Community Development

BACKGROUND

The development of strong communities has long been a tenet of the social work profession (Shulman, 2009). Strong communities play a protective role in human development. Community development practice has defined and is often cited as the birth of the social work profession. It dates back to the 19th century, with the settlement house movement and social work leaders such as Jane Addams (Kirst-Ashman & Hull, 2009). This early work outlined the value of empowerment of people to direct their assets to improve social conditions. This general framework, which revolves around central democratic principles, has stood as a core value of community development to this day (Rubin & Rubin, 2008). Community development is focused on improvement in the lives of community members, with specific attention to those areas that form the bonds of membership (Butterfield & Chisanga, 2008). The social work profession's early community development efforts are notable for setting a practice agenda that called for a simultaneous focus on the interrelationship of the individual's and the community's development (Kirst-Ashman & Hull, 2009).

As society and the profession grew throughout the 20th century, community development, as a scope of practice, went through several developmental phases (Butterfield & Chisanga, 2008). The 1930s were a time of great expansion, with a large-scale federal response to address the compounded effects of the Great Depression (Kirst-Ashman & Hull, 2009). In the 1950s, the primary focus was on building an infrastructure of organizations that provided social services (Milligan, 2008). The 1960s saw the well-known emergence of social action campaigns to address community concerns. The results were far reaching in terms of both large-scale social policy reforms—such as the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964 (P.L. 88-452), the Model Cities Program, and the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (P.L. 88-352)—and the growth of empowerment in communities of interest, such as women, African Americans, and gay communities. These efforts continued into the 1970s. Increasingly, though, the debate over the etiology of challenges faced by community members gained strength, with some advocating for an individual pathology understanding, whereas others favored a more holistic understanding of how the larger societal forces compounded to form challenges. The 1980s and 1990s saw the beginning of decreased federal funding to state and local governments, a decline in the overall strength of the national economy, and a growing call for personal responsibility. These societal changes had profound effects on the practice of community development. The cyclical nature of community development is often seen as a low watermark in the field (Fisher & Harding, 2008).

Communities have inherent strengths and resources and the capacity to positively address their own issues. The increasing complexity of U.S. society and the demands placed on the organizations, structures, and policies that affect communities present opportunities for democratic involvement. Community development work is directed at strengthening, empowering, and building community capacity in the face of the challenges presented by 21st century society (Gamble & Weil, 2008; Streeter, 2008). The viability of a community development approach draws on the assets of the diverse stakeholders who are involved in the community and how those assets are used to address the community challenges (Council on Accreditation of Services for Children and Families, 2008). Community development "establishes a process that promotes people

working together for a common purpose in groups and organizations" (Milligan, 2008). With community members' participation, focused planning, and commitment, community development efforts work to increase the capacity of the community and its members in an increasingly complex and interdependent world. Community development work is thought of as both a process and as goal driven, with qualitative and quantitative goals as expected outcomes (Butterfield & Chisanga, 2008).

Effective community social work practice is integrative, comprehensive, collaborative, participatory, strengths and asset focused, founded on building capacity, sustainable, empowerment focused, focused on the present with an eye on the future, and inclusive (Mizrahi, 2009). Effective community development practice requires a multitude of skills sets (Shulman, 2009). Increasingly, these skills sets are seen as essential in the toolkit of all social workers. As an aspect of macro practice, the social work profession is seen as well positioned to play a major role in community development (Rothman, 2008).

The role of social work in community development varies. Some of the key roles that social work assumes are those of facilitator, enabler, mediator, broker, coordinator, and mobilizer (Kirst-Ashman & Hull, 2009). Each role can be seen as playing a part in supporting the linkages in the community and in supporting the process of building the capacity of the community to achieve its goals. The methods used by social workers to achieve the community's goals include, but are not limited to, facilitating and participating in the community's work to identify its core values, belief systems, rights, assets, resources, strengths, needs, and goals. Social workers engage with the community to create community-building strategies to meet the community's goals by collecting and analyzing data, studying alternatives, facilitating the community's selection of a course of action, facilitating and helping to implement this action, training and developing staff and community leadership, identifying and developing funding sources, and establishing ongoing evaluations and feedback mechanisms (Kirst-Ashman & Hull, 2009; Shulman, 2009). Com-

munity development social work is in the scope of practice that has direct connection to the profession's ethical responsibility to the broader society (NASW, 2008). Section 6 of the NASW *Code of Ethics* outlines responsibilities related to improving social welfare and promoting public participation and engagement in social and political action. In turn, community practice is supported by the Council on Social Work Education (2008) as a core competency of both undergraduate and graduate social work education.

In response to the increasing complexity of community life and challenges, social work has seen the rise of newer practice models—much of which is rooted in empowerment practice (Shulman, 2009)—that are well designed to meet the current challenges. Among these are consensus organizing (Ohmer & DeMasi, 2009), capacity development (Cnaan & Rothman, 2008), applications of the strengths perspective (Saleebey, 2009), community resiliency (Kulig, Edge, & Joyce, 2008), community empowerment (Miley, O'Melia, & DuBois, 2009), asset building in communities (Han, Grinstein-Weiss, & Sherraden, 2009), micro-enterprise and micro-credit (Yunus, 2006), and community capacity (Huebner, Mancini, Bowen, & Orthner, 2009). In addition, the community development social work literature has been increasingly augmented by international sources and practices (Cox & Pawar, 2006).

Twenty-first century social work practice has been marked by a return to the prominence of community development and attention given to macro social work practice (Kirst-Ashman & Hull, 2009). Spurred in part by the challenges outlined by Robert Putnam in the 1990s related to the state of community in the modern society, 21st century community development approaches have regained prominence as a critical field of practice (Netting, Kettner, & McMurtry, 2008).

ISSUE STATEMENT

The challenges present in the second decade of the 21st century include major global issues such as the worldwide economic downturn, large-scale environmental threats, civil unrest,

wars and terrorism, and the resulting negative impacts that such challenges bring to communities. Determining the positive use of technology as a way to strengthen communities is a challenge to social work practice and policy, resulting in a need for meaningful community development in these areas (Mizrahi, 2009).

The concept of community is far-reaching and reflects the many different ways that human beings are linked, including natural disasters that have affected the global economic scene such as the earthquake and tsunami that occurred in Japan in 2011. Some of these linkages are physical linkages, such as a neighborhood community. Some are online communities or social networks. Communities may also be defined by the affinities of their members, such as people living with certain physical, emotional, financial, cultural, intellectual, and developmental challenges. Regardless of the type of community, the linkages and sense of belonging are seen as central constructs (Rubin & Rubin, 2008). The communities of the 21st century are increasingly affected by the significant social, economic, political, and cultural changes that affect these vital linkages and, thereby, create needs and opportunities for social work services. A rapidly changing society requires ongoing attention to the manner in which social work considers community, understands community, engages community, and ultimately works to make change in the community.

The effects of societal changes, in combination with changing societal structures, pose challenges to the supports that community membership can provide. Factors that affect community life include, but are not limited to, inadequate programs and resources that supports self-determination to empower individual and community successes; changing demographics in physical communities; the ever-changing political climate; the effects of globalization; income disparities and health disparities; deterioration of neighborhoods; lack of affordable housing and related services; homelessness; social disorganization; violence, institutionalization and deinstitutionalization of varied communities; underachievement in educational settings, including low graduation rates; domestic violence; divorce rates; unplanned and teen-age pregnancies; infant mortality rates; racial, class, and political tensions; and disenfranchisement and discrimination against diverse groups (which may include, but are not limited to, people of color; those considered undocumented; the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender community; people who are aging; returning military/veterans and their families; and women). These factors and others increasingly present a challenge to the ability of communities to foster social well-being, protection, and an enhanced quality of life (Hill & Blanck 2009; Rotabi, Gammonley, Gamble, & Weil, 2007; Tett, 2006).

POLICY STATEMENT

NASW recognizes the wide range of compounding issues and forces that affect the variety of community life in the 21st century. As such, NASW endorses the following policy and practice principles:

■ The right of a community and its individual members to reach their full potential

■ Communities gaining access to information and resources, developing participatory organizational mechanisms, and helping members make socially responsible decisions and contributions

■ Community-identified goals and concerns being in the forefront of all community development activities

■ Community development practice including continuous reflection on the intersection and role of diversity and pluralism within the community exchange

■ Social work curriculums related to community development being continually revised and integrated to ensure that the ever-changing field of community development policy and practice remains current and viable

■ Social work students being knowledgeable about the ways in which communities and populations can become more involved and competent in drawing on their strengths and assets to solve problems and enhance the quality of their lives

■ The development of community leaders who can address the needs of community and participate in the coordination of the multidisciplinary efforts of a variety of community groups

■ Initiatives that support state and local community development

■ Federal, state, and private funding procurement to assure community development successes

■ Legislation supporting the self-identified needs of communities and strategies that directly engage community residents in leadership and service provision.

REFERENCES

Butterfield, A. K., & Chisanga, B. (2008). Community development. In T. Mizrahi & L. E. Davis (Eds.-in-Chief), *Encyclopedia of social work* (20th ed., Vol. 1, pp. 375–381). Washington, DC, and New York: NASW Press & Oxford University Press.

Civil Rights Act of 1964, P.L. 88-352, 78 Stat. 241 (1964).

Cnaan, R., & Rothman, J. (2008). Capacity development and the building of community. In J. Rothman, J. Erlich, & J. Tropman (Eds.), *Strategies of community intervention* (7th ed., pp. 243–262). Peosta, IA: Eddie Bower.

Council on Accreditation of Services for Children and Families. (2008). *Standards and self-study manual* (8th ed., version 1.0). New York: Author.

Council on Social Work Education. (2008). *Educational policy and accreditation standards.* Alexandria, VA: Author.

Cox, D., & Pawar, M. (2006). *International social work: Issues, strategies and programs.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Economic Opportunity Act of 1964, P.L. 88-452, 78 Stat. 508 (1964).

Fisher, R., & Harding, S. (2008). Political life and public life: The context for community organizing. In J. Rothman, J. Erlich, & J. Tropman (Eds.), *Strategies of community intervention* (7th ed., pp. 5–26). Peosta, IA: Eddie Bower.

Gamble, D. N., & Weil, M. (2008). Community: Practice interventions. In T. Mizrahi & L. E. Davis (Eds.-in-Chief), *Encyclopedia of social work* (20th ed., Vol. 1, pp. 355–368). Washington, DC, and New York: NASW Press & Oxford University Press.

Han, C.-K., Grinstein-Weiss M., & Sherraden, M. (2009). Assets beyond savings in individual development accounts. *Social Service Review, 83,* 221–244.

Hill, E., & Blanck, P. (2009). Future of disability rights advocacy and "the right to live in the world." *Texas Journal on Civil Liberties & Civil Rights, 15*(1), 1+. Retrieved from http://www.questia.com/PM.qst?a=o&d=5044785678

Huebner, A. J., Mancini, J. A., Bowen, G. L., & Orthner, D. K. (2009). Shadowed by war: Building community capacity to support military families. *Family Relations, 58,* 216–228.

Kirst-Ashman, K., & Hull, G., Jr. (2009). *Generalist practice with organizations and communities* (2nd ed.). Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.

Kulig, J., Edge, S., & Joyce, B. (2008). Community resiliency as a measure of collective health status. *Canadian Journal of Nursing Research, 40,* 92–110.

Miley, K., O'Melia, M., & DuBois, B. (2009). *Generalist social work practice: An empowering approach* (6th ed.). Boston: Pearson.

Milligan, S. (2008). Community building. In T. Mizrahi & L. E. Davis (Eds.-in-Chief), *Encyclopedia of social work* (20th ed., Vol. 1, pp. 371–375). Washington, DC, and New York: NASW Press & Oxford University Press.

Mizrahi, T. (2009). Community organizing principles and practice guidelines. In A. Roberts (Ed.), *Social workers' desk reference* (2nd ed., pp. 872–881). New York: Oxford University Press.

National Association of Social Workers. (2008). *Code of ethics of the National Association of Social Workers.* Washington, DC: Author.

Netting, F. E., Kettner, P., & McMurtry, S. (2008). *Social work macro practice* (4th ed.). Boston: Pearson.

Ohmer, M., & DeMasi, K. (2009). *Consensus organizing: A community development workbook.* Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.

Rotabi, K. S., Gammonley, D., Gamble, D. N., & Weil, M. O. (2007). Integrating globaliza-

tion into the social work curriculum. *Journal of Sociology & Social Welfare, 34,* 165. Retrieved from http://www.questia.com/PM.qst?a=o&d=5024109510

Rothman, J. (2008). Multi modes of community intervention. In J. Rothman, J. Erlich, & J. Tropman (Eds.), *Strategies of community intervention* (7th ed., pp. 141–170). Peosta, IA: Eddie Bower.

Rubin, H., & Rubin, I. (2008). *Community organizing and development* (4th ed.). Boston: Pearson.

Saleebey, D. (2009). *The strengths perspective in social work practice* (5th ed.). Boston: Pearson.

Shulman, L. (2009). *The skills of helping individuals, families, groups, and Communities* (6th ed.). Belmont, CA: Brooks/Cole.

Streeter, C. (2008). Community: Overview. In T. Mizrahi & L. E. Davis (Eds.-in-Chief), *Encyclopedia of social work* (20th ed., Vol. 1, pp. 347–355). Washington, DC, and New York: NASW Press & Oxford University Press.

Tett, L. (Ed.). (2006). *Community education, life-long learning and social inclusion* (2nd ed.). Edinburgh, Scotland: Dunedin Academic Press. Retrieved from http://www.questia.com/PM.qst?a=o&d=113445710

Yunus, M. (2006). The Nobel Peace Prize 2006: Nobel lecture. *Law and Business Review of the Americas, 13.* Retrieved from http://heinonline.org/HOL/Page?handle=hein.journals/lbramrca13&div=24&g_sent=1&collection=journals

NASW Members with Primary Responsibility for Revision of This Policy

First Draft Revision:

Jed Metzger (NYS)

Policy Panelists:

Joanne Iurato (CT)
Leah Lazzaro (NJ)
Tanya Roberts (NC)
Myke Selha (IA)
Mary Bishop (TX)
Rick Collins (CA)
Anna Scheyett (NC)