

## Box 11.6 Becoming a Change Agent

In June 2002, a group of high-achieving high school students from Wilson Charter High School in Phoenix, Arizona, traveled to a national science competition in Buffalo, New York. The group wanted to take a side trip into Canada to visit Niagara Falls. A teacher traveling with the students asked officials if the students could cross into Canada using their student ID cards. Though they never crossed the border, four Latino students were detained and questioned about their immigration status. It turned out that all four had been brought to the United States from Mexico by their undocumented parents when they were young children. The students, who became known as the Wilson Four, were in a situation shared by many other children and youth. They had grown up in the United States, the only home most of them remembered, yet they were not citizens. Estimates are that as many as 65,000 students in a similar situation graduate from high school in the United States every year (Passel, 2003). These students are not eligible for many services and forms of assistance that US citizens can receive, including in-state college tuition and access to many types of student loans and grants. They are not able to work legally and are at risk of deportation back to a country that most have only lived in for a short time and they think of as home. Cases such as the Wilson Four prompted legislators to introduce the Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors (DREAM) Act into the US House of Representatives and Senate. If passed, the DREAM Act would allow students brought to the United States before the age of 15, who graduate from high

school or obtain their GED and who are of "good moral character," to enter into a path to obtain citizenship.

### Analyzing the Situation

- Research the situation of the Wilson Four. What happened in their case? Were they deported? Continue your research and learn more about children who were brought to the United States when they were young and are now caught in the dilemma described earlier. What challenges do they face? What options do they have?
- Learn more about the DREAM Act. What do its supporters say? What do its opponents say? Are the arguments on one side or the other a better fit with social work values and ethics?
- How does the situation of children brought to the United States when they are young relate to the larger debate about immigration in the United States?

### What Can Social Workers Do?

Given your analysis, what might social workers do to address the needs and challenges of various parties involved in the situation described earlier? What interventions could you suggest at the individual level? The community level? The institutional level? And the policy level?

### What Can You Do?

What one step might you take now, alone or working with others, to address the situation these students are stuck in? What are the barriers that might keep you from taking this step? What could you do to reduce those barriers?

Since the first one was founded in 1817, schools for the deaf have been established around the country to better address the educational needs of deaf students. Staff at these schools have an in-depth understanding of the academic and social needs of deaf and hearing-impaired students. Deaf schools also serve an important cultural role: they teach a common language, American Sign Language, which focuses on the history of the deaf community; and they provide deaf students with deaf role models. However, the vast majority of deaf and hard-of-hearing students attend mainstream schools. In 2007, only about 15 percent of deaf and hearing-impaired students attended a school for the deaf (Samuels, 2007). Deaf students in mainstream public schools have a variety of educational and social needs that may not be met. School social workers can help address the needs of deaf and hearing-impaired students by gaining an understanding of deaf culture and of the students' educational and social needs. School social workers must be prepared to provide direct services



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## Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Students

and advocate for appropriate instruction and support for deaf and hard-of-hearing students. Social workers can also be involved in educating the community about the benefits of schools for the deaf and advocating for adequate funding for these institutions.

Conservative estimates suggest that there are between 2.25 and 2.7 million LGBT school-age youth in the United States. These students face a variety of challenges in schools. LGBT youth are three times more likely to drop out of school and four and a half times more likely to skip school than their heterosexual classmates. A large part of the reason why LGBT students do not attend school is the abuse they face from classmates, and sometimes also from teachers and administrators, because of their sexual orientation and gender identity. In a 2015 School Climate Survey conducted by the Gay, Lesbian, Straight Education Network (GLSEN), 85 percent of the students surveyed reported frequently hearing homophobic remarks at school. Eighty-five percent of the LGBT students in the survey said that they had been verbally harassed because of their sexual orientation, and 43 percent reported harassment based on gender identity. Over 38 percent of the students said they had been physically harassed (being pushed or shoved) because of their sexual orientation, and more than 27 percent said they had been physically harassed because of their gender expression. Of even more concern, 13 percent of students reported sexual orientation–based physical assault (punched, kicked, or injured with a weapon), and 49 percent reported being electronically harassed via social media, texting, or email. Most students did not report these incidents, believing that nothing would be done. Eighty-two percent of students surveyed reported that their schools engaged in LGBTQ discriminatory practices or policies (GLSEN, 2015).

All students deserve to go to school in a safe environment. School social workers can help create safe environments by helping school personnel understand the risks that LGBT students face at school. They can provide trainings in the schools for administrators, teachers, students, and parents to help reduce homophobia and the bullying it causes. School social workers can collaborate with groups, such as GLSEN, who are doing work around the country to make schools safe places. GLSEN helps create gay-straight alliances (GSAs) in schools. These groups offer support to LGBT students and their allies, and have been engaged in helping educate the school community about the reality of harassment and bullying. School social workers can serve as advisors to GSAs, and help the groups work more effectively, while giving students a safe staff member to approach when issues arise.



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## Social Work Values and Ethics

In addition to the National Association of Social Work Code of Ethics, school social workers should be familiar with the NASW *Standards for School Social Work Services* (2002), the NASW *Standards for the Practice of Social Work with Adolescents* (1993), and the NASW policy statement on "Education of Children