**Lecture Notes for Chapter 4: Advocacy in Social Work**

The element of social work that greatly distinguishes it from other helping professions is advocacy. Social workers are unique in being oriented to and knowledgeable about **advocacy**— engaging in purposeful actions that will help people to advance their rights, opportunities, causes, and human dignity—a hallmark of social work. Advocacy can involve one case (many times an individual or family) requiring some kind of change, which is known as **case advocacy.** It may also take the form of a larger structural or systematic effort to change policies, common practices, procedures, and laws to advance social justice for a larger segment of society, which is known as **cause advocacy***.* Cause advocacy necessitates social workers to be knowledgeable about **social action** and ways to create social change.

The goals of case advocacy are often to meet individuals’ **absolute needs,** or the basic goods and services that support human survival in the short term (water, food, shelter, sanitation, medical care). The goals of cause advocacy involve causes that impact a group of people and, like case advocacy, can encompass **relative needs**, which are the goods and services that promote human dignity and well-being over the long term: meaningful employment, equal status before the law, social justice, quality education, and equal opportunity.

Social workers do not just work to match their clients with available resources; they actively attempt to change “the way things are” in order to improve their clients’ lives and the communities in which clients pursue their lives. Advocacy requires value orientation, ethnics, knowledge, skill, and passion. Advocacy should be collaborative, client centered, ethical, and act to help people in need.

**The Need for Professional Advocates**

Social workers connect individuals, families, and communities with the available resources.

When services and resources are unavailable to meet serious needs within communities, social workers advocate for policy and program changes with larger systems – organizations, communities, and society.

**Power and Social Inequality**

Some people have more access to society’s benefits and resources, and some have less.

This creates social inequality. Social workers combat inequality at many levels.

Social workers aim to empower clients to participate in decision making and the process of determining the best outcomes for themselves.

**The Ethics of Advocacy**

Advocacy is often viewed by social workers as a professional mandate and mark of competency. The *Code of Ethics* of the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) and International Federation of Social Workers’ (2004) statement of principles for ethical social work practice provide guidance on advocacy.

* Client Self-Determination
  + Consumers of services make decisions and choices based upon their will and value orientations.
  + Social workers are set aside their personal values and attempt to examine an issue or cause from the perspective(s) and voice(s) of the client.
* Self-Interest and Advocacy
  + Focus on one’s own benefit (self-interest) vs. client centered (advocacy)
  + Case advocacy- specific individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities address needs and concerns.
  + Cause advocacy - social change and enabling larger groups of people to improve their social and economic situation.
* Individual Benefit Versus Community Benefit
  + Who is the primary beneficiary of the change process?
  + **Individual Reigns Supreme perspective** equates individual gain and interest with the common good.
  + **Community Reigns Supreme perspective** places client benefit in a context of promoting policies and practices for the common good.
* Pathways to Community Benefit
  + Social workers advocate for pathways that will give groups of people access to resources, rights, and opportunities.
  + Social workers help clients to access power resources within themselves, their families, and their contexts.
  + Social workers create opportunities for significant participation in community.
  + Need to assess and understand political, economic, social, and environmental factors that can influence decision making that affects large groups of people.

**Human Aspects of Helping**

* The human nature of advocacy involves both emotional and rational aspects.
* Passion to confront issues can be a powerful asset in promoting change, but it can also blur many of the realities associated with a situation or issue.
* Objectivity is an important aspect of advocacy and a quality that social workers can contribute to the process.
* Social workers need to able to put clients’ values and interests first while providing professional insight concerning the realities, good and bad, associated with proposed change.

**Social Workers and Social Change**

* Social work pioneers
  + became aware of the need for cause advocacy when they recognized that addressing clients’ immediate needs from a charitable perspective held little promise for creating substantial and sustainable change in people’s lives. (“Give a man a fish” perspective.)
  + Dorothy Height
    - admitted to Barnard College, denied entry due to race
    - prominent leader during the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s
    - four decades as President of the National Council of Negro Women
    - 1994 Presidential Medal of Freedom, 2004 Congressional Gold Medal
  + Florence Kelley
    - Labor rights, children’s rights, women’s suffrage, Hull House
  + Whitney Young
    - Urban League, Civil Rights, 1969 Medal of Freedom
* Cause and Function
  + Porter Lee - social workers are professionals with responsibilities involving community practice, social action, and leadership. They have the ability to create social change and lead social movements. He believed in moving the identity of social workers away from “simple helper” toward agent for systemic change. He emphasized objectivity, as opposed to emotion, in providing services and promoting social change.
* Responses to Hard Times
  + Great Depression of the 1930s - social and economic conditions challenged prevailing assumptions about public assistance and the belief in individual responsibility.
  + 1964 – President Lyndon B. Johnson’s War on Poverty
    - Volunteers In Service To America (VISTA) – domestic Peace Corps
    - Job Corps – job training for school dropouts
    - Head Start – low income preschool
  + Mid-1960s to 1970s – Civil Rights, Vietnam War, Women’s Rights
  + 1980s - social workers exposed the consequences of President Reagan’s tax reforms, which reduced financial support for social welfare programs for the poor and provided benefits for the rich. Social workers also brought new issues--problems of drug abuse, homelessness, and sexually transmitted diseases, among others--to the attention of the public and decision makers.
* Cause Advocacy Today
  + 2008 election of President Barack Obama provides renewed inspiration for advocacy. Obama ran for office on a platform of social change.
  + Issues include health care reform, LGBT rights, services for veterans, immigrants, housing, older adults, HIV/AIDS, substance abuse, mental health, environmental concerns such as climate change.
  + Cause advocacy is a part of professional social work identity.

**The Cost of Advocacy**

* There is potential for advocacy to deplete resources and potentially work against the cause. For instance, bad publicity, adverse effects, and false hope can be just as detrimental as the expenditure of funds and other resources.
* There are expenses related to advocacy activities, such as the value of each person’s time to engage in research, analyze and draft policies, attend meetings, develop media strategies, lobby, organize communities, and campaign. Communication itself—with constituent groups, leaders, politicians, and decision makers—requires a great deal of time, as well as expertise in modes ranging from the telephone and print media to text messages, websites, e-mails, blogs, wikis, and social networking sites.
* To evaluate the benefits of advocacy, those involved need to clearly define the criteria for success and ongoing means for evaluating whether advocacy outcomes are being reached.

**A Model for Dynamic Advocacy**

* Advocacy Practice and Policy Model
  + Systems Theory – Advocacy encompasses work with individuals, families and communities
  + Empowerment Theory - Both case and cause advocacy involve social workers building relationships with clients of various system sizes to participate in and impact decision making processes.
  + Strengths Perspective - In advocacy, it is important that social workers give appropriate attention to both the problems confronting client issues and the various strengths available to create needed change.
  + Ecological Perspective - When advocating for change, assessment of the total environment, not just people and social systems, is vital.
* The Cycle of Advocacy
  + The change process for generalist practice can be adapted to guide social work advocacy and link practice goals and outcomes.
    - Engagement, Assessment, Planning, Implementation, Evaluation
    - Important to pay attention to connection between evaluation and assessment – there is a feedback loop.
* The Advocacy Model in Action
  + Advocacy includes actions taken to defend or represent others in order to advance a cause that will promote social justice
  + Social workers promote fairness, secure needed resources, and empower people (especially members of disadvantaged groups) to have an active influence on decision-making.
  + Specific advocacy activities and efforts to advance policy development include:
    - Supporting clients in court and in front of appeal committees.
    - Promoting human rights and dignity in everyday life.
    - Educating clients to advocate on their own behalf.
    - Working to change policies, practices, and personnel in an organization (
    - Making organizations accountable for the welfare of people being served
    - Improving service delivery systems.
    - Creating new functions within organizations and communities so they can better address human needs.
    - Educating people about important social issues.
    - Conducting research to document the needs and the plight of disadvantaged population groups.
    - Campaigning for a new law or for politicians who support socially beneficial legislative initiatives.
    - Advancing projects and programs in communities and nationally.
    - Combating discrimination and oppression.
    - Educating communities to advocate on their own behalf

**Tenets of Advocacy and Policy Practice**

* Social and Economic Justice
  + Social justice is a core value of social work in the NASW *Code of Ethics.*
  + Justice includes **distributive justice***,* and Social justice in this sense encompasses **relational justice,** which is people’s ability to exert influence over decision making processes and in relationships with dominant groups. Economic justice is captured in the concept of **distributive justice,** which is the ability to allocate resources, income, and wealth in a manner to ensure that people’s basic material needs are met.
  + Considerations include:
    - Am I sensitive to my client’s right to think and act independently?
    - Am I supporting equality of opportunity for my client?
    - Am I encouraging with my client meaningful participation in decision making?
    - Am I helping my client to unearth opportunities for social and economic justice?
    - Am I helping my client secure needed resources?
    - Am I ensuring that all parties’ rights are being respected?
    - Am I advancing thought about the need for social responsibility?
* Supportive Environment
  + Social work involves not just a client but a client system—all the people and social systems surrounding that client.
  + A thorough assessment and holistic awareness of the environment is essential for contemplating and enacting change.
  + Clients need a supportive environment.
  + Considerations include:
    - Has a determination been made in collaboration with the client about which elements of the environment are currently supportive and which are detrimental or not as supportive as possible?
    - Are existing resources available in order to advocate successfully?
    - Is collaboration occurring to generate ideas for solutions and to make reasonable and effective choices about courses of action?
    - Am I examining with the client ways to work with people and organizations to create a more supportive environment?
* Human Needs and Rights
  + People in positions of power and policy makers often determine who have needs, what is needed, and how programs and services should be implemented and evaluated. These top-down decision making processes yield disconnects between how clients view needs and what others believe they deserve.
  + Social workers focus on client point of view.
  + Considerations include:
    - Who is defining the need, for whose benefit?
    - What are the consequences for the client of such a definition of need?
    - Are consumers of services being included or consulted when defining what is needed?
* Political Access
  + The primary interest of politicians, CEOs and board members, may not be what is best for the general welfare or the welfare of clients.
  + Effective social workers identify ways to become politically involved and develop political access for their clients.
  + Considerations include:
    - Am I assisting clients to understand the bigger, fuller context of their problems?
    - Am I facilitating the collaboration of others who have similar challenges or who work to overcome those kinds of challenges?
    - Am I assisting clients with communicating their predicaments to politicians and policy makers?
    - Am I enabling politicians and policy makers to look beyond these clients’ situation to assess the structural and systemic issues contributing to the creation of private troubles?