact with group participants on an individual level. Sometimes group members seek out the professional for private intervention. Some groups can tolerate this, and others cannot. Individual attention may raise anxiety among group members and be seen as preferential treatment. It is important for group workers to set the boundaries of interaction with all group members. The rules of the group should be clarified from the beginning.



EP 1a

Safety is critical for group success. Participants need to know that they are free to share sensitive and personal information without having to deal with negative responses to their feelings. This requires cultural sensitivity. At the same time, participants should not be allowed to share feelings that express prejudice or are hurtful to another member. Group workers cannot always ensure appropriate sharing, but setting rules of conduct with the group from the beginning and providing guidelines to create a safe environment are important.

Community Practice

The term *community practice* encompasses a number of different methods, all of which are focused on creating change in the social environment. These methods include organizing, planning, development, and change (Gamble & Well, 2010). **Community organizing** is the process of bringing people together to work for needed change. **Community planning** involves collecting data, analyzing a situation, and developing strategies to move from a problem to a solution. **Community development** is the process of helping individuals improve the conditions of their lives by increased involvement in the social and economic conditions of their communities. **Community change** is the desired outcome, whether it means adding needed services, shifting the balance of power from the haves to the have-nots, reducing isolation, or developing and implementing more effective policies. Community practitioners are involved in recruiting community members, identifying community strengths and problems, planning change efforts, developing strategies and tactics needed to carry out change efforts, supporting and encouraging group members, raising needed resources, and evaluating their efforts.

Communities can be made up of groups of people with common identities or interests or of people living in the same geographic area. For example, someone may be a part of the Hmong or Navajo community (community of identity), the environmental or social work community (community of interest), or a community based in a town or neighborhood (geographic community). Social workers engage in community practice for many reasons. Community work helps community members meet others, thus reducing isolation. It also allows community members to work together as a group to create social change and shift the balance of power. Pressure by local groups can lead to funding and development of needed services in a community and can result in new legislation to promote a more just community. Community efforts can also reduce oppression and increase civil and human rights, as has

happened in the various movements for civil rights in the United States and around the world.

Although most social work practitioners concentrate on interventions with individuals and small groups, the problems that social workers confront cannot be adequately addressed by this type of work alone. To begin to solve the immense problems that confront us, such as poverty, homelessness, oppression, hunger, child abuse, and domestic violence, to name just a few, social workers must engage community members in social change efforts. Without this step, the problems society faces will continue to worsen, and the suffering of social work clients will continue to increase. Consider the reasons for organizing, as described in Box 6.7. By focusing on changing the social environment, community practice brings hope to those who are locked out of the mainstream of society and thus works toward ensuring social justice.

Roles LO 6

Social work practitioners take on a variety of roles when working with communities. These roles include community organizer, community planner, advocate, researcher/evaluator, fundraiser, and trainer/teacher.

Community organizers bring people in a community together to work toward some type of social change. They work with existing groups or help form new groups that utilize the strengths or assets of community members to create needed change.

Box 6.7 More About... The Goals of Organizing

Somewhere in the Deep South, on the road that runs from New Orleans to Atlanta, an 80-year-old woman is living alone in a shack by the roadside. If you are driving along that road, you can sometimes see her going painfully along in the long grass beside the highway. She is looking for the drink bottles the motorists throw out the windows of their cars as they go past at 70 miles an hour. Tomorrow a child will come by her shack to collect the bottles and bring them to the grocery downtown and will bring the 5 cents a bottle she gets back to the old woman to buy food.

Or if you were walking the dirt streets of a town not far from there, you might have seen a child playing in the road. He is throwing his toy into the air, chasing it, picking it up, and throwing it again. You come closer. It is a dead bird.

Make no mistake. Organizing is not just about strategies about analyses, about tactics. Organizing is about people, about the old woman with her drink bottles and the child with his dead bird. Organizing is about the "welfare cheats," the "deadbeats," the "punks"—everyone else this society looks out and shuts in.

What would she or he say, that famous poor person the "leaders" of this country so often talk about, and so rarely talk with, if given the chance to speak?

That I needed a home, and you gave me food stamps.

That I needed a job, and you got me on welfare.

That my family was sick, and you gave us your used clothes.

That I needed my pride and dignity as a human being, and you gave me surplus beans.

Let us not forget, when we talk of violence, that the death of a young mother in childbirth is violent, that the slow starvation of the mind and body of a child is violent. Let us not forget that hunger is violent, that gain is violent, that oppression is violent, that early death is violent. And that death of hope is the most violent of all.

The organizer brings hope to the people.

Source: Kahn (1994).