This chapter concludes the series of chapters about social work on various levels of practice. It explores planned change in communities with particular attention to the feasibility of this type of practice for all generalist workers.

Learning Objectives

14.1 Learn about the nature of social work’s commitment to communities.
14.2 Translate the planned change process to work in communities.
14.3 Consider the social work role of community change agent and related skills.
14.4 Examine the social work role of legislative advocate and its related skills

Case Study: Organizing Parents at School

“I’m so glad you could all make it here today!” Brianna said. She meant it too. She didn’t expect it to be so easy to get 15 people to come to another planning meeting to save Eastwood Middle School’s playground, especially since some of them had to take a long public transportation route to get to the school. It was easy for her to develop some empathy for the parents. For one thing, she knew what it was to have responsibilities at home. For another, she was absolutely sure she would not want her own child in a school without a playground. They’ve all come back. I must be doing something right. The school district planned to demolish the playground at the middle school to create a profit-making parking lot, and a lot of the parents were upset. Sure, middle schoolers didn’t need a teeter-totter, really. And, yes, every day there was more litter just outside the fence, including broken glass, needles, and used condoms. On the other hand, the playground was a place that allowed the kids to let off steam, and teachers believed that ordinary things like swings and the teeter-totter helped with behavior problems. Brianna could attest to that; she felt
confident in beginning this group because not only did she see the benefits of the playground for herself as school social worker but she’d spoken to every one of those teachers.

“We want to do what we can,” said Sarah, a middle-aged Caucasian woman sitting just across from Brianna in the circle. Then there was silence. Everyone looked at Brianna, waiting for her to speak. Brianna took a breath. “I’d better say the right thing or I’m going to lose them. Wait! The opening statement. That’s where I begin. Phew.”

“Oh, let’s get started,” Brianna said in a clear voice. “As you all know, I’m the social worker here at Eastwood, and the school district hired me to see that your kids do as well as possible in school. That includes families, so I get to work with you too. My supervisor and the principal have agreed that we should try to do something to save the playground. We have 2 hours to work with tonight. Maria, do you want to sum up what we did last week?”

“Sure,” Maria said. “We decided we should try to save the parking lot. We have a goal of going to a school board meeting and stating our case. We made a plan to make sure that would happen. I’m in charge of asking to get on the school board agenda. I’ve already figured out who I need to talk to just like we planned.”

“Excellent!” said Brianna. “Last time, when we were thinking about all of the things that are going on for the school board, we figured out what their arguments are probably going to be.” At the last meeting, the group had recognized that the needles and condoms were on everyone’s mind, and the school board members felt strongly that school kids shouldn’t be playing near that litter. “The litter,” said Josie. “We’ve got to do something about the litter.”

“And we need to do it before the school board meeting,” said Maria. Brianna looked around the room and saw that every head but Bob’s was nodding. Oh boy, this guy doesn’t seem to agree with anything. But I can’t let myself be annoyed with him. I know I’m at risk of being too emotionally involved, as if my whole reputation depends on this group. It doesn’t. I’ll stay calm. “Bob,” she said, putting a caring note into her voice. “You look like you’re not sure.”

“I don’t think the litter is the problem at all. I think it’s like we said last time when we talked about economics. I know from one of their meetings that the school board wants this place because they need the money when they sell it off to become a parking lot. They don’t want to destroy the football team’s practice field because people pay for football game tickets in the nice stadium on that side of town. So the team over at Westwood High gets two fields, and our kids get nothing.”

Brianna took a breath. All of the group members took a breath too. They looked at her in silence. She had a moment of real fear. They were all looking at her. They are depending on me to know the answers. But I don’t know the answers. Wait. I know how to do this. Step by step. I have to keep doing engagement all the time, and Bob is a good example of someone I didn’t fully engage yet. And I can do that. I know about listening skills and group roles. “Bob, sounds like you feel strongly about this,” she said, making brief eye contact then looking all around the room. He nodded. Okay. I’m doing this. Reflective listening and labeling feelings. I know he’s in the role of blocker, but I want to see if I can turn him into an opinion sharer and information giver. “You bring us a valuable opinion. I’m convinced we’re going to need that opinion and information related to it very soon. I also believe it will be best if you keep bringing us different opinions. We’re going to rely on you for that. But I think in order of priorities, the group feels like we should tackle the litter first.”
“We do,” said Maria decisively, and the rest of the group nodded, looking at Bob. Bob looked at Brianna. “Okay for now?” Brianna asked him, and he nodded. “So we’re going to tackle the litter.” Every head nodded. Brianna took a deep breath. Thank goodness. “In that case,” she said, “we need a more detailed plan.”

Section 14.1: Social Work in Communities

This section discusses communities and social work’s commitment to work with and on behalf of them.

Social Work in Communities

We’ve already said that working with groups can give anyone anxiety. When the group is part of a community effort, it’s easy to get even more anxious. When Brianna heard teachers talking about the playground’s destruction, they all seemed resigned to it. They were concerned about the litter, but they never talked about it. This was partly because they didn’t want to think about the potentially dangerous neighborhood they had to commute to every day from the suburbs. Everyone was overwhelmed thinking about the neighborhood. There had been gang-related shootings right in front of the school, and last year a kid had gotten stabbed on the bus. Teachers were afraid, and it was a situation they felt they could do nothing about. The principal’s view was “we do what we can for them here, because goodness knows we can’t do anything about where they live.”

As a social worker, Brianna knew she needed to think differently. Social justice is a core social work value (National Association of Social Workers [NASW], 2018). The NASW Code of Ethics (NASW, 2018) is specific about Social Workers’ Ethical Responsibilities to the Broader Society:

6.01 Social Welfare

Social workers should promote the general welfare of society, from local to global levels, and the development of people, their communities, and their environments. Social workers should advocate for living conditions conducive to the fulfillment of basic human needs and should promote social, economic, political, and cultural values and institutions that are compatible with the realization of social justice. (p. 29)

WHAT IF... FOCUS ON DIVERSITY

Name the areas of diversity that existed between Brianna and the parent group she was serving. Consider the Aspects of Diversity section of Chapter 3. What might be some challenges she faced because of those differences? How might she capitalize on the strengths that existed in the differences?

Social Justice

Let’s take a moment and look at the term social justice. We have seen that the search for social justice is one of the defining features of social work. While social justice can mean different things to different people, it is often related to making sure that everyone in a society has their human rights met (Gasker & Fischer, 2014). As we’ve said, human rights can be civil, political, environmental, economic, social, and cultural (CSWE, 2015). Let’s take these one by one.
Civil Rights

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights was developed by the United Nations in 1948. The United States has committed to abide by the declaration. It is considered to be the basic resource for discussions of human rights. First, the document states that considerations of human rights should be made for every person regardless of who they are or where they live. It says that “All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood” (p. 1). Some of the civil human rights that are mentioned specifically include the right to do the following:

- Have the law recognize them as a person
- Be legally considered to be equal to all other people and entitled to equal legal protections and fair, public hearings in cases of criminal charges in which they are presumed innocent until proven guilty and provided with necessary defense
- Be protected by the courts from discrimination and arbitrary arrest, detention, or exile
- Be protected by the courts from arbitrary interference with their privacy, family, home or correspondence, or to attacks on their reputation
- Have freedom of movement and residence in their own country
- Leave any country and return to their own
- Seek asylum from persecution
- Have a nationality and the right to change it

ETHICAL PERSPECTIVES

Are political rights specifically mentioned in the NASW Code of Ethics [NASW, 2018]?

Political Rights

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (United Nations, 1948) also recognizes specific rights related to government. Most important is the right to take part in government, either directly or through freely chosen representatives that have been selected by secret vote where every adult has a vote. People have the right to join a group and to have meetings, and they should not be forced to join any group.

Environmental Rights

The declaration says that people are entitled to shelter, and it can be assumed that safe shelter is expected. In addition, the declaration requires safe working conditions. Since the declaration was written, though, people have become aware of the importance of the physical environment to well-being. The Council on Social Work Education (CSWE; 2015) suggests that environmental rights means when all people equally experience environmental protection and the decision-making process related to it. Most importantly, environmental justice suggests that no one should be “affected by a disproportionate impact from
environmental hazards,” and all should be free from ecological destruction. Finally, people should responsibly use ecological resources, including the land, water, air, and food (p. 20).

**Economic Rights**

Achieving social justice cannot happen where access to resources is not equitable. The declaration states that people have rights to be free from “want” (CSWE, 2015, p. 1). Economic rights include the right to a standard of living adequate for health and well-being, including food, clothing, housing, medical care, and necessary social services. They have rights specific to work, such as the right to do the following:

- Work and have free choice of employment
- Have fair and favorable working conditions with equal pay for equal work
- Have protection against unemployment and security when facing sickness, disability, widowhood, old age, or other inability to work
- Have fair wages that allow for human dignity
- Have social protection when wages do not allow for human dignity
- Form and join trade unions
- Own property
- Have rest and leisure time through limits to hours worked and periodic, paid holidays

**Social Rights**

According to the declaration, everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression. People should be allowed to think and form opinions. They should be able to share ideas with anyone anywhere. Everyone has a right to freedom of religion and its observance. Specific rights are set aside for family and marriage. People have a right to marry and to found a family, to have equal rights as a couple, and to have the right to divorce. Marriage should happen only when both spouses give full consent. The family is considered to be a fundamental group in society. It is entitled to protection. Slavery and the slave trade should be forbidden.

**Cultural Rights**

People have a right to participate in the culture of their communities. Everyone has the right to free (required) education in elementary stages. Technical and professional education should be available, and higher education should be accessible to all, based on merit. People should be taught to have respect for human rights and to value tolerance and friendship among nations and racial and religious groups. Education should teach people to work for peace. On the other hand, parents have the right to choose the kind of education their children receive. Finally, everyone has the right to participate freely in the cultural life of the community, to enjoy the arts, and to share in scientific advancement and its benefits.

Finally, the declaration says that people should pay attention to the duties they should carry out to maintain their own rights in their communities. If you think in terms of systems, you may wonder why civil rights are all stated about individuals. People exercise or are denied civil rights as they are part of families, groups, organizations, and communities. In fact, everyone finds their civil rights in their communities.
For Brianna, it was easy to value these human rights, but it was clear that the people living in the neighborhood of the school were being deprived of their human rights. It truly was overwhelming. What could a social worker do about poverty, unemployment, unsafe housing, gang violence, mass incarceration, and substance abuse? How could a social worker work toward social justice in people’s communities? Just like the situation many social workers face, it would have been easy for Brianna to walk away. She could easily adopt the attitude of all of the other professionals in the school: Nothing can be done about the community.

**Place and Nonplace Communities**

One way to keep from feeling overwhelmed is partialize, or think of the community in manageable bits. On one hand, community work might be called the ultimate challenge in social work. It is a culmination of individual, group, and organizational skills (Hardina, 2013). However, we tend to think only of neighborhoods as communities. For these reasons, social workers often think communities are beyond their everyday, generalist social work abilities. Certainly there are social workers who specialize in community work, but the generalist practitioner can (and should) participate as well. To begin to consider how you might participate in community change, think about this: Communities aren’t necessarily neighborhoods, towns, or cities. They aren’t necessarily coalitions, or collaborating groups, of agencies and organizations. Instead, a community can be a “place or a non-place” (Hardcastle, 2011, p. 97). In **place communities**, we rely on location to define a group, such as the parents of children who all go to the same school, but in **nonplace communities**, we rely on a simpler definition: Nonplace communities can be groups of people who think alike in some way. They are connected by social bonds: identity, profession, religion, ideology, or common interests. A community is composed of people who feel a “we-ness” (Hardcastle, 2011, p. 97). For example, a church group can be a community even though members may not live near the church itself. A volleyball team can be a community. A cohort of students who do group work together and have classes in common can be a community. The generalist social work practitioner will identify communities that are important to their individual and group clients by getting to know those clients and looking for ways their systems intersect. The ecomap allows workers to consider these communities in assessment and planning through the circle marked “Individuals, families, and groups.”

By considering the communities where our individual, family, group, and organizational clients belong, we may be able to see that many agencies are dealing with the same problems over and over again. In those situations, we are looking across the commonalities of all of our cases. In other words, we are finding the larger community issue that affects all of our cases. At that point, we can identify aspects of the larger systems that are not fair to our clients. We have a cause. One way to work toward social justice is to have a “case-to-cause” mentality (Abramovitz & Sherraden, 2013, p. 4). That means our focus may have begun on individuals or small groups, but when we recognize that they have challenges in common we begin to see the problem as a cause. For instance, a social worker who works with individual children may say this: “Preventing child abuse is my cause.” Working with clients to further a cause is the best route. Community change should be carried out by community members (Stoeffler, 2018).
Social Justice and Society’s Grand Challenges

Social work’s commitment to social justice is embodied in the book *Grand Challenges for Social Work and Society* (Fong, Lubben, & Barth, 2018). The Grand Challenges initiative is a campaign developed by social work thinkers to move everyone toward thinking about our deepest problems and finding new solutions. The Grand Challenges initiative is designed to “promote scientific innovation in social work; engage the social work profession in strengthening the ties among social work organizations; foster transdisciplinary research; expand the student pipeline into the social work profession; and create greater acknowledgment of social work science within the discipline and by other, related, disciplines” (Fong et al., 2018, p. 1).

There are 12 Grand Challenges that confirm social work’s commitment to social justice:

1. Ensure healthy development for all youth.
2. Close the health gap.
3. Stop family violence.
4. Advance long and productive lives.
5. Eradicate social isolation.
7. Create social responses to a changing environment.
8. Harness technology for social good.
10. Reduce extreme economic inequality.
11. Build financial capability for all.
12. Achieve equal opportunity and justice.

The elaboration of these 12 goals represents social work’s commitment to justice. In addition, it reflects the importance of social work among disciplines in the common goal of working toward justice for all across the globe (Fong et al., 2018).

**CRITICAL THINKING AND COLLABORATIVE LEARNING EXERCISES 14.1**

1. In a small group, discuss ways that your human rights might be violated or threatened. If you assume they are not because you live in a democracy, look at each of the human rights and think again.

2. In a large group, think about the communities you all share. It’s obvious that you share the class as a group, and some of you may belong to the same clubs. Look beyond those communities, and identify those in which you’re a member and those that you share with classmates. What might be a common cause for all of you?

3. Work with a partner to come up with a definition of social justice in your own words. Be sure to include civil, political, environmental, economic, social, and cultural elements in your definition.
Section 14.2: Planned Change in Communities

This section continues the discussion on communities with a focus on the challenge of applying the planned change process to macro level practice.

Planned Change in Communities

Remember that systems seek homeostasis, and communities are no different (Carter, 2011). However, change in communities is part of the macro level of practice in multisystem practice (MSP). It is possible to change communities. You are very familiar with the method. It is the generalist social worker’s planned change process. As in organizations, there are many theories and methods of community change. Multisystem generalist practice provides a basic foundation with the planned change process as its method. Community change has an additional challenge though. It is not simple to translate the planned change process into macro level change. As we’ve seen, macro practice has pulled away from micro and mezzo practices (Abramovitz & Sherraden, 2013). Many social workers find community practice to be a distinct type of social work. With the MSP method, macro practice, whether with organizations or communities, is just another part of generalist social work practice. When all levels of systems are assessed, any system can be a target for change. For that reason, all levels of practice are considered in every case.

Self-Reflection

Why think about your own feelings when you work with communities? Other than what may be your apprehension about community work in general, you should think about a community as capable of affecting your life and the lives of your clients in significant ways. That’s why you are seeking change. For example, it’s likely that you feel strongly about the dignity and worth of the person. As we’ve seen, those strong feelings will create and feed off of beliefs that may or may not be rational. As part of self-reflection you’ve got to think critically about your feelings related to the community you are targeting for change. For Brianna, the issue was one of dignity and worth for the students. She valued dignity and worth, and helping people to achieve dignity was part of her passion for community work. Brianna believed that people living in poverty lacked dignity due to their troubled neighborhood, and she was glad to be able to carry out that aspect of generalist social work. When she looked at the needles and condoms that littered the sides of the playground, she got really angry. It wasn’t fair that the kids should be exposed to that. It didn’t make sense that she should be angry with the parents, but somehow she was. Why didn’t they do something? Her anger was also directed toward the other professionals in the school. In fact, she almost allowed her anger to affect her relationships with them. When she practiced mindfulness exercises and took a look at her feelings, she realized she needed to do some critical thinking. She recognized that she needed to get to know the parents. She had to allow them to be the experts about their own lives so she could understand them better. That way, she could begin to develop empathy and would be less likely to judge them. Likewise, the professionals were all caring people. She became objective and realized that the professionals felt helpless, but they really cared about the students. The sincere concern of the other professionals could be considered a strength of the school. She might be able to use that resource. Once she thought about it that way, she could move on with calm resolve.
Engagement

When you work with communities, you have the same engagement experience as in work with organizations: You can find client system representatives everywhere. You never know who your client system representative may be. They may be an elected official or any community member. As always, you begin with your individual skills of engagement. Some of the basic skills that are especially important in work with communities are offering service, stating the obvious, and partializing challenges. Remember to display warmth, empathy, and genuineness (WEG), even when you have serious disagreements with client system representatives. Instead of jumping right in, use the preparatory empathy process we discussed in Chapter 5. Remember the importance of networking in organizational work. It is the same here. Always be prepared to develop relationships with others. You should not leave an interaction with a professional without exchanging business cards. It also makes sense to share your business card with interested people who are not human service professionals. Brianna was surrounded by people who were not human service professionals. Her relationships with them were important, and her relationship with her principal was particularly so.

Assessment

As with any level of practice, you need to carry out multisystem assessment work with a community. An important thing to think about in the assessment of a community is to be clear about who is included in the community and why. When you come to the systems called “Individuals, families, and groups,” you will think about your client system representatives and all of the individuals you know well within the community as well as your agency. Think about what they have in common. This will allow you to clearly identify your cause. As always, use an ecomap that includes the lines of connection and tension so you can identify which systems to target for change. You may have to target individuals or groups to accomplish your community change, so make sure the ecomap is complete. In this case, the community consisted of the parents, the students, the staff of the school, the neighborhood location of the school, and the school board. When considering individuals and groups, Brianna began with a **focus group**, one method for assessing communities that allows participants to become involved in the change effort right away (Meenaghan, Gibbons, & McNutt, 2005). She thought about the parent organization and the roles the individuals were playing. Within the group that was assembled, Maria was easy to spot as the intrinsic leader. Bob was acting in the role of blocker, but Brianna hoped to convert him to the roles of opinion seeker and information giver. He had already begun to help with the assessment by observing a school board meeting. This was the use of **expert presentation and testimony** for assessment (Ilvento, Garkovich, Hansen, Hustedde, & Maurer, n.d.). In the focus group that was rapidly becoming a task group, Josie was an encourager, and there were more than a few contributors, including Sarah, that could be relied on.

Another individual to be assessed was the principal. Brianna also planned this **key informant interview**, where individuals who have knowledge of situations are asked questions about the needs and challenges of the community (Ilvento et al., n.d.).
In addition, she used the key informant interview method of assessment by interviewing all of the teachers about the benefits of the playground. She learned from her client representative group that they interacted very little with the principal except for when their kids were in trouble. Brianna suspected that ethnic and cultural differences were part of the problem. She made a note of it and planned to interview the principal.

When Brianna considered the justice system, she realized that there were a lot of illegal activities affecting the school—substance abuse and gang violence to name just two. She was sure of this because she used the secondary data method of assessment, where sources like the census could be employed (Ilvento et al., n.d.). Brianna recognized that there wasn’t a strong connection between the school and the police. She decided the potential to get the police involved was probably a strength she could use later.

There was also a weak link between the community and the school board. Community members knew little about the board and, except for Bob, had no experience attending meetings. The connection between the school and the school board was fraught with tension. Inadequate funding left the school short of staff and space. If there had been funds, janitorial staff could have expanded their hours to include cleaning up the playground.

The possible loss of the playground was a major problem for the school. Currently, though, there was tension between the physical environment and health care. The litter simply wasn’t healthy. Brianna worked with the principal, as a key informant, and discovered that the health care plans for teachers had been cut. A conversation with Maria, her intrinsic leader, told her that many of the families were covered by Medicaid. Her client representative group, the parent organization, let her know that finding available health care was a problem. There wasn’t a doctor anywhere in the neighborhood. Brianna filed that away to consider later.

Another area of tension was the institution of education. Federal taxes paid only a small portion of the school’s budget. Much of the rest relied on local property taxes. With property values being so low in the neighborhood, the school board had few funds to meet the school’s costs. Brianna wondered if any educators in her state were working to change that. She made a note to get that type of expert testimony. Immediately she thought of the statistics available through secondary data analysis that showed the United States falling behind other countries in student performance. That information could be useful later.

Social welfare policies were a support to the school, with families benefiting from income support, health care, and help with food expenses. Spirituality was also a bonus. Most of the families attended the same Catholic Church that catered to Hispanic and financially challenged people of the neighborhood. See Figure 14.1.

**Planning**

The planned change process follows the same process in work with communities as it does on any other level. You work with one or more (probably more) client system representatives to make a doable plan that reflects the strengths, resources, and challenges of the community. In work with communities, you may have a **client representative group**.

**Creating Goals: Identifying System Interactions**

The ecomap and the MSP assessment clarified areas for planning and implementation. Brianna looked for positive connections as well as systems in tension and systems with tenuous connections.
FIGURE 14.1  • Community-Based Ecomap

MULTISYSTEM PRACTICE: ASSESSMENT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Systems</th>
<th>Strengths and Diversity</th>
<th>Challenges</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Social worker</td>
<td>Has conducted self-reflection; carried out &quot;I feel, I believe, I know, I do&quot; process with open mind</td>
<td>The social worker must not allow strong value of courage to create feelings that are so strong they affect the work in a negative way. The social worker must not be emotionally tied to the change outcome.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Continued)
### Systems

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Systems</th>
<th>Strengths and Diversity</th>
<th>Challenges</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Agency</td>
<td>School staff members are sincerely caring.</td>
<td>Staff members are hopeless about change.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Client system representative(s): Principal</td>
<td>Biological, psychological, cultural aspects: Power, privilege, identity Used to power; expects to have his way Committed to change</td>
<td>Biological, psychological, cultural aspects: Discriminations Has trouble relating to parents due in part to cultural and ethnic differences Negative experiences with the school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent group</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health care</td>
<td>Medicaid available to most families</td>
<td>Teachers’ coverage cut No local health care available</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economy or personal finance</td>
<td></td>
<td>Low property values leads to fewer local tax dollars.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical environment</td>
<td>Playground is currently in place and beneficial to students.</td>
<td>Playground litter is dangerous to students’ health The playground is scheduled to be destroyed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>Public funding School is available and required.</td>
<td>Federal taxes pay too small a share of school expenses.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National and international policies</td>
<td>Provide positive examples of public education.</td>
<td>Comparisons reveal the United States lagging in student performance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spirituality and religion</td>
<td>Parents have church in common.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Justice</td>
<td>Police are available in the neighborhood.</td>
<td>The police relationship with the school could be strengthened. The police presence could be improved.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual, family, community, and peers</td>
<td>Maria—leader; Josie—encourager; Close knit community of parents</td>
<td>Poverty, violence, drug dealing, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government: School board</td>
<td>The meetings are public.</td>
<td>Parents need to learn to attend board meetings productively. Funding is inadequate based on school board decisions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social welfare policies</td>
<td>Medicaid is available.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Continued)
Overall, the physical environment was the most compelling. The goals would relate to that.

Creating Goals: Recognizing Strengths and Challenges

Brianna’s client system representative group was the parent organization. She worked with them to develop goals for planned change.

To begin to establish goals, Brianna and the group considered the types of interactions and relevant resources and challenges. Brianna used the skills of group eye contact, reflective listening, and use of the present. She facilitated decision-making in a way we have discussed, through consensus building. She framed the topic one week, encouraged free-flowing discussion, and brought proposals the next. She and the group identified the strengths in the school. They found there were strengths and challenges within each system group:

Brianna and the group created this table:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>System Group</th>
<th>System 1</th>
<th>System 2</th>
<th>System 3</th>
<th>System 4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Community</td>
<td>School</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>School board</td>
<td>School</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Justice</td>
<td>School</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Physical environment</td>
<td>Health care</td>
<td>School</td>
<td>Brianna</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Economy</td>
<td>School</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Health care</td>
<td>Community</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Principal</td>
<td>Community</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Creating Goals: Building on Strengths

Taken together, the strengths of the system interactions could be used to respond to the challenges. Brianna and the group created the following responses to the challenges facing the school:

Goals

First, remember that goals need to be concrete. They are specific statements, and they describe the situation that is ideal. Goals represent what the client and worker want to achieve. Implementation happens in the context of goals. You can measure a goal to see
whether it has been met. A goal is a statement about how the worker and client will know whether the implementation has been successful.

The ideal is for the client system representative to identify and develop goals with the worker. In community work, this will result in community-driven goals. But the worker is controlling the change process and may recognize goals that they think should be addressed. These goals are worker-driven goals. In this case, the community-driven goal was to save the playground. Brianna’s worker-driven goal was to clean up the litter.

Using the table they created, Brianna and the parents created the following goals:

1. Keep playground
2. Clean litter

**Objectives**

Each goal has at least one objective because objectives are the concrete, measurable tasks that need to be carried out to accomplish a goal. Brianna and the parent group identified the following tasks that were necessary to carry out the main community goal.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Goal</th>
<th>Objectives</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Keep playground</td>
<td>Circulate petition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Present petition at school board meeting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clean litter</td>
<td>Organize Cleanup Day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Create sustainable plan for the future</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Next, Brianna and the group specified expectations. As you know, in this stage of planned change it is important to identify “who will do what by when.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Goal</th>
<th>Objectives</th>
<th>Who</th>
<th>What</th>
<th>When</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Save Playground</td>
<td>Circulate a petition</td>
<td>Josie and Brianna</td>
<td>Create petition</td>
<td>In 1 week</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Identify school board meeting scheduler</td>
<td>Brianna and the administrative assistant at school</td>
<td>Circulate petition electronically and on paper to parents and tabulate results</td>
<td>In 2 weeks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Get on school board meeting agenda</td>
<td>Maria</td>
<td>Talk to secretary at school district administration building</td>
<td>Immediately</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Organize staff members to join the parent group at Cleanup Day and at the school board meeting</td>
<td>Maria, Bob, and Brianna</td>
<td>Follow-up with Maria’s contact and get permission to present at meeting</td>
<td>Immediately</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Present to school board</td>
<td>Brianna, group, any willing staff members</td>
<td>Discuss with individuals; distribute handouts</td>
<td>In 2 weeks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Present support for playground, including petition and teachers’ testimony</td>
<td>In 2 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Show photos of clean area</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Implementation

Brianna and Maria began implementation of the plan. Their first objective was to circulate a petition. Since last meeting, Josie and Brianna were going to create a petition. Maria was going to identify a person to contact about getting on the school board agenda, and she and Bob were going to get on the board schedule. In addition, they were going to choose a day for Cleanup Day, and Josie was going to get rubber gloves and trash bags. As organizational change agent, Brianna initiated the group conversation about what was happening with task completion. Brianna began each conversation with an opening statement that went something like this:

**Brianna:** Thanks for being here again, everyone. I see you made it all the way up the three flights of stairs. *(use of humor; engagement)* Seriously, is there any crisis going on that I’m not aware of? *(beginning implementation by determining whether there is a crisis)* You all know that I’m here because I’m the school social worker, and the school is here to help the kids learn. *(agency mission)* We know the playground is good for the kids, so I’m hoping to help you parents to achieve your goal of saving it. *(role)* We have an hour and a half today *(length of the meeting)*, and I think we need to start by seeing where we are with our tasks. *(task assessment)*

The opening statement helped the group to remember why they were there. Their long-term goal might otherwise be lost in the details of working out each objective. Brianna was also reminding them that she was the leader of the group and assuring them that it would be a focused meeting.

### Task Assessment

As they compared notes about task completion and Brianna made a task assessment, it became clear that they had some success, but they were also facing challenges. Maria had already made a contact at the school administration office, but she and Bob had not been able to arrange an appointment since the board secretary was on vacation. That changed the “when” on the “Who Will Do What By When” chart. Josie and Brianna had created a petition, but it wasn’t complete since the principal had to approve it. Again, the “when” would be changed. Josie did not get the rubber gloves and trash bags since she was busy with the petition. Finally, they needed to choose a day and time for cleanup.

**Brianna:** Josie, were you able to make arrangements for the gloves, bags, and vests?

**Josie:** No, I wasn’t.
Brianna: I think I know why. You were working with me on the petition and didn’t have time, right?

Josie: That’s the story.

Brianna considered how to respond. She was thinking about the different kinds of yeses and nos that can appear in a task assessment:

- Yes, they have carried out their tasks successfully.
- Yes, they’ve carried out part of their tasks.
- No, they didn’t feel like it (or didn't have time, or forgot, or almost any other reason).
- No, they tried but it didn’t work.
- No, there was a very real reason that was out of their control.

Josie’s answer fell in the “No, they tried but it didn’t work” category.

A “No, they tried but it didn’t work” from Josie calls for reassessment.

“No, they tried but it didn’t work.” Identify strengths and challenges.

Josie’s challenge was time. On the other hand, she had proven to be very reliable. As leader, Brianna had to decide what to do next. She knew the petition might need revision, so Josie would again be pressed for time. She decided to get Josie some help on the trash bag task. She changed the task by asking another group member, Rhonda, to take it on. Rhonda had been a group follower, but Brianna hoped she would become a group facilitator.

Looking over the “Who Will Do What By When” chart, there was another objective that required immediate attention. “Okay,” Brianna said, “We need to pick a day for Cleanup Day.”

Decision-Making

Brianna had a small group that seemed to expect to share in decision-making, so she chose the consensus-building type of decision-making. To carry out the time-saving version of consensus building, she began by framing the topic and encouraging group discussion.

Brianna said, “Let’s take the next 15 minutes to talk about the date of our Cleanup Day. We need to choose what day of the week, what time, and what day of the month. We’ll discuss each of these by getting everyone’s ideas on the table. Once we’ve had the discussion, I’ll take your ideas and over the next week I’ll come up with a proposal. You can vote on the proposal at the next meeting.”

Eventually, the parents completed the consensus process and chose a date for Cleanup Day. On that day, other parents and school staff members, including teachers and the principal, came out in force. They were all happy to stop feeling hopeless and helpless. In addition, they responded enthusiastically to the petition. When the school board met, the meeting was an impressive display of parents talking about their children and their efforts to clean the playground and the teachers reporting that they felt the playground helped with behavior problems. The principal came out in support of all of them. In the end, every one of the group’s objectives was met. The school board decided to keep the playground intact and sell another piece of school district property instead.
Evaluation, Termination, and Follow-Up

It was time for celebration. The group planned to meet again at the usual time and place. They decided to have a potluck meal to celebrate. Brianna asked if she could invite the school staff and parents who joined in Cleanup Day. In addition to the celebration, Brianna drew up a specific agenda for the meeting. It related to evaluation of the project. The agenda included reviewing their original goals and objectives. They involved the group in answering questions about whether the goals and objectives have been met. They also considered process evaluation. They wanted to know what worked well so they could do it in the future. They considered whether they would want to do things exactly the same way even though the effort was successful. Finally, and most specifically, they needed to discuss how they were going to make their litter control project ongoing, or sustainable.

The group decided to continue to meet as they had been doing before the playground project began. They made a new goal to keep Cleanup Day going. Brianna helped with objectives and encouraged Maria, Bob, and Josie to continue in their roles of leader, information seeker, and group contributor. They planned to recruit more members to their group and continue their planned change process. Brianna encouraged that idea since she knew that more members meant more potential leaders for the future (Pyles, 2009).

Brianna made a note in her mind to follow up with the group after a month to be sure all was going as planned. If she found that Cleanup Day was a regular part of the school week, she would know that the process had been a success.

**CRITICAL THINKING AND COLLABORATIVE LEARNING EXERCISES 14.2**

If you live with others, get together with those people. With the goal of “Clean the house/apartment,” develop a “Who Will Do What By When” chart and try to carry it out. Conduct a task assessment, and bring the evaluation of your project to class. Discuss how you would do it differently if you had to do it over. Consider whether you and your roommates might want to continue achieving the goal in the same way in the future. Share with the class.

Section 14.3: The Social Work Role of Community Change Agent

This section is about the social work role of community change agent. We consider the role and the skills that allow us to carry it out.

The Social Work Role of Community Change Agent

As we’ve said, communities can be connections of place and nonplace. As you consider the ecomap of any case, you will come across communities that may become your target systems. In other words, since communities exist in the interaction of individuals and the environment, they are always of interest to the social worker. In systems terms, communities are their own systems. They exchange energy in balanced ways that result in synergy, or they become depleted and enter into the downward spiral of entropy. Given this, it’s easy to see that communities have needs. These include the physical and mental health of community members, a functional economy, and effective policy-making (Homan, 2004).
Where communities exist in ongoing need, change is necessary. Community change can be thought of as developing different attitudes and better policies and practices, reducing problems, improving the way needs are met, and developing strengths within the community (Homan, 2004). Like most change, the best route is for members to be enabled to make their own changes. Enter the community change agent. The community change agent has three basic purposes: (1) to identify problems, (2) to organize people to solve the problems, and (3) to help focus and evaluate the change efforts. As in all social work, the worker is responsible to make sure the planned change process is carried out. Remember that the worker is not responsible for carrying out all of the tasks. Change has to be owned by clients and client system representatives. Community participation in activities like community organizing is by its nature empowering (Speer, Peterson, Zippay, & Christens, 2011).

Important note: Social workers have sanction to do their jobs because someone, perhaps representative government, is paying their agency to carry out its mission. Social workers do not engage in professional actions that are outside the agency’s purpose. For that reason, any professional organizing you might do (with the exception of some changes within your own agency) must be done with your supervisor’s knowledge and consent. Besides, you want to be paid for the professional actions you carry out. Of course you may serve as a community change agent on your own time as a private citizen. In those cases, you need to make sure that everyone involved understands that you are acting on your own, not as a representative of your agency.

**Skills for Community Change Agents**

Keep in mind that community practice builds on many of the skills used in generalist social work (Hardina, 2013). You will need the skills you use in work with individuals, groups, and organizations. The skills that are most specific to social work in communities are below.

Since the community change agent is a role that addresses the needs of large as well as small groups, it requires some specific skills:

- Assessing or researching community needs
- Organizing
- Coalition building
- Promoting programs
- Identifying intrinsic leaders

**SELF-REFLECTION 14: THE ASSERTION SELF-STATEMENT TEST–REVISED**

Macro level practice involves offering services and persuasion. This requires assertiveness, and for many people that means they have to display an absent attribute. As we’ve seen, developing the ability to display absent attributes includes self-reflection, particularly by engaging in critical thinking about workers’ feelings related to assertiveness. Take the Assertion Self-Statement Test–Revised on pages 433-435, and figure out how you talk to yourself about your own assertiveness. Is there anything you have to change about the way you think in order to be an effective community change agent?
Community Needs Assessment or Research

As we’ve seen, there are a number of assessment methods that are specific to communities. These include running focus groups, analyzing secondary data sources like the census, interviewing key informants, and getting expert presentation and testimony. While community level assessment is important in every case, these specific methods are necessary when the focus for change is the community.

Organizing

Organizing requires imagination. Someone who will organize is the first to recognize that all is not well. It is the community change agent using their organizing skills who envisions different circumstances in the future. For this reason, the organizer often has to use their skills of persuasion to help community members to get out of their old patterns of thinking and doing. In a way, the organizer is reminding people that they are unhappy. A community can get used to unhappiness that grows over time as they slowly come to accept it. Community change requires a tension between how things are and an attraction to what they might become, so organizers may actually try to get people irritated (Fisher, 2001; Homan, 2004). You will go to members of the community, and you will share your vision. Point out that things are not as they could or should be. You’ll need your individual skills. Begin with someone you recognize as an intrinsic leader, and recruit them to identify community members and to help with the organizing effort. Even in the beginning stages, you’ll be modeling the skill of organizing so that the intrinsic leader will adopt those skills in the future. Then, your most important task will be to find a way for all of the community members to communicate with you and with each other (Fisher, 2001). You may have physical meetings that are held at an accessible location, or you may use telephone calls, conference calls, or texting, Listservs, and social networking sites (McKnight & Plummer, 2015).

Coalition Building

There may be times when you recognize that more than one community (place or non-place) is facing the same challenges. For example, you work with homeless people in a city where there are many services addressing their needs. Everyone has a mission to help the homeless, but neither knows what the other is doing. Each food bank within walking distance may be trying to provide a range of foods when they might be better off becoming the go-to place for specific foods, like fruit or bread. Shelters across the city may have space for men and for women but no place for families. One shelter may offer case management services while the others do not. On top of it all, there is probably no one who knows what kind of services the people who are homeless feel will help them most. Part of the problem is that many of these agencies are forced into situations where they are competing against each other for funds. For that reason, they are not likely to interact. One individual, though, can pull them all together: the change agent using the skill of coalition building. This skill is similar to the skill of organizing, it is just done on the agency and community level. Target systems are not individuals but communities and organizations. Again, you need to be able to imagine a better system and you need to use your persuasion skills to convince system representatives that a better way is possible. You’ll also use your networking skills, reaching out to people you know and seeking introductions to people you don’t know. For example, if you contact the director of one shelter, they may know the name of a highly visible religious leader in the community. That person may direct you to someone who runs a food bank, and so on. As in organizing individuals, your goal is to get the groups communicating. Pagnoni (2014) has identified strategies for getting people involved and helping them to stay involved:
Assess each potential partner to identify what might motivate them to participate. What will they get out of it? More comprehensive services for clients than they are currently equipped to provide? Potential partners in grant writing and other fund-raising?

Consider the mission of each of the agencies. Will the collaboration help them to carry out their mission?

Make sure all of the partners understand what success looks like. All of the groups should agree on what they’d like to see happen.

Evaluate progress often using data you collect on a regular basis. Let participants know what is working and not working.

Make opportunities to let others know about the good work the coalition is doing. Find ways to get the good news about the coalition to staff, volunteers, clients, other service providers, local businesses, and the members of the larger community. This will provide positive visibility for all of the coalition members.

**Promoting Programs**

Community change agents need to get the word out about their efforts. They need supporters, target communities, and the general public to know what is happening (Homan, 2004). In addition, community change often entails events of some kind. Whether it is a press conference, a professional conference, focus group, neighborhood block party, or a coalition meeting, the community change agent has to have skills in promotion. When carrying out the skill of promotion, the worker considers neighborhood groups and asks “What do I want from this group?” and “What do they need to know to respond?” Information can be carried through presentations (usually PowerPoint), brochures, meetings, newsletters, posters, and flyers. For these, you’ll need expertise in software that has been designed to facilitate these types of communication. Don’t be afraid to try them out—they’re meant to be user-friendly. Another method of promotion is to use the media in all of its forms. There is a particular document—the press release—which you can use to get the media interested in covering your program. Keep in mind that word of mouth should always be a consideration. Electronic word of mouth works too. Depending on your target system, you might also use position papers and other serious reports (Homan, 2004). Like many macro level skills, promotion cannot be carried out by a person who acts shy. Notice that acts shy is different from is shy. You may have to display the absent attribute of assertiveness, but it can be done. Let your passion for your cause carry you through challenging situations.

**Identifying Intrinsic Leaders**

Two things are true about community change agents: (1) they want the successful community changes to last, and (2) they will not be a part of the community forever. For these reasons, it is critical to identify and cultivate leaders to gradually come to take over your tasks and eventually drive the efforts themselves. You will probably notice that there’s a person who has a powerful voice in the group. Probably others already look to them for decision-making. That’s one person you want to gradually allow to take over the leadership role. Remember that it is the leader who allocates roles to group members, so you may want to teach them about the roles people play and what you have done to assure that contributing members keep contributing. All of this leads us to think about identifying one person as potential leader, but that would be a mistake.
It is important to cultivate more than one leader, because you are looking for a long term plan to keep your changes in place (Homan, 2004). There are several reasons why your leader may not be able to continue in their role, including an inability to continue contributing so much energy to the project. You need some backups, and it is important to talk to the group about who will continue as leader and who might be recruited as a leader after that.

### Skills for Community Change Agents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Skill</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Example</th>
<th>Required Worker Characteristic(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Community needs assessment or research</td>
<td>Uses methods like running secondary data analysis, running focus groups, interviewing key informants, and gaining expert presentation and testimony</td>
<td>Brianna created a focus group of interested parents and got them involved in the change process by asking them for assessment information.</td>
<td>Assertiveness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Critical thinking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizing</td>
<td>Identifies problems and identifies and connects community members</td>
<td>Bill saw that people drove far above the speed limit in his clients’ neighborhood, so he got the neighbors together to seek solutions.</td>
<td>Imagination</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Persistence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Persuasion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coalition building</td>
<td>Connects agencies and other groups with common interests</td>
<td>Jeff's clients were homeless and needed many services. He had a hard time identifying the most appropriate agency resources, so he began to connect the various agencies with the intention to create a resource directory.</td>
<td>Imagination</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Assertiveness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Focus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promoting programs</td>
<td>Gets the word out to constituents about an event</td>
<td>Would you please post this brochure about the upcoming meeting?</td>
<td>Assertiveness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Ability to use graphic software</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identifying intrinsic leaders</td>
<td>Helps two or more participants to experience leadership so that changes will be sustainable</td>
<td>Maria, I see you are putting a lot of energy into this effort. Do you think you will be able to continue when I am gone?</td>
<td>Flexibility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Patience</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Sample Dialogue for Community Change Agents

**Brianna:** Mrs. Smith, I know as school secretary you are the guardian of the bulletin board. *(use of humor)*

**Mrs. Smith:** That's right. *(smiling)* Do I need to guard it from you?

**Brianna:** I think you do. I have a small poster here I’d like to get where everyone can see it. I have spoken to the staff and I’ve given handouts in the classroom, but I’d like to remind everyone that Cleanup Day is in 2 weeks.

**Mrs. Smith:** Oh! Cleanup Day. I was going to ask you when that was happening. Sure, I'll put it on the bulletin board.
Section 14.4: The Social Work Role of Advocate

This section closes the discussion of community practice with a social work role that is required on all levels of practice: the role of advocate.

The Social Work Role of Advocate

Advocacy is not optional for social workers. Our NASW Code of Ethics requires it of us. First, Section 1.01 of the code clearly states that "clients' interests are primary" (NASW, 2018, p. 7). In other words, our first responsibility is to clients. Sometimes our efforts at empowerment with individuals are not possible. A client may simply be unable to act on their own behalf. They might be disabled in some way, or they might just be too upset to manage one more thing. In those cases where the social worker has done their best to help the client help themselves, advocacy may be necessary.

Advocacy is to represent and support a client system or a cause to others (Hardcastle, 2011). Advocating for a client system is known as case advocacy, and advocating related to a larger, systemic problem is called cause advocacy. When we are advocating, we are acting on behalf of others. We can advocate for an individual with another individual, group, or organization. For example, we might advocate with a landlord, a support group, or an employer. We can advocate for a group with an individual, organization, or community. In that case, advocacy might be with an agency administrator or a local decision-maker. We can advocate for an organization with another organization or with a community. Perhaps we want neighbors to accept a group home in their midst, for example. And we can advocate for a community with any other system. If we translate our case issues to cause issues, we may advocate with government on behalf of any other client system.

As we’ve mentioned previously, another portion of the NASW Code of Ethics (NASW, 2018) is more explicit about macro level advocacy. Standard 6 related to Social Workers’ Ethical Responsibilities to the Broader Society presents us with broad areas of responsibility. We are to work on behalf of the general welfare of society, advocate for healthy living conditions, and we should promote “social, economic, political, and cultural values and institutions that are compatible with the realization of social justice” (NASW, 2018, p. 27). We’re supposed to help others become advocates, and we’re supposed to provide professional services in public emergencies. Finally, we’re required to “engage in social and political action that seeks to ensure that all people have equal access to the resources, employment, services, and opportunities they require to meet...
their basic human needs and to develop fully” (p. 30). We’re also required to study the way policies affect practice and to advocate changes where needed to promote social justice. We are required to work to expand choice and opportunity for all, especially disadvantaged groups, and we’re responsible to promote respect for cultural and social diversity across the globe. We must promote policies that guard and provide equity and social justice for all people. Finally, we must act to “prevent and eliminate domination of, exploitation of, and discrimination against any group of people” (NASW, 2018, p. 27).

Skills for carrying out the role of advocate include all of the skills used in work with individuals. In addition, the following skills are particularly relevant:

- Direct advocacy
- Legislative advocacy

**Skills for the Social Work Role of Advocate**

**Direct Advocacy**

Sometimes people suffer because of circumstances that can be changed. It is the unique call of social workers to respond to these circumstances. People may have to pay high fees to cash checks because there is no bank in the community, they may live in housing that is exposed to environmental toxins, they may be denied services because of changes in eligibility (Hoefer, 2006). In situations like these, direct advocacy may be necessary. **Direct advocacy** is to speak and act on behalf of an individual, family, group, organization, or community. Direct advocacy is necessary when people cannot act or be taught to act on their own behalf. It may also be necessary when an intrinsic leader has not yet been cultivated in a group or when an organization or community needs a spokesperson. Keep in mind that direct advocacy on the part of a worker is done only as a last resort. It is preferable to empower client systems to advocate on their own behalf. First, try to teach the skills of advocacy. If your client system can still not act on their own, then try assisting them. Only when that fails should workers consider advocating for others. Workers need to be confident and to be able to address individuals and groups. A worker who carries out direct advocacy needs to draw on their skills of working with individuals and groups. Often it is necessary to locate a client system representative or group within the target system. In addition, it is always important to collaborate with your client system to plan your advocacy activities. You should not act on behalf of any client system when individuals are not aware you are going to do so. Speak on behalf of others only with their consent.

**Legislative Advocacy**

When government policies get in the way of clients having their physical and emotional needs met, legislative advocacy is likely to be necessary. Once assessment is complete and goals have been developed, it is important to carefully identify the legislative target system (Hoefer, 2006). Often local governments, like town and borough councils, have a surprising range of influence. Zoning laws that determine where residential facilities can be built, for example, come under the umbrella of a town council. As we’ve seen, many school-related decisions are made at the district level with the school board. While many social welfare policies are made at the federal level, spending priorities for social work services are most often made at the state level. More and more policy and funding decisions are moving from the federal to the state level, and there is a good chance you can have a powerful impact on decisions made at the
state level (Homan, 2004). Once you’ve identified your target, it is critical that you understand how decisions are made at that level. There may be one individual who decides how a county will spend money on services for those who need substance abuse treatment. State and federal governments operate in similar ways, with a complex process for developing bills and creating laws, policies, and regulations. The best way to learn about these complexities is from your client system representatives. For example, if your state government turns out to be your target system, your local state representative will be your client system representative. That person, or more likely a member of their staff, will shepherd you through the process. Before you get that far, though, it is important to conduct research. Know where the problem you’re addressing happens. Consider whether it is the law or policy that is the problem, or whether the problem lies in its implementation (Hardcastle, 2011). When you are knowledgeable about what you want to happen, spend time looking for allies. Conducting legislative advocacy is another potentially intimidating macro practice, but chances are good that you won’t need to go it alone. Your client system is just one individual or group that is influenced by policies that affect many people. Look for people who are interested in your concerns. Some of those people may work for agencies that specialize in legislative advocacy for particular groups, and working with them will magnify your efforts. Use your ecomap to identify potential allies, and don’t forget that your state NASW chapter will have a legislative agenda on the state level. Perhaps they are already focused on your issue, or they may be willing to consider helping your cause. In short, you need to talk to people to find out what level of government is in charge of decision-making related to your issue, you need to talk to more people to find out how the decision-making works, and you need to cast a broad net as you recruit others to help. Instead of beginning with a focus on who is against you, begin with a focus on who is with you. Legislative advocacy is only intimidating when you think about doing it alone.

**Skills for the Social Work Role of Advocate**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Skill</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Example</th>
<th>Required Worker Characteristic(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Direct advocacy</td>
<td>Speaking and acting on behalf of an individual, family, group, organization, or community when they are unable to do so themselves</td>
<td>Can you please tell me who can help me understand your eligibility policies?</td>
<td>Assertiveness, Passion, Patience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legislative advocacy</td>
<td>Identifying a cause, learning about where and how decisions are made, recruiting allies to support the effort and provide direction</td>
<td>I wonder if Senator Schwank or someone from her office would be willing to talk to me about the current laws related to predatory lending.</td>
<td>Assertiveness, Passion, Patience</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Sample Advocacy Dialogue**

**Worker:** Mary, it seems like your problem is bigger than the two of us.

**Mary:** (sighs) I guess it is.
Worker: That doesn’t mean we give up. I suspect others have the same problem, and I suspect they may already be working on a solution. I think we can find out who they are and what they’re already doing. Let’s start with getting a clear understanding of the situation. Would you be willing to work with me and make some phone calls?

The Shy Worker: Reflective Responses

When Brianna first thought about the plan to dismantle and sell the playground at the school where she worked, she was surprised and angry. She had to work not to be angry at the parents and the other staff members. After that, she had the energy to move forward with engaging others in a planned change process. She identified who had to be engaged and quickly moved to assessment. At this point, she nearly became stuck. It was easy for Brianna to do the analysis of secondary data related to the school population and crime in the school neighborhood. But she was terrified to even think about other methods of community assessment like developing a focus group, finding an expert to present information, or interviewing a key informant. At first, she casually interviewed the teachers. After that, she just put off the other assessment tasks. Finally, her supervisor called her on her hesitation by asking whether Brianna wanted to save the playground or not. Brianna felt scared. When she talked to her supervisor, she realized that she believed she just wasn’t capable of the necessary tasks. Her supervisor helped her to think critically about her beliefs by asking her to identify occasions in the past where Brianna had overcome her shyness in her life outside of work. After she did so, Brianna recognized that she did have ways to cope with her shyness, and she began to know that she did have the capability. It still wasn’t easy, but Brianna was able to take the coping skills she already had to get past her shyness, display self-confidence, and carry out the work.

Community level assessment can be intimidating.

Call the local office of your state senator or representative. Ask to make an appointment with a legislative aid. Take a group of fellow students with you, and ask about the process of getting legislation developed or changed. You will find out there is more to it than you usually read about in books and that interactions with individuals who can help you are critical. Ask about a current project or concern of your legislator and, if you agree with the approach, find out how you can help in the effort. Talking to people and getting close to the decision-making process is the best way to learn it.
Ethical Decision-Making Challenge

Brianna was stirring up people to act against the wishes of the school board, a group of individuals elected by local voters to act on their behalf. Is there anything in the NASW Code of Ethics (NASW, 2018) that suggests it might be unethical to do that?

Human Rights

Is it possible that the students in this case were being denied human rights? Do you think they have the right to a playground? Use the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (United Nations, 1948) to support your answer.

Evidence-Based Practice

Find out if there is any evidence related to successful change efforts in schools.

Policies Impacting Practice

Find out where and when your school board meets. Attend a meeting.

Managing Diversity

Like most of the teachers in the building, Brianna was Caucasian. Do you think the mostly Hispanic parent group members might have trouble trusting her? What might she have to do to be culturally responsive?

Multilevel Practice

Identify examples of Brianna’s work on all levels.

Micro:

Mezzo:

Macro:

Dynamic and Interactive Planned Change Stages

Identify aspects of Brianna’s work where she worked in the following stages:

Self-Reflection:

Engagement:

Assessment:

Planning:

Implementation:

Evaluation:

Termination and Follow-Up:

Chapter Summary

Section 14.1: Social Work in Communities

Every social worker is committed to community level change, since the NASW Code of Ethics (NASW, 2018) requires attention to the welfare of the broader community. The social worker’s concern is social justice, a concept that is often associated with human rights. According to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights as developed by the United Nations (1948) and ratified by the United States, human rights have many components, including civil, political, environmental, economic, social, and cultural rights.

Section 14.2: Planned Change in Communities

Because communities, like all systems, seek homeostasis, they are difficult to change. However, generalist practitioners who practice MSP are required to work with systems of all
sizes. Work with communities is manageable when the generalist planned change method is used to guide practice.

**Section 14.3: The Social Work Role of Community Change Agent**

One social work role in work with communities is that of community change agent. A social worker in that role identifies problems, organizes people, and focuses and evaluates change efforts. Skills used by community change agents include those used in work with individuals and groups as well as organizing, coalition building, promoting programs, identifying intrinsic leaders, and fund-raising.

**Section 14.4: The Social Work Role of Advocate**

Another social work role required by the *NASW Code of Ethics* (NASW, 2018) is that of the advocate. In advocacy, we represent clients to others. We can carry out advocacy on all system levels, after we have seen that clients are unable to advocate on their own behalf. Skills used by advocates include direct and legislative advocacy. In all cases, it is important that workers collaborate with client systems in the advocacy process.

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### SELF-REFLECTION 14: ASSERTION SELF-STATEMENT TEST–REVISED

**PURPOSE:** To measure self-statements in relation to assertiveness.

**AUTHORS:** Richard G. Heimberg, Emil J. Chiauzzi, Robert E. Becker, and Rita Madrazo-Peterson

**DESCRIPTION:** The ASST-R is a 24-item instrument designed to assess the role of self-statements in assertive (or nonassertive) behaviors. Self-statements are assumed to have a crucial role in affecting assertiveness and unassertiveness. The ASST-R was devised to teach these self-statements and to assess the relationship to assertiveness. The ASST-R consists of 12 positive and 12 negative self-statements. The ASST-R is viewed as a useful measure for teaching cognitive changes in problems involving nonassertive behavior.

**NORMS:** The ASST-R was studied with three samples including 12 psychiatric patients of mixed diagnosis randomly selected from a mental health clinic in Albany, New York; 16 adults from the center’s nonprofessional staff; and 20 college students.

The means for positive self-statements were as follows:

- Students = 44
- Staff = 39
- Psychiatric patients = 33

The means for negative self-statements were:

- Students = 27
- Staff = 23
- Psychiatric patients = 37

(Continued)
THE ASSERTION SELF-STATEMENT TEST–REVISED

It is obvious that people think a variety of things when they’re responding in different situations. These thoughts, along with feelings, determine what kind of responses a person will make.

Below is a list of things that you may have thought to yourself at some time while responding in the assertive situations. Read each item, and decide how frequently you may have been thinking a similar thought during the assertive situations.

Circle a number from 1 to 5 for each item. The scale is interpreted as follows:

1 = Hardly ever had the thought
2 = Rarely had the thought
3 = Sometimes had the thought
4 = Often had the thought
5 = Very often had the thought

Please answer as honestly as possible:

1. I was thinking that I was too nervous to say what I felt. 1 2 3 4 5
2. I was thinking that the other person would suspect some ulterior motive if I said anything. 1 2 3 4 5
3. I was thinking that the other person should respect an honest expression of feelings. 1 2 3 4 5
4. I was thinking that many people fail to get involved or stand up for themselves in similar situations so there is nothing wrong with my keeping quiet. 1 2 3 4 5
5. I was thinking that I could benefit by expressing myself. 1 2 3 4 5
6. I was thinking that I should act in accord with what I think is right. 1 2 3 4 5
7. I was thinking that if I could avoid this situation I could somehow relieve my discomfort. 1 2 3 4 5
8. I was thinking that it would be selfish of me to let my own feelings be known. 1 2 3 4 5
9. I was thinking that I could express myself in a calm, relaxed way. 1 2 3 4 5
10. I was thinking that I would appear incompetent or inadequate if I tried to take a stand. 1 2 3 4 5

SCORING: Each item is rated for frequency on a 5-point scale, and the individual items are summed for scores on the positive and negative dimensions. Total scores are not used. Positive items = 3, 5, 6, 9, 13, 14–16, 19, 21–23. Negative items = 1, 2, 4, 7, 8, 10–12, 17, 18, 20, 24.

VALIDITY: The ASST-R significantly discriminates between patients and the other two groups for good known-group validity.

PRIMARY REFERENCE:
11. I was thinking that something bad would happen to me if I tried to express myself. 1 2 3 4 5
12. I was thinking that the other person wouldn’t like me if I offered my opinion. 1 2 3 4 5
13. I was thinking that my opinions and decisions should be respected if they are reasonable. 1 2 3 4 5
14. I was thinking that since letting my feelings be known was an effective course of action in the past, I should do likewise now. 1 2 3 4 5
15. I was thinking that I would only be hurting myself by not expressing myself. 1 2 3 4 5
16. I was thinking that future interactions with the other person might be damaged if I didn’t say what I felt now. 1 2 3 4 5
17. I was thinking that since similar past experiences resulted in failure or ineffectiveness, I shouldn’t bother to do anything now. 1 2 3 4 5
18. I was thinking that I would probably feel guilty later if I refused to do the person a favor. 1 2 3 4 5
19. I was thinking that there didn’t seem to be a good reason why I shouldn’t speak my mind. 1 2 3 4 5
20. I was thinking that I would become embarrassed if I let my feelings be known. 1 2 3 4 5
21. I was thinking that if I didn’t state my opinion now, it might cause problems later on. 1 2 3 4 5
22. I was thinking that my views are important. 1 2 3 4 5
23. I was thinking that if I didn’t speak up, it would interfere with my plans. 1 2 3 4 5
24. I was thinking that a friendly person would not impose his/her views in this situation. 1 2 3 4 5

**Recommended Websites**

Universal Declaration of Human Rights (United Nations, 1948):

**Critical Terms for Roles and Skills in Work With Communities**

- social justice 409
- place communities 412
- nonplace communities 412
- focus group 415
- expert presentation and testimony 415
- key informant interview 415
- secondary data 416
- client representative group 416
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- organizing 425
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### Generalist Practice Curriculum Matrix With 2015 Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards

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Competency 7: Assess Individuals, Families, Groups, Organizations, and Communities

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Competency 8: Intervene With Individuals, Families, Groups, Organizations, and Communities

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Competency 9: Evaluate Practice With Individuals, Families, Groups, Organizations, and Communities

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References


**Recommended Readings**