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Community-Based Interventions

Philosophy and Action



Springer

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Preface

In the field of social service delivery, the term community-based is very popular nowadays. Nonetheless, the idea that interventions should have a grassroots orientation is not new. Since the passage of the Community Mental Health Act (1963) in the USA, along with similar proposals and supportive political movements in other parts of the world, services should be decentralized and persons should be evaluated and treated in their respective communities. The basic premise of this change is that social interventions will be attuned to the aims of those who use these programs and, thus, be sustainable in the long-run.

A key assumption of this book, however, is that most of these programs have not, and will not, become community-based. Although these projects may be located in communities, and possibly adopt the appropriate rhetoric, their ties to local persons will be weak. The reason for this failure is straightforward: that is, these interventions are not guided by a philosophical position that is consistent with becoming truly community-based. The policies and practices that are vital to becoming community-based will not be undertaken.

However, once this shift in philosophy is made, practically every facet of service delivery must be rethought. New perspectives on methodology, leadership, and community organizations, for example, must be proposed and adopted. Fundamental to these changes is that community members must be actively involved in and control every aspect of an intervention. Without the integration of these persons into the core of all interventions, these programs should not be considered community-based.

In this book, the reader is provided with some history, philosophy, and examples of community projects, in order to illustrate the various dimensions of a community-based intervention. As part of this reorientation, new language and novel ways of thinking about communities and social planning are introduced. In fact, some of these concepts and descriptives may seem odd at first. The point, however, is to think outside of the usual ways in which social interventions are conceptualized, implemented, and evaluated.

However, this community-based strategy does not represent simply a new philosophy. A political side is also present. Simply put, through community-based initiatives persons should not only obtain more relevant services but gain control of

their lives. In this way, the malaise that currently plagues society, whereby persons feel alienated from their basic institutions, can be reversed. The political thrust of community-based projects, in other words, is to promote the autonomy of communities.

Given the recent improvements in social theory, and the links established between this philosophy and practice, the development of community-based projects on a wide scale is not difficult to imagine. The prospect of communities planning and monitoring their health care, for example, is not fictional any longer. The hope is that this book can contribute in a small way to the realization of this end. Once persons begin to control their communities, they may begin to expand their goals and envision a society where everyone participates in the planning of institutions and is treated with dignity. Hence, community-based projects may be able to promote the alternative, and more humane, world that many protestors around the globe believe is necessary to improve the lives of everyone, but especially those who are poor.

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