Class Activities for **Chapter 4: Advocacy in Social Work**

**Class activity #1**

Ask for volunteers to fulfill roles in a class simulation. Assign roles as:

1. a social worker for the residents of an inner-city housing project
2. a resident of the housing project who has been chosen by residents to represent them
3. a city official who has proposed the destruction of the project to improve the area’s economy
4. the owner of a local business who believes the presence of the project hurts her bottom line

The goal of the social worker is to represent his/her clients’ interests while also hearing out everyone’s perspectives, and making sure the resident representing his/her peers has a voice in the process. The social worker would like to see the project remain in place, but recognizes this may be a losing battle. Can she find a way to advocate successfully for her clients anyway?

The students playing the city official and business owner should not be willing to agree to let the structure stay in place. (You may want to coach them all separately, briefly, outside the classroom before the role play.) Can the social worker find a way to suggest alternatives that will still meet her clients’ needs as well as possible given her limitations?

**Class activity #2**

Have the class break up into dyads. (If there is an odd number, you may wish to jump in and join the final student.) Randomly assign one to be the social worker and one to be the client. This activity aims to illustrate some of the struggles inherent with advocacy at times.

The weekly meeting between client and case manager has just begun. The “client” should be very upset when the meeting begins, saying that child protective services has decided they are going to move to terminate her parental rights despite the fact that she believes she’s done all she can to earn custody of her children again. She’s been clean and sober for 1 ½ years and has attended mandated parenting classes, which she’s completed successfully. She also has enough space and a home considered adequately large the return of the four children. However, she also has a physically abusive live-in girlfriend who was not living with her when her children were initially removed from her home. Additionally, she has recently lost her job and is looking for a new one. The social worker does not believe that it’s currently a good idea for the children to return home, but the client wants the social worker to call child protective services and advocate on her behalf. The client has signed a release of information to facilitate this.

Observe how the social workers react to the situation. How do they approach the call to advocate for a client about whom they have some concerns?

**Class activity #3**

Have the class break into groups. Give them the following problem aimed at illustrating the cost of advocacy.

A rural community is struggling with low employment and the emergence of methamphetamine abuse on a wide scale. Police are frustrated with the scope of the problem, as the police force is too small to handle all the calls it’s getting. The schools are reporting a lot more student absences as parents struggle to keep their addictions in check enough to take care of their children. Many other families are concerned about their safety and want something to be done to get methamphetamine users out of the town, one way or another.

A social worker for a local child protection agency is aware that many of the parents in the town are struggling with methamphetamine addiction. She also knows that many of those parents recognize they have a problem and want to get help for their addiction, but have no insurance and cannot afford treatment. Public funding for treatment would help these families have a chance to put their lives back together, and the social worker believes it could make a positive difference, but recognizes the idea may not be a popular one.

What are the potential costs of advocating for the clients suffering in this community? What are the potential benefits? How could a savvy social worker navigate this issue and appropriately advocate for those in the community who need help?