

Community planners work with communities, agencies, or government entities to understand problems and develop appropriate plans of action.

Social workers at all levels of practice are involved in **advocacy**. Advocacy means pleading the cause of another or, put more simply, speaking up and supporting what one believes in. At the community level, social workers are generally involved in advocating for funds and services with and for community members. They are also involved in legislative advocacy for changes in laws or policies.

Conducting research as a community practitioner means facilitating the research or evaluation effort. The researcher involves all those who are affected by the concern, program, or need, using principles of democratic participation. Rather than serving as an outside expert, the community researcher provides guidance to meet the goals of finding information and effecting change. This approach is referred to as action research or critical action research (Stringer, 2007). Through the research process, the subjects of the research are also often participants and are involved in data collection, analysis, and reporting findings. The most vital component of community action research is that the findings lead to community change.

Community social workers are often involved in raising money to support community change efforts. They conduct research and write grants to receive money from government sources and private and corporate foundations. Organizing and implementing grassroots fundraising efforts, including raffles, concerts, and sales events, are also common activities at the community practice level.

Social workers have skills that can help community members more effectively work together to create change. They are often involved in helping community members learn to recruit, strategize, work with the media, raise resources, and join together in coalitions.

## Models of Community Practice

Practitioners can use a number of approaches or models to create community change (Homan, 2011; Gamble & Weil, 2010). A model gives practitioners a framework that guides them in determining how best to approach a situation within a specific community. It provides guidelines about the roles practitioners should take, how power comes into play in the change effort, the target of the change effort, who becomes involved in creating change, and the types of issues that are addressed. The common thread that joins all of the models is that each is aimed at creating community-level change.

**Neighborhood and Community Organizing** When people hear the term *community practice*, they often think of community organizing. Neighborhood and community organizing is the process of bringing members of a geographic community together to create power in numbers. Practitioners organize residents to act on their own behalf, developing local control and empowerment. This type of organizing has an external and an internal focus. The external focus is on accomplishing specific tasks, whereas the internal focus is on helping members build their capacity for future organizing efforts.

Group goals can vary widely. They may include improving neighborhood safety by adding streetlights, stop signs, or increased police patrols. Some groups lobby to change local, state, or national policies, whereas others fight for new services for their communities. The internal focus of neighborhood and community organizing is on helping members develop the knowledge base and skills necessary to be effective in their external pursuits. This means working with residents to develop their skills in the areas of leadership, problem analysis, planning, resource development, strategic analysis, and evaluation. Social work roles in this model include organizer, teacher, facilitator, and coach.

**Functional Organizing** Functional organizing is similar to neighborhood and community organizing, but the focus is on recruiting people with similar interests or concerns rather than on recruiting people in the same geographic location. The aim is still to bring like-minded people together to shift the balance of power and advocate for needed change. Examples of functional communities include people concerned about the environment, treatment of children, health care for the poor, domestic violence, and discrimination based on race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, class, age, or mental or physical ability.

As in neighborhood and community organizing, the aim in functional organizing is on creating external change and building internal capacity. Organizing efforts focus on advocating for a specific issue or population and are often aimed at policy change, service development, and community education. Practitioner roles include organizer, teacher, advocate, and facilitator.

**Community Social and Economic Development** Community social and economic development strives to empower and improve the lives of low-income, marginalized, and oppressed people by bringing residents together to become more involved in the social and economic lives of their communities. The goals of this model include improving education, leadership, and political skills within the community and improving the economic health of a community. The latter is achieved by enlisting the support of government entities, banks, foundations, and developers to invest in the community. This approach differs from other economic development approaches in that the community members are involved in each step of the process. Community members assess their community, determine what its needs are, develop a plan for change, and help with the implementation of the plan.

Community social and economic development efforts focus on housing development, job training, business development, and such support services as child care, education, and transportation. Practitioner roles include planner, teacher, manager, promoter, and negotiator.

**Social Planning** Social planning is a rational problem-solving process in which planners look at communities and available resources and create plans to develop, expand, coordinate, and implement services. The social planning process takes place at the local and regional levels. Social planning has traditionally been conducted by outside experts. These experts study the