

# 13

## Using Organizing: Acting in Concert

Goodbye Bill. I die like a true blue rebel. *Don't waste any time in mourning. Organize...*  
Could you arrange to have my body hauled to the state line to be buried? I don't want  
to be found dead in Utah.

*Joe Hill, labor organizer, songwriter, martyr<sup>1</sup>*

Community organizers ... are passionate, because they believe that change is possible, and because they enjoy working with people. ... although it is not an occupation that leads to great wealth, community organizers can make a living at it. ... They do well by doing good.

*Szakos and Szakos (2007, p. xi)*

Community organizing involves connecting people in communities to change the status quo. Community organization brings together people in defined geographic or functional areas to protect and strengthen their social connectiveness, cohesion, and capacity. It can develop communities and mobilize people for change through social action. Community organization can be progressive or radically reactionary, like the Tea Bagger (aka Tea Party) movement (Barstow, 2010; Ferris, 2009; Kim, 2010; Raban, 2010). What distinguishes a progressive community organization and organizer is the pursuit of social justice in the organizing. Changing society is never easy, but this chapter, as has the previous chapters, will describe ways to mobilize the community, whether the focus of change is building community or promoting a social cause. This aim of this chapter is to convey what progressive community work is like today in terms of its goals, approaches, and preoccupations. But be forewarned: progressive community organizations and social actions pursuing social justice face greater obstacles and challenges from the conservative media and power holders than do reactionary and conservative organizations such

as the Tea Party Bagger movement (Nichols, 2010; Raban, 2010). Efforts to appoint liberal Supreme Court justices (Baker, 2010), and the media and legislative pillorying of Association of Community Organizations for Reform, ACORN, with Congress passing laws defunding ACORN based on unproven charges made by deceitful radical conservatives reveal the uneven playing field for progressive organizers (vanden Heuvel, 2010a, 2010b).

Organizing has a proud history. Traditionally, organizing emphasizes “mobilizing community residents to form their own identities, renew their interest in public life, and fight for their rights across a broad range of issues” (Kingsley, McNeely, & Gibson, 1997, p. 27). Organizing also entails economic and social analysis. Success comes from “strong people skills to bring people together and keep them inspired and working well; capable organization to assure that the work involved actually gets done; and strategic savvy in order to pick the right objectives and the right public actions to win them” (Shultz, 2002, p. 97).

Community organization and community practice methodologies have long been part of

progressive social work's arsenal for change. They also are part of clinical and direct social work practice's responsibilities. They help the micro practitioners be part of activities such as building community capacity, identifying community assets, creating caring social connections, and joining with others to promote community cohesion and individual and group self-respect. Workers practicing on a micro and personal level can still be social change agents pursuing social justice and drawing attention to social injustices, and they should become knowledgeable about the problems clients share so that others trust their expertise and recommendations. Community intervention encompasses the ability to tap community strengths and the skills of including, linking, engaging, and empowering clients as citizens.

## Community Organizing and Organizations

### The Current Scene

Community practice has increased the status, if not the popularity, of our profession and workplaces. President Obama lists it on his résumé. Despite the increased efforts and successes of radical conservatives and the challenges to ACORN, progressive organizing and advocacy is robust. Even a list as impressive as MoveOn.org, Americans United for Separation of Church and State, Highlander Research and Education Center, Industrial Area Foundation, Neighborhood Assistance Corporation of America, Center for Community Change, Take Back the Land, and the National Low Income Housing Coalition does not scratch the surface of the inventory of progressive organizations.<sup>2</sup> As the epigram at the beginning of this chapter said, "They do well by doing good" (Szakos & Szakos, 2007, p. xi).

Community practice involves working beside people of varied backgrounds to create a culture of change, identify assets, link groups, and pursue social justice. Spirited community organizations make the crucial difference between a vital community and a stagnant one, between a community dominated by controlling vertical corporations and the moneyed class and a community run by and for the grassroots.

Community workers increasingly are celebrated as creators of social capital and sustainers of social communities.

### The Earlier Scene

The contemporary community intervention activity is both a rebirth and continuation of the community-focused efforts of the 1960s with new auspices and rhetoric. The 1980s and 1990s were somewhat tranquil for progressive community action. Liberalism was in full retreat, if not in hiding. It was an era more characterized by public self-introspection and the pursuit of the material than the social good. The current activity, which ideally is not short-lived, is being motivated without the federal encouragement and fiscal subsidies provided by the earlier Economic Opportunity Act, Model Cities, and the range of New Frontiers and Great Society legislation. University of Maryland social work professor Mark Battle, the former executive director of the National Association of Social Workers, called the 1960s the "first substantive federal-to-community-to-people program. . . . Its design and operation had facilitated . . . a flow of money from the federal government to the man on the street." From his vantage point as Administrator of Work Training Programs of the U.S. Department of Labor's Manpower Administration during this era, Battle concluded that the broadly based War on Poverty "enriched democracy" and gave "worth in the larger public mind to poor people" (Battle, n.d., para. 7, 15). The programs of the 1960s included the federally supported domestic programs of the Great Society and War on Poverty programs ranging from the Economic Opportunity Act's Community Action programs, Head Start, Job Corps, Neighborhood Youth Corp; Model Cities; Volunteers in Service to America (VISTA); Manpower Development and Training Act; Comprehensive Community Mental Health Act; and the Peace Corps abroad. There are remnants today of that heady time in Head Start and over 1,000 surviving Community Action Agencies across the nation.<sup>3</sup> However, despite today's Great Recession, there is little government support for community intervention and social justice for the increasing numbers of poor and marginalized.

## Community Building

Minkler (1997) defines community building as “an orientation to community that is strength based rather than need based and stresses the identification, nurturing, and celebration of community assets” (pp. 5–6). Fabricant and Fisher (2002a, 2002b) call community building the most significant social service work of the 21st century. They view it as a process based on principles of reciprocity, respect, inclusiveness, and accountability. Some authors equate community building with community empowerment. It matters less what the process is called, as long as it facilitates collective change (Checkoway, 1997) and empowers “disadvantaged citizens to more effectively define and advance their own life chances” (Turner, 1998, p. ix). Many of the activities listed in Box 13.1 relate to community building, engaging a community to improve itself.

Two distinguishing features of community building are (a) collaboration, to tap the strengths of both displaced and well-placed citizens (Martinez-Brawley, 2000), and (b) engagement by the community itself, in contrast to the use of peripatetic professional organizers (Minkler,

1997) or remote social service providers. When professionals are involved, ideally they partner with community groups rather than dominate them (Turner, 2009).

Usually community-building initiatives have four elements:

- Focus on specific, geographically defined target areas
- Planning based on a recognition of community assets and available resources as well as needs (see Assets Inventory and Mapping in chapters 5 and 6)
- Community participation in the governance, planning, and implementation of development activities
- Comprehensive development, including an attempt to integrate economic, physical, and human development activities (Chaskin, Joseph, & Chipenda-Dansokho, 1997, p. 435; also see Foster-Fishman, Cantillon, Pierce, & Van Egeren, 2007; Frisch & Servon, 2006; Geoghean & Powell, 2006; Heenan, 2004; Steeves & Blevins, 2005)

This requires community practitioners to “work across multiple systems simultaneously”

### BOX 13.1. Current Modus Operandi

Different groups are coming together to improve their communities, at least from their perspectives. Ordinary residents use groups and community organizing to make themselves heard in local and regional decision making, with and some without mandates requiring resident-driven planning. Sometimes shouting from their side and their opponents drowns out rational discourse. Some are true grassroots groups; others are Astroturf organizations (groups

that are presented as grassroots organizations but are often sponsored by corporate interests and lobbyists) and Potemkin organizations (false-front organizations designed to appear larger than they actually are). No single ideology or approach prevails. Web sites, media stories, and professional articles are filled with write-ups of community change success and failure. Some community organizing concepts are:

coalitions  
 collaboratives  
 community development  
 community organizing  
 community revitalization  
 comprehensive initiatives  
 constituency building  
 cultural strategies  
 empowerment zones  
 faith-based groups  
 healthy cities

holistic approach  
 interorganizational networks  
 internet and networking  
 local regeneration  
 neighborhood issues  
 participatory planning  
 partnerships  
 resident involvement  
 social entrepreneurship  
 sustainable development

(Mulroy & Matsuoka, 2000, p. 229). Community capacity building uses established or new organizations. Community building helps the socially marginalized by surrounding them with a potent village that it takes to nurture and sustain humankind. It is about social cohesion, social infrastructure, and social capital. These have inherent civic and political repercussions.

Warren (2001), emphasizes, however, that building social capital “at the level of local community institutions”:

may not be sufficient, if those community institutions remain detached from our political system. What has largely been overlooked in the debates about social capital is the growing disconnection between politics and what remains of American community life. . . . The political efficacy of turn-of-the-century political parties and twentieth-century cross-class federations both promoted civil participation and benefited from it. . . . Revitalizing democracy, then, requires community building, but also something more: creating institutional links between strong communities and our political system. (p. 19)

Johannesen (1997) holds that vital social development is not possible without political

development and action. Social development inherently involves a redistribution of political control and capacity needed to accompany economic redistribution. Wakefield and Poland (2005) “suggests that social capital cannot be conceived in isolation from economic and political structures. Social capital . . . needs to be placed in its economic and political context, while recognizing that social organization—not just social connection—have impact on personal lives” (p. 2828). These are the empowerment and social integration functions of social work. Social development, social participation, and community building are inherently political (van Deth, 1997).

Saul Alinsky’s biography summarized in Box 13.2 illustrates the political nature of organizing.

### A Well-Known Example of Comprehensive Community Building

Infamous since the 1950s for widespread blight, the South Bronx was a place that Presidents Carter and Reagan visited to wring their hands.

#### BOX 13.2. Saul Alinsky and Grassroots Organizing

Saul Alinsky (1909–1972), son of an Orthodox Jewish Russian tailor, studied sociology at the University of Chicago. Alinsky married a social worker. His career started as a youth street worker concerned with the social milieu of delinquents. Alinsky, who hated to see fellow humans pushed around, demonstrated that (a) mass-based organizing can be accomplished with unsophisticated people and (b) organizing skills can be taught. He has inspired thousands of organizing projects by both progressives and now even the radical right.

Alinsky’s classic books, *Reveille for Radicals* and *Rules for Radicals*, serve as a social activist’s bible. They details Alinsky’s philosophy, theory, leadership building techniques, and nonviolent conflict and disruptive tactics for social action.

Alinsky’s approach was to develop and work with talented indigenous leaders and build mass people’s organizations, gaining recognition for local leaders and power for the organization so that dominant employers in the community, such as Eastman Kodak, would negotiate with them. He believed that

change can come about through the use of real and perceived power. In the 1940s, Alinsky organized the Back of the (Stock) Yards, a working-class Polish area in Chicago, in part by uniting labor unions and Catholic functionaries—groups that historically had been at odds. He convinced them that it was in their self-interest to coalesce. His forte was strategic thinking coupled with spontaneous, disruptive tactics. He was a master of gaining the support of and resources from influential people. Marshall Field III, a department store heir to a fortune; Catholic Bishop Bernard Shiel; and Kathryn Lewis, daughter of United Mine Workers union leader John L. Lewis, helped establish the Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF) to support Alinsky’s work in furthering democracy. Gordon Sherman used Midas Muffler money to help Alinsky launch a training institute.

Alinsky is remembered as a fighter for the disenfranchised and someone who put democracy into action. He still inspires and guides both reactionary and progressive community organizers. For an Alinsky biography, see Horwitt (1989).

Then, in 1977, some impoverished families rehabbed three abandoned apartment buildings slated for demolition. 'Following this restoration, each apartment was sold for \$250 to those who had invested 600 hours of labor in restoring the building. . . . In addition, the families created a grassroots self-help organization known as the Banana Kelly Community Improvement Association' (Abatena, 1997, p. 28).

Major resurrection started in 1986 with new housing built by community development corporations (CDCs), which gave themselves names such as Mid-Bronx Desperadoes (Grogan & Proscio, 2001). Still, the schools and other services remained pathetic. Much of the later progress is due to Anita Miller, a leader who convinced the Surdna Foundation to underwrite massive changes: "A one-time banker . . . Miller had been intimately involved with South Bronx CDCs as a program officer at the Ford Foundation and later as program director at the Local Initiatives Support Corporation. Well connected to everyone who mattered in both the public and private sectors, Anita Miller not only recognized the paradox [of physical renaissance with inadequate human supports] but was bursting to do something about it" (Schorr, 1997, pp. 329–330).

Collaborative community building does not always go smoothly or solve every problem (Meyer, 2002), but the South Bronx as an environment now has new resources (day care, senior services, retail services) and is more livable. Successful community builders must function well in their local community ecosystem and be cognizant of the interstices between it and larger societal institutions (Bowen & Richman, 2002, p. 68).

### Patch Approach as Micro Community Building

In the 1970s, Britain developed the *patch approach* as a system of community assistance that deploys teams of human service workers to defined neighborhood-sized geographic catchment areas or *patches* (Payne, 2000, 2002). Fieldworkers, case managers who often lived in their assigned patches as settlers, supported and built "on the resources of informal networks of kin and neighbors" and joined with other local organizations and institutions "to solve both

individual and community problems" (Adams & Krauth, 1995, p. 89). In other words, the patch approach makes use of natural helpers and community networks. Creating a patch team is a decentralized but organized way of providing flexible personal social services to people in an immediate geographic area. However, a locality-based patch can be a rather large patch (a field?) since it often includes 4,000 to 20,000 people (Martinez-Brawley & Delevan, 1993, pp. 171, 181). The patch can be specialized and focused on a particular clientele or general and broad-based (Martinez-Brawley & Delevan, 1993, p. 9). We will discuss the patch approach again in Chapter 14.

#### A CASE EXAMPLE

In 2000 a community development worker was working in the City of Whitehorse, Australia, Box Hill Central Business District (CBD) Youth Services Team to reduce drug-related problems (Rogers & Anderson, 2007). The community development worker established links with business and retail proprietors, shopping center managers, police, community representatives, youth agency representatives, ward councilors, and council staff. Meetings were held throughout the community that focused on relevant topics of concern, with particular emphasis on the public drug consumption by youths in the Box Hill neighborhood. The community worker assisted in efforts to increase drug treatment services in the area, to educate security staff at local businesses regarding appropriate interactions, to increase use of youth centers, and to implement proactive design measures. In addition, this worker helped lead efforts in an education project designed to combat misconceptions about the neighborhood. The project reportedly was successful. The authors assert "the importance of fostering relationships and creating opportunities for open dialogue between key stakeholders probably has universal application" (Rogers & Anderson, 2007, p. 95).

### Communities of Solutions

Successes seldom involve the entire rural or metropolitan community. Community builders know to focus on the "community of solution" (see Assets Inventory and Mapping in chapters 5 and 6), a concept that means that boundaries are defined by problem, actors, and solvers. A community of solution is not bounded by jurisdictional lines of governmental and

voluntary agencies. It can function at any level, even internationally. In health and social services, a typical community of solution involves those organizations and people who want to address an identified problem, perhaps an alliance that gets together because the problem affects everyone in the group (see the above example). As nursing professors Allender and Spradley (2001) note, "Recently communities of solution have formed in many cities to attack the spread of HIV infection. Public health agencies, social service groups, schools, and media personnel have banded together to create public awareness of the dangers present and to promote preventive behaviors" (p. 5).

The community undertakings demonstrate that, despite the shameful national neglect of the poor and their hardscrabble neighborhoods, an array of professions has become involved in meaningful local work and partnerships. These undertakings also demonstrate that community building is an antipoverty effort.

### Asset-Based Community Building

Assets, resources, and strengths have become a central revitalization focus for low-income and inner-city neighborhoods. After banks and insurance companies refused to do business in desperately poor neighborhoods, activists secured the passage and enforcement of the Community Reinvestment Act to stop this practice of "redlining." Prior to the mortgage and lending crisis that sparked the Great Recession, the long-term results of the implementation of this law led to more interest in tangible personal and community assets. Activists and other change agents became equally intrigued by tangible and intangible assets and the talents of people in impoverished neighborhoods, as demonstrated by Philadelphia's Mural Arts Program (<http://www.muralarts.org/whowear/>). The potential for political influence, social capital, and the ability to build relationships are inherent in community building.

Asset assessment is part of good patch analysis. The patch approach looks for the social networks in the patch, establishes communication between groups and between agencies, and assesses structural and personal assets. Full use of the opportunities and resources available to a

community requires a broad, inclusive understanding of the community's assets.

The following are five ways in which assets play a role in urban and rural community practice:

1. Asset building
2. Asset claiming
3. Asset identifying and mobilizing
4. Individual leadership assets
5. Cultural assets

Our abbreviated discussion here is an introduction to a multifaceted practice approach and a chance to see what these efforts reveal about community and community building. Many professionals find the emphasis on intangible assets such as strengths and resiliency to be a better way of working with communities rather than limiting the attention to only problems and deficiencies (Ammerman & Parks, 1998). The community from a strengths perspective builds on what it has (Delgado, forthcoming). Asset inventories and mapping were discussed in the assessment chapters. Once identified, these assets become tools in community building.

### Asset Building

Asset-building programs develop tangible assets such as housing, small business ventures, and savings accounts. They have the potential to change impoverished communities in many ways. Michael Sherraden of the Center for Social Development at the George Warren Brown School of Social Work, Washington University, has long advocated an assets-building approach for the poor (McKernan & Sherraden, 2008; Sherraden, 1991). He holds that asset building with the poor will reduce their dependency on tenuous welfare transfers and provide them with stakes in the community. Community practitioners will need to be familiar with the range and success rates of programs in order to further broad progress. Those engaged in direct practice will want to be aware of opportunities as they help families navigate the path to dignity and economic security.

*Habitat for Humanity.* This well-known nonprofit organization, based in Georgia, is a self-help,

sweat-equity program in which volunteers help families build their own houses and houses for others like themselves. Each family usually puts 300 to 500 hours of labor into their own house as it is built to receive a no-interest mortgage. The idea for Habitat for Humanity International came from minister Clarence Jordan. The organization was founded in 1976 by Millard Fuller, a business partner of Morris Dees, founder of the Southern Poverty Law Center (Walls, 1993). Former President Jimmy Carter's volunteer work with the organization gives it invaluable publicity. The Habitat for Humanity organization has built 150,000 sound homes in 3,000 communities (see <http://www.habitat.org>). Former corporate executives work side by side with church groups and low-income families, and the interaction that occurs between different people is a strength of the program.

**Microenterprise.** There are reportedly over 2 million microenterprises in the United States funded by microenterprise programs (<http://www.microenterpriseworks.org>). Microenterprises targeted at the poor are small businesses that range from a self-employed street vendor or seamstress to a small shop owner. Their size may be only 1 (no one but the owner) up to 50 employees (*What is a Microenterprise*, n.d.). The concept of microenterprises as a way to encourage financial independence started abroad. Economics Professor and 2006 Noble Laureate Muhammad Yunus in 1979 established the Grameen (rural) Bank in Bangladesh with the objectives of eliminating the exploitation of the poor by moneylenders; creating opportunities for self-employment for unemployed people in rural Bangladesh; bringing the disadvantaged, mostly women, into organizational formats they can understand and manage themselves; and creating a cycle of "low income, injection of credit, investment, more income, more savings, more investment, more income" (Banking for the poor, Grameen Bank, 2010). This concept has hundreds of variations in the United States (Banerjee, 2001; <http://www.microenterpriseworks.org/>).

**Individual Development Accounts.** Robert Friedman (2002) of the Corporation for Enterprise Development puts it this way: "To work for,

earn, and own an asset gives one a stake in one's own future. The very process leading to ownership builds the capital, competence, and connections to keep people reaching toward and building dynamic and promising futures" (p. 1). For years, Sherraden and his colleagues have promoted individual development accounts (IDAs), an asset-based policy innovation (Sherraden, 1991). The model encourages the poor to get in the habit of saving, even \$25 to \$30 a month, by matching their savings for the first few years. The savings are for home ownership, an education, and basically community stakes.

### Asset Claiming

Asset claiming can be for individuals, families, categories of workers, or populations. It was discussed in Chapter 1. Social workers have an obligation to help eligible households to obtain the various forms of community mutual support and to identify sources of income, such as the earned income tax credit and child tax credits (Weiss-Gal & Gal, 2009). Just as importantly, social workers can explain to the general public how such supplements and tax reductions lift people out of poverty.

**Living Wage Movement.** The living wage movement is a response to the growing imbalance of America's productivity, with workers getting relatively less and owners significantly more. Economic inequality has ballooned over the past half century, as discussed in Chapter 4. Many global corporations not only fail to share their resources with workers but also fiercely fight any attempts to promote economic democracy. Nevertheless, working people continue to claim a right to fairness in their economic relationships with their employers. Such sentiments have launched community-organizing campaigns to secure a living wage. A living wage differs from the substandard federal minimum wage that will keep a family of three below the meager federal poverty standard; rather, it is a wage that meets the designated standard of living (<http://www.universallivingwage.org/>). The federal government has been unconscionably slow in raising the minimum wage, and therefore organizers have looked for leverage to help workers who are paid

under city contracts or under large government contracts to for-profit firms. The living wage movement has largely been locally based.

The first policy agreement to pay a living wage was negotiated in 1994 with Mayor Kurt Schmoke in Baltimore, Maryland, by a coalition of labor (led by the American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees) and community groups (led by Baltimoreans United in Leadership Development, the Industrial Areas Foundation, and the Solidarity Sponsoring Committee). It required city service contractors and government suppliers to raise the pay of 4,000 low-wage workers (Uchitelle, 1996). The agreement resulted in resetting the starting wage for such workers to \$2.65 above the minimum wage. Similar ordinances have been passed in a number of political jurisdictions (Gertner, 2006). In 2007, Maryland passed the nation's first statewide living wage law after Maryland's voters endorsed a living wage in the 2006 election (<http://www.progressivemaryland.org/page.php?id=148>). The economist Robert Kuttner described the movement as "the most interesting (and under-reported) grassroots enterprise to emerge since the civil rights movement . . . signaling a resurgence of local activism around pocketbook issues" (as quoted by ACORN, n.d., *The Living wage movement*, para. 1).

**Historical Fairness Claims.** A second area of assets claiming is grounded in historical fairness and restitution claims for past injustices and atrocities. They relate to specific populations such as the Amerindians, who were subjected to genocide, ethnic cleansing, and an apartheid reservation system, and are still owed money by the U.S. government and have had their property exploited under government trusteeship. The issues of genocide and ethnic cleansing buttressing the Amerindians' claims as well as the claims of African-Americans rooted in slavery and the racism of the Jim Crow era (Gates, 2010) were discussed in Chapter 1. Now that Japanese-Americans who were interned in camps during World War II have received federal compensation and European workers are being reimbursed by corporations for forced (slave) labor during the same war, there is a precedent for Amerindians and African-Americans to receive the promised but never-delivered assets.

## Individual Leadership Assets

Community leadership is decisive for a vital community (Foster-Fishman, Cantillon, Pierce, & Van Egeren, 2007; Gambone, Yu, Lewis-Charp, Sipe, & Laco, 2006; Hannah, 2006; Ohmer, 2008). Individual leaders, "even idiosyncratic ones," are more likely than plans or ideologies to yield change, according to The Rensselaerville Institute (The Rensselaerville Institute, n.d.). Leadership identification and development are critical organizing tasks in assets inventory, development, and management. There are many ways to solicit and refine individual assets (Lazarri, Ford, & Haughey, 1996; Rodriquez, 1998). Citizen participation in community activities allows identification of actual and potential leaders. There are many grassroots leadership training organizations, including the venerable Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF) headquartered in Chicago (<http://www.industrialareas-foundation.org/index.html>) and the southern Appalachian Highlander Research and Education Center (<http://www.highlandercenter.org/>). Online training resources are readily available, generally at no cost, from organizations such as the W. K. Kellogg Foundation (Monteiro-Tribble, n.d.) and Americans United for Separation of Church and State (<http://www.au.org/take-action/activist/>).

There are potential and undiscovered leaders in almost every community. Maggie Kuhn, founder of the Gray Panthers and an advocate for the elderly, didn't emerge as a leader until she attained senior citizen status. Women are often an untapped resource. Despite the wealth of personal assets in communities, most usually are not applied to social goals, because people are scattered and undirected. An individual may embody valuable assets such as knowing the community and being nurturing of others but lack confidence. Gathering these people together, orienting them, and creating situations for empowerment are key tasks. Any training, whether in workshops or workbooks, must be a complement to participation in the community. Community participation allows emergence of potential leaders, networking, and building social capital. The community practitioner needs to develop "winnable" projects with the community and potential leaders. The community practitioner can help

nurture confidence and greater community empowerment with social action and community projects that are successful.

This is not to say that only potential leaders count. Each individual has strengths and weaknesses, assets,<sup>4</sup> and practitioners can connect people and their assets through networking to increase community and individual empowerment, community cohesion, and social capital.

To identify potential and current community leaders, community builders can use key informants with reputational assessments: Who cares about the issue? Who has had problems with the issue, if anyone? Who knows and is known on the issue? Whom would you turn to for advice on the issue (or generally)? The names are inventoried and eco-mapped for social networks. The names most often mentioned and those with network centrality are the most promising potential leaders.

Leadership assets include personal qualities like being trustworthy and having emotional maturity, intelligence, and honesty and skills like raising money. Organizer Si Kahn writes about cultivating, supporting, and spotting community leaders: a leader is “someone who helps show us the directions we want to go and who helps us go in those directions” (1991, p. 21).

## Cultural Assets

A function of culture, any culture, is to provide people with an integrated system of tools, symbols, language, and beliefs to understand and relate to the physical and social world (Jenks, 2005). It gives its adherents a sense of community, identity, and history and the ability to construct a reality. Culture provides intangible and tangible assets. A community’s culture contains many assets, and sometimes liabilities.

Communities can create and enrich cultural assets that will contribute to their social solidarity. An example is Philadelphia’s Mural Arts Program (<http://www.muralarts.org/whoware/>). Its mission is to unite “artists and communities through a collaborative process, rooted in the traditions of mural-making, to create art that transforms public spaces and individual lives.” Since the Mural Arts Program began in 1984 as a component of the Philadelphia Anti-Graffiti Network, under the direction of

muralist Jane Golden, it has produced over 2,800 murals and involved over 20,000 underserved youth in neighborhoods throughout Philadelphia. The Anti-Graffiti Network reached out to graffiti writers to redirect their energies from destructive graffiti writing to constructive mural painting. Mural-making provided a support structure for the youths to develop their artistic skills and empowered them to take an active role in beautifying their communities. Mural projects often include stabilization of abandoned lots and revitalization of open spaces. Today’s Mural Arts Program, a nonprofit organization, is an innovative and successful public/private partnership. Community participants include block captains, neighborhood associations, public schools, community development corporations, local nonprofits, and city agencies.

## Using Community Assets

To establish and use a successful assets program, we must make a regular practice of finding out who knows what and who knows whom: assets inventorying and mapping. We must be on the lookout for knowledge linkages (Fesenmaier & Contractor, 2001) and social-emotional linkages between individuals, groups, associations, and social institutions. An important element of community building is networking in and to a community.

We also must be on the lookout for the unattached. Social and organizational networks are much more powerful when reinforced by emotional bonds. Faceless or neglected individuals need to be connected to fellow human beings. For this reason, along with practical considerations, the late Maggie Kuhn, organizer of the Gray Panthers, promoted the concept of the “healthy block.” It makes sense for people to care about and look after each other in times of crisis. If neighbors would spare a little time to become familiar with the needs of those in the immediate neighborhood, we could move beyond neighborhood crime watches and into true community.

## Organizing

*Relationships and Belief Bonding.* A born organizer, the late Senator Paul Wellstone was “famous for talking not just to the customers of the cafes

he loved to frequent, but for going into the kitchen, talking up the dishwashers and fry cooks, urging them not only to vote for him but also to demand more for themselves. He befriended U.S. Capitol security guards and brought them home to dinner” (Smith & Lopez, 2002, p. 1). He formed relationships. Twenty thousand people celebrated his life at his memorial service life. Having an affinity and respect for people is crucial.

Building relationships is a necessary first step in “belief bonding” with the constituency: creating a belief that together, the community practitioner and the groups composing the constituency, the initiator, client, change agent, action, and support systems, can effect change. Organizers must also gain the trust of strangers and create a climate where people want to mobilize themselves. Alinsky holds that only the people can build a people’s organization for change (Alinsky, 1969, p. 74).

Besides attending community events, organizers spend much informal time with the relevant constituencies. The relationships begin with the participant-observer techniques discussed in the assessment chapters. They patiently gather information in casual ways. The community

practitioner reaches out to individuals and key informants, expressing interest and listening to their concerns and narratives. When groups wish to reach out, the organizer can propose house meetings, events held in homes for base-building purposes, usually involving around eight people. Organizers talk to new people every day.

Organizers look for ways to bond. Food and beverages (a potluck or even a cocktail party) serve to create a relaxed environment and to advance one-on-one recruitment to the cause. Cesar Chavez, the eminent National Farm Workers Association leader, agricultural workers union builder, and civil rights leader, timed his visits to the homes of farm laborers, the *campesinos*, at mealtime. Eating together was a means of bonding and leveling the social relationship: by feeding him, the workers felt like they had done something for the leader and were not just takers (Box 13.3).

The organizers who created the Solidarity Sponsoring Campaign, an association for low-wage workers in Baltimore, were keenly aware of the need to establish trust. On cold nights, social worker Kerry Miciotto set up a stand on the street and served hot tea to janitors and

### BOX 13.3. The Recruitment of Cesar Chavez

Legendary community organizer and poor people’s advocate Fred Ross was trained by Alinsky’s Industrial Area Foundation and employed by the Community Organization Society, a Mexican-American civil rights, social justice, and community-building organization founded by Chicano veterans after World War II. He went to the Chavez home in the *Sal Si Puedes* (roughly translated as *escape if you can* or *get out if you can*) section of San Jose, California, three nights in a row to ask the couple to sponsor a house meeting in their home. Ross first won the trust of Helen Chavez. At the meeting—over the babble of babies and children—soft-spoken Ross had to capture the attention of Cesar Chavez (then a 25-year-old veteran and laborer with a history of participating in farm labor strikes) and his *pachucos* (tough-guy) friends and neighbors as they sat on old couches that “sagged audibly under the weight of too many people” (Ferriss & Sandoval, 1997, pp. 37–39). Ross described neighborhood problems and

his organization’s success in the firing and jailing of Los Angeles police officers who had nearly killed seven young *pachucos zoot-suiters*. Thinking back, Chavez recalls, “I knew about the Bloody Christmas case, and so did everyone else in that room. . . . Fred did such a good job of explaining how poor people could build power that I could taste it. I could really feel it. I thought, Gee, it’s like digging a hole; there was nothing complicated about it” (p. 43). Ross got Chavez to attend another organizing meeting with him that very night. Within months, Chavez was recruiting strangers himself through house meetings and canvassing and then a mass meeting. This made him “nervous to the point of illness, afraid no one would come,” but since he had organized well, a slow trickle eventually swelled to a crowd of over four hundred (p. 51). The man—with an eighth-grade education—was a success. Chavez made history as a farm labor union and civil rights leader.

other workers as they came and went from office buildings.

A member of ACORN takes the discussion beyond trust: “When you set up a meeting for poor people, make sure to provide transportation and food. The hungriest people are who you want at an action” (Brooks, 2001, p. 73).

Gestures that say “we are listening to you” build relationships. Chavez successfully recruited farm workers with a simple procedure: After passing around self-addressed three-by-five cards with space on the back for the worker’s name and address, Chavez asked a question that each person could answer on the card: “What do you consider to be a just hourly wage?” His method of surveying farm workers was an instant hit—because these workers were being consulted for the first time. As one worker said, “It’s like letting us vote . . . on what we think” (Levy, 1975, p. xxi). Likewise, ACORN organizers visited 500 workfare sites in Los Angeles and asked workers about their concerns (Brooks, 2001, p. 72).

Clearly, successful organizing involves analysis of relationships, not just “banners, literature, and personalities” (Robinson & Hanna, 1994, p. 80). Robinson and Hanna (1994) describe the careful listening and probing that occur in such meetings: “The focus is on discovering the core motivational drives: Why did the person do what they did; why does the person feel this way; why is the person concerned about this issue? Childhood experiences, pivotal life events, and watershed personal decisions often figure in. The answers to these questions will reveal the person’s value system” (p. 85). Chavez had a habit of bumming cigarettes and rides off *campesinos* for the same reasons: it created a reciprocity obligation and it also provided an opportunity to get to know the farm workers on a personal level.

#### Make Each Person Count

Groups and actions work best when they tap the strengths of each participant. In Steinbeck’s fictionalized story of a 1930s apple pickers’ strike in California, he describes two organizers’ efforts to use a crisis as an opportunity and to make each person count. Mac, an experienced organizer, and Jim, the acolyte, are preparing to help a young migrant deliver her baby in a Hooverville. There is no medical attention available (Steinbeck, 1963, pp. 40–43).<sup>5</sup>

[Mac] “They won’t help us. We got to do it ourselves. . . . Christ, we got to stand by our own people. Nobody else will. . . . You guys know how to work together.”

...  
A change was in the air. The apathy was gone ... Four cans of water was [*sic*] put on to boil; and cloth began to appear. Every man seemed to have something to add to the pile....

And after the successful delivery of the infant with assistance from some of the women and men:

[Jim]-) “I never knew you worked in a hospital....”

[Mac] “I never did....”

[Jim] “You acted sure enough,....”

(Mac) “Well, Christ Almighty, I had to! We got to use whatever material comes to us....”

....

[Jim] “You didn’t need all that cloth. Why did you tell London to burn it?”

-[Mac] “Look, Jim. Don’t you see? Every man who gave part of his clothes felt the work was his own. They all feel responsible for that baby. It’s theirs, because something from them went to it. To give back the cloth would cut them out. There’s no better way to make men feel part of a movement than to have them give something to it.”

Organizers like Mac and Jim get to know their people and give them something to do in the movement or activity. They make it their business to know who plays the piano, who likes taking minutes, who is happiest without assigned responsibilities so she can “choose” to set up or clean up. The organizer uses the process to bond the members, too.

#### Reflecting the Community

The issues you choose to focus on must be of interest to the community. This is an imperative of ethical and critical community practice—community self-determination, empowerment, and conscientisation—as well as a tactical requirement. Butcher (2007) states that a core of critical community practice is “a commitment to *working for social justice through empowering disadvantaged, excluded and oppressed communities to take more control over the conditions of their lives*” (emphasis original) (p. 17). Among Alinsky’s (2006) rules for organizing social actions are “[n]ever go outside the experience of your people” and “[w]henever possible go outside of the experience of the enemy.” Going beyond the

community can most often result in either disinterest or confusion. SNCC leader Bob Moses (Moses & Cobb, Jr., 2001, p. 85) recalls how, as civil rights organizers framed the community's everyday issues, they had to slowly and deliberately "search out where [consensus] was lodged beneath layer after layer of other concerns".

Leaders also should also reflect the community. Though more indigenous leaders often are being hired as organizers, the average organizer usually does not match the neighborhood culturally or demographically. Organizers need not be from the community, but they must be viewed as one of the community. In building bonds and developing leadership, organizers find ways to bolster the self-confidence that leads to leadership (Banks, 2007). Pointing out skills and competencies of individuals to their peers in an even-handed manner helps later, during situations when people have to rely on each other's strengths. Alinsky (1969, pp. 64–79) believes the only viable and enduring leadership for a people's organization will come from the community. Organizers also need to realistically assess who will be good leaders and will work well in trying circumstances and who will not.

(Mac) London's with us. He's the natural leader. . . . Leadership has to come from the men. (Steinbeck, 1963, p. 43)

**Leadership Development.** For new practitioners, it can be hard to bond with people, build things together, construct solutions together, and then let leadership proceed on their own. Yet, almost as soon as the joining process and the building of social capital begin, the worker must begin to trust in people's strengths and leadership (Foster-Fishman, Cantillon, Pierce, & Van Egeren, 2007; Itzhaky, 2003). The excerpts below, from a community worker's diary, make vivid such emotions.

Tonight the first meeting of the neighborhood action group (Operation Upgrade) is to take place at 8:00 p.m. in the Methodist Church. I didn't want the group to lean too heavily on me, or foster the idea that what they needed all the time was a professional to rescue them. I told the [seven-person] Steering Committee two weeks ago to decide if they wanted me to come to the neighborhood meeting, and if they decided, they would have to invite me. This has really been a troublesome, trying day for me. I kept hoping they would

have strength and confidence enough to handle it without me. Each time the phone rang today, I hoped it would be an invitation. At 4:30 p.m., Mr. Halley came to tell me the Steering Committee had decided to let me rest for tonight. They will invite me at a later date. He thanked me for my help and promised a report soon.

....

Who do these people think they are? I gave them the idea, coached them, and met with the Steering Committee, and now they think they can handle a meeting without me (Cohen, 1971, pp. 341–342).

**Widening the Circle of Participation.** Building internal relationships and a support network is necessary but not sufficient. Expand the networks and look for linkages with other networks. This is where the assets mapping, networking, and coalition skills are applied. Members are encouraged to bring others to important meetings and events. Members make lists of the people they pledge to bring to meetings or into the action system. Members, new and old, need to feel involved and valued before they can turn difficulty into determination. Here, as in many contexts, it is prudent to learn what members want from an experience and to be there for them. The bottom line is that organizers try to expand the number of supporters and allies who will support the cause. Turning to Alinsky (2006) again, "a good tactic is one that your people enjoy." When new people are brought in and old people are retained, as Max from **In Dubious Battle** advised above, give them interesting and exciting things to do.

### Focus, Focus

Alinsky (1969, 1971, 2006) advocated that the target system be defined, preferably as simply and as personally as possible. A specific villain is not a law of nature but must be created and defined. Ganz (2003), an associate of Chavez, urged worker to focus their resources:

- Concentrate resources at the point they will do the most good.
- Act at the moment when the group's chances of success are greatest.
- Undertake activities consistent with the group's capacities.

**BOX 13.4. Social Action Planning Checklist**

- Has everything been done to make the target system's perception of the action system powerful? Power is in the target system's perception. The action system needs to appear big and bad. According to Alinsky, power goes to two poles: to the money and to the people. If the action system doesn't have money, it needs to have or appear to have the people.
- Does the target system understand how the target system behaves? Are the target system's vulnerabilities assessed? Does the action system understand the target system's rules so that it can make it live by them—or, at the least, call attention to their violation?
- Has the target system been personalized and focused so the action system can identify it?
- Are the tactics understood by, acceptable to, and enjoyable or exciting to the action system and unpredictable to and outside the experience of the target system?
- Have tactics that are unpredictable and embarrassing to the target system been designed? Has the media been alerted as to when these tactics will be used? Who will be the action system's voice and face?
- Are the tactics action-oriented, exciting, understandable by the action system, and quickly doable?

Adapted primarily from Alinsky (1969, 1971, 2006).

Box 13.4 provides additional guidelines to planning social action.

### Formulating Strategies: Key Elements

People drawn to social action want action rather than planning; they tend to “ride to the sound of the gun.” However, before action, planning must occur if the action is to be anything but noise. Before action, assessment, field analysis, mapping, and networking are required. The problem-solving systems, especially the target, change agent, action, and support systems, must be identified and developed. Assets must be assessed and the field analyzed. The targets must be specific and broad, and vague goals must be SMART. Once SMART objectives are formulated, winning strategies and action plans can be developed.

*Working with Conflict.* “Change means movement. Movement means friction,” explained Alinsky (1971, p. 21). Change in the status quo usually entails conflict, except in the very rare instances when all parties agree with both ends and means (Messinger, 2006). “A people's Organization is a conflict group. . . . Its sole reason for coming into being is to wage war against all evils which cause suffering and unhappiness,” wrote Alinsky (1969, p. 132). Some organizers plan and use conflict to train and

develop leadership and develop community identity and cohesion. They want “to rub raw the sores of discontent” and get people's ire up when the privileged make statements of the “Brownie, you're doing a heck of a job” variety that President George W. Bush made to the Federal Emergency management Agency director Michael D. Brown on September 2, 2005 during the Hurricane Katrina disaster. Alinsky proved that even though have-nots lack power and money, their numbers can allow them to start and stop many things. Putting one's body on the line to face police dogs is one example, but leaders speak more of justice, education, pressure, and action than of outright physical confrontation with targets. Simply moving one's body to the right place at the right time and bringing along 10 friends is also people power; rallies can draw thousands of people. And thousands of people means television. And being on TV is empowering (Cohen, 2009).

*Conflict and Consensus.* Some organizers, such as Mizrahi (2002), suggest that we “assume the principle of least contest” (p. 6), escalating or antagonizing only to the degree needed. Least contest preserves resources for another day. Consensus is held as the optimal tactical approach in that it holds the potential to aggregate resources and bring together a range of key decision makers (Heenan, 2004; Jacobson, 2007). If conflict is not to be perpetual, consensus needs

to be reached at some point in a contest (Jacobson, 2007). Conflict is a tactic that needs to be well thought out in terms of the potential for success, and not used just the fun of it. Eichler (1995), a proponent of the collaborative approach, describes consensus organizing as “a yearning for partnerships—a desire by all the parties to succeed and a sense that everyone has to pull together in order to succeed” (p. 257). Once the target comes to the table, there is a presumption of consensus between the action system and the target. Some groups make decisions mainly in consensus mode (e.g., Amerindians, Quakers), and it is the best way to mobilize them into action. However, it should not be used as an excuse or cover for defeat. Consensus is possible only when there are some overlapping interests. See Chapter 10 for the discussion of bargaining.

Consensus and conflict orientations are not diametrically opposed. Eichler (1995) concedes that consensus building does not work when key partners refuse to participate and will not be brought to the table. Beck and Eichler (2000) believe “organizers and community practitioners should learn both techniques so that the issue can guide the strategy” (p. 98). Consensus builders argue for a commonality focus and believe that building on what unites is more strategic and lasting. Those who support identity politics remind us to start where people are, that an initial spotlight on uniqueness and differences with its attendant discrimination and alienation will lead people to broader social concerns (Guinier & Torres, 2002).

Community practitioners inevitably reach moments when they have to decide whether to include or fight the power elites in the community. It is important to be aware of both options and use either when effective. Social workers need to engage in far more organizing and social action, using whatever mode works best for those they serve.

### Organizing

**The Change Systems** Once the community practitioner and community residents, the initiator and client systems, have decided what should be done, the SMARRT objectives and the target system, they must think realistically about the support, change agent, and action systems. The composition and size of the change agent,

support, and action system must be determined and the systems established and operationalized. Here the data from the assets inventory and mapping and the field analysis are useful. Key questions are:

- Who the necessary allies and the desirable allies for the action and support systems?
- How can they be recruited and networked?
- Is there a wider supportive group who might provide resources but not direct action?
- What resources and budget are needed (talent, leadership, social capital, and physical resources such as space, equipment, parking, and communications)?
- What are the action system’s internal resources and assets and what assets will be necessary from a support system?
- How can the external resource holders be recruited and networked?
- What organizations and tactics will be necessary to implement the action plan?

**Change Systems Composition.** Organizations and people, the constituents, composing the various change systems need not belong to the client system or the initiating organization; they can be all those who identify with the change goals, objectives, and cause and who benefit if the goals are attained. The field assessment of driving forces should identify the supporting organizations that will support the change. The field analysis and community assessments also can identify the restraining forces and opponents to change.

When developing an action plan, it is a good idea to make lists of who, on key issues, are already with (driving forces), possibly with, or probably against the goals and social change (restraining forces). For example, a neighborhood organization dedicated to increasing and enforcing gun control might come up with this list of players:

*Potential constituents* (change agent, action systems; driving forces): mothers (parallel to MADD), siblings, other students (parallel to SADD), peace churches and organizations, local chapters of Million Mom March, handgun control groups

*Potential allies* (support, action systems; driving forces): emergency room personnel, community leaders in high-crime areas, socially concerned faith-based organizations, police

*Potential opponents* (target systems; restraining forces): National Rifle Association chapters, gun dealers, pawnshop owners, hunters, farmers, gun-owning county council members, Tea Bagger supporters, U.S. Supreme Court

Any interested person or task group should be brought into the change agent and action systems and become driving forces for change, even if training is necessary for some constituents to be effective. Certain allies would be particularly valuable—in this case, doctors and nurses from emergency rooms overburdened by the victims of gun violence. This element makes us ask who can be enlisted to act or form a coalition and whether we can outwit our opposition, neutralize them, or take them out of the field.

**Target Systems.** Selecting appropriate targets combines assessment and organizing skills. Alinsky urges that the targets be personalized (Alinsky, 1969, 1971, 2006; Cohen, 2009). “Pick the target, freeze it, personalize it, and polarize it” (Alinsky, 2006). Alinsky provides the sound advice that in complex communities there needs to be a clearly identified villain to rail against. The Tea Bagger supporters in the 2010 political campaign selected Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi for this role.<sup>6</sup> Targets should be vulnerable, even if they are not the most significant restraining forces to change. The target should be a personification, not something general and abstract such as a community’s discrimination practices or a major corporation or City Hall. Use the mayor, the CEO of a health insurance company, or, at the least, a specific health insurance company. This is the tactic in organizing where opponents are made to feel the heat so that they will see the light.

Themba (1999, p. 95) recommends asking the following key questions in choosing the target:

- Who or what specific institutions have the power to solve the problem and grant the demands?

- Who must be influenced before the real power holders can be influenced?
- What are the strengths and weaknesses of each potential target? Which are the most vulnerable?
- Which targets are appointed, which are elected, and by whom, when, and how?
- How are they influenced (as by voters, consumers, taxpayers, investors, shaming, etc.)?
- What is their self-interest in this issue?
- Who may have jurisdiction if the issue is redefined (e.g., turned a tobacco advertising issue into a fair business practice issue, a public health issue, a child welfare issue)?
- Can the decision-makers be influenced to be made driving forces, or at least, not restraining forces to change?

**Tactics.** The tactics used must fit the nature and character of the change agent, action, and support systems and the vulnerability of the target system. If a new group or organization, a new change agent or action system, is eager for a victory, the community practitioner can find a “fixed fight”—a sure winner—to build confidence. Greater care and judgment must be exercised to avoid premature losing struggles or change efforts that produce no change. Our late colleague, friend, and long-time activist Edward Dutton, a great participant in noble losing causes and some winning ones, was fond of the expression: “Any blow that doesn’t kill, strengthens.” Only martyrs seek to lose contests and then to die strong. In social change, it is better to win.

In a first fight, the community practitioner must be careful lest the victory comes too rapidly and too easily. If the struggle is too easily settled, a false sense of power can develop and there may not be adequate time to develop leadership and action system bonding and cohesion.

Self-determination, empowerment, and informed consent require that the change agent and the action systems, the people who will be on the line, be central in designing the action plan tactics. Social action tactics range from public information approaches (leafleting, informational pickets, letters to the editor, blogging, holding candlelight vigils) to direct action tactics (boycotting, obstructing, sit-ins, strikes).

The group will enjoy coming up with imaginative tactics and the media will relish them. Alinsky said, "People hunger for drama and adventure, for a breath of life in a dreary, drab existence" (1972, pp. 120–121). Alinsky (1969, 2, 2006) also advised us never to go outside the experience of the action system and always try to surprise the targets. Create confusion and fear, and be unpredictable. As power often is in the perception, try to appear stronger and conceal your actual strength, if possible. Remember, a good tactic is one that the action system enjoys. Happy warriors are better fighters than miserable martyrs. Hands-on exercises are preparatory, creative, and mobilizing. Organizing is serious and yet fun-loving tradition. Experience has shown that participants must enjoy and be challenged by the tactics. However, a concrete win, the social change, is the reason for social action, not moral victories and fun.

Debriefing sessions after an action encourage participant responsibility and creativity and help cultivate leadership. They evaluate the action to date, the objective accomplishments, and any changes in the field, and start the process for the next phase of the change effort: where do we go from here? Evaluation looks at whether the effort was successful, at what price, and the next steps that will be used to influence decision makers.

### Using a SMARRT Strategy Chart and Field Analysis

Given the complexity of large-scale change, incrementalism (breaking problems into small, manageable steps) is reasonable. A strategy chart with the SMARRT objectives and sub-objectives, similar to a critical path analysis, is an assessment tool whose simplicity and versatility make it a helpful planning process for seeing the terrain and for mapping out a route to change. It can be used in community and organizational projects. Box 13.5 gives an example. It can be coupled with a field analysis chart.

### Illustrative Exercises

1. What could make a prospective leader feel good? What are opportunities and assignments that will let the person achieve

something—build self-esteem through accomplishments.

2. Research the biography and social change efforts of Jane Addams, Emily Greene Balch, Ron V. Dellums, Dorothy Height, and Jeannette Rankin. Do they share anything in common?

### Community Coordination

*Coordination* involves assembling resources, synchronizing activities, providing order, and encouraging teamwork of individuals, groups, and organizations to connect as a system or network. Coordination is network building and management (see Chapter 10). The community practitioner must pay attention to coordinating all the elements of the change system, except the target system. Coordination concentrates and focuses assets, resources, and the change systems.

### Coordination Through Information

Network and people can be connected by countless means: the Internet, communication technology, Twitter,<sup>7</sup> word of mouth, telephone and virtual networks, posters, newsletters, leaflets and handbills, and face-to-face meetings, among other methods. Their purpose is to convey information about expected network members' behaviors. Community education involves targeted outreach to and coordination of (a) diverse lay audiences who are able to respond to alerts and advice and (b) opinion leaders who help diffuse information. Box 13.6 illustrates spontaneous communication in a city. We discussed communication education more fully in Chapter 11.

### Community Participation: Putting Community at the Center

Progressive community practitioners believe that a small group of decision makers from distant governments and large, vertical and global companies ought not to run communities because these vertically related decision makers rarely have the best interests of the community central to their deliberations. Critical community practice, as discussed in chapters 2 and 4

**BOX 13.5.**

**Strategy Chart**

**Midwest Academy Strategy Chart: After choosing the issue, fill in this chart as a guide to developing strategy. Be specific. List all the possibilities.**

Goals	Organizational Considerations	Constituents, Allies, Opponents	Targets	Tactics
1. List long-term objectives of campaign.	List the resources that the action system brings to the campaign. Resources, assets required: tangible as money, personnel, volunteers, other in-kind, and intangible	Who cares enough about the issue to become part of action or support systems? Whose problem is it? Who gains if win? What are the risks? Power over target? Organization of action system?	Primary Target Always a person or specific people, never an abstraction.	For each target, list the tactics that the action system can best use to make its power felt.
2. State intermediate goals for this issue campaign. What constitutes victory? How will the campaign: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Win concrete improvement in people's lives?</li> <li>Give people a sense of their own power?</li> <li>Alter the relations of power?</li> </ul>	List the specific ways that action system can be strengthened by the campaign: Expanded leadership, increased leadership experience, expanded membership base, new constituencies, fundraising	Who are the opponents and the target? What will losing cost them? Resources in opposition? Power and power sources?	Secondary targets, Target's support system? Power holders over them? Action system power over them?	Tactics: In context? Creative and flexible? Directed and focused? Makes sense to action system? Backed by specific power?
3. What short-term or partial victories can be won as steps toward the long-term goal?				Tactics include: Social marketing Public information as by informational pickets Public hearings Media blitzes Strikes and disruptions. Civil actions Other (be specific)

Source: Bobo, K., Kendall, J., & Max, S. (2001, p. 33), *Organizing for Change*, c. 2001 by Seven Locks Press. Adapted and used with permission.

**BOX 13.6. Community Support and Organizing**

In 1993, hate activities in Billings, Montana, reached a crescendo. Ku Klux Klan (KKK) fliers were distributed in public places and mailboxes, the Jewish cemetery was desecrated, the home of an Amerindian family was painted with swastikas, and a cinder brick was thrown through the bedroom window of a six-year-old boy displaying a Hanukkah menorah. Billings was not intimidated by the hate; it acted together as a community. Coordination was spontaneous. The police chief urged citizens to respond nonviolently before the violence escalated any further. Religious groups from every denomination sponsored marches and candlelight vigils. The local labor council passed a resolution against racism, anti-Semitism, and

homophobia and held a “Stand Together Billings” rally to urge community adoption of an anti-hate proclamation. The local Painters Union’s members painted over the racist graffiti. The local newspaper printed full-page menorahs that were subsequently displayed in nearly 10,000 homes and businesses. The community made an unmistakable declaration: “Not in our town; we are a decent community.” Since then, no serious acts of hate violence have been reported in Billings. Billings exercised social control through mutual support and social justice.

Source: <http://www.pbs.org/niot/about/niot1.html>, 5/27/2010.

and in the introduction, considers citizen participation, participation of the marginalized, community self-determination, and community empowerment to be fundamental to democracy and social justice. This tradition stresses democracy, public and client participation in decision making, and multi-stakeholder accountability. The goal of community participation is broad involvement of citizens in all phases of the improvement process until residents own and sustain it. This usually requires benefits to flow from engagement: tangible benefits such as a job and a better life, and intangible benefits such as inclusion and empowerment (Butcher, Banks, Henderson, with Robertson, 2007; Orsini, 2006; Shaw, Gallant, Riley-Jacome, & Spokane, 2006; Wakefield & Poland, 2005). Community residents want to influence their environments—not just carry out someone else’s ideas—and have “partnership arrangements as a way of giving local people a major say over what happens in the area” (McArthur, 1995, p. 66). If not control, in terms of planning, service creation, governance, or evaluation, beneficiaries, as a minimum, should have peer representation (Masilela & Meyer, 1998). There should be larger numbers and more types of consumers in any collaborative or consortium.

The dearth of community/grassroots involvement in decisions regarding what happens to communities has given credibility and momentum to the reactionary and homogeneously white

Tea *Bagger* movement. It has feasted on America’s growing sense of powerlessness, alienation, and estrangement (Barstow, 2010; Kim, 2010; Raban, 2010; Zernike & Thee-Brenan, 2010).

Mutual engagement with and participation by service users and the citizenry is more than a goal; it is our professional obligation to do what is necessary to involve a diversity of community members (Daley & Marsiglia, 2000, p. 83). Henderson (2007) contends that community practice is about stimulating, engaging, and achieving active community participation and engaging individuals and groups in the participatory process. Butcher (2007, p. 17) reinforces his colleagues position: the core of critical community practice is “a commitment to *working for social justice through empowering disadvantaged, excluded and oppressed communities to take more control over the conditions of their lives* [emphasis original]”. We must get beyond our own professional fields, our own circles, our group’s opinions, and ‘rounding up the usual suspects.’ It must be done to improve the quality of information, build social capital, and because it is just.

Miley, O’Melia, and DuBois (1998) recommend three factors to increase the likelihood of successful participation on the part of consumers:

1. A clear directive for consumers’ participation by the sponsoring organization or authority

2. A power base from which to assert consumers' rights to participate
3. Recognition of consumers' legitimacy as spokespersons (pp. 379–380)

Points two and three speak to the need for clients and consumers to organize and develop a power base independent from the sponsoring authority.

In contrast, a low-income community can be set up for failure when residents are expected to (a) understand jargon and talk and act like the traditional spokesperson, (b) donate considerable time as unpaid volunteers, with the accompanying expenses and income loss, and (c) keep things going without resources after professionals complete their project, the sponsoring authority withdraws support, and the community organization more or less is set adrift (Lewis, Lewis, & Rachelefsky, 1996).

Box 13.7 suggests ways to avoid paternalism. If the marginalized are included, don't re-marginalize them. Do their views count? Involving people in task forces or coalitions and sustaining their participation is not an easy task, but forming a representative group and enlarging the sphere of participation are worthwhile challenges.

**Ensuring True Representation.** When the 1960s and 1970s Great Society, War on Poverty, and model cities programs, and the more contemporary empowerment-zone programs, expanded and looked for indigenous leadership, self-anointed leaders often pushed themselves forward.

Not surprisingly, a search for indigenous community leadership attracts the upwardly mobile and often ersatz leaders instead of the marginalized. This is a participation challenge: while hustlers and the upwardly mobile may not be the most representative people, at least they are from the neighborhood and may be more indigenous than the Astroturf leaders the power structure historically cultivated.

As Kahn (1970) reminds us from that era, "leaders require followers." Actually, a leader is someone whom others follow. A community-building task is developing indigenous leaders to replace the Astroturf leaders ordained by the power holders. In recruiting community representation, a community practitioner will:

1. Consult with members of communities, key informants, about whom they would appoint.
2. Ask current clients, client representatives, and other key informants whom they look to for advice and help with decisions.
3. Identify the most widely admired community members by the community members from the assets inventory, power analysis, and community assessment. Use community segmentation to ensure the range of community diversity is covered.
4. Survey agency critics to assess if they should be added to the community leadership. It is better to have them in the tent than outside yelling. Don't limit participation to the passive and the sycophants; they are unlike to mobilize a community.

### BOX 13.7. Connecting and Dissimilarity

As human service professionals, we support social processes that create community and embrace differences. Altruism researchers believe that humans can have personal and group identities and still include others. We can extend the clan. According to Oliner and Oliner (1995), expressions of communal care grow out of eight processes:

Promoting attachments with those in our immediate settings:

1. Bonding
2. Empathizing
3. Learning caring norms

4. Practicing care and assuming personal responsibility

Promoting caring relationships with those outside our immediate settings and groups:

5. Diversifying
6. Networking
7. Resolving conflicts
8. Establishing global connections

Source: Excerpts from *Toward a Caring Society* (pp. 6–7), by Pearl M. Oliner and Samuel P. Oliner, 1995, Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers. Copyright 1995 by Pearl M. Oliner and Samuel P. Oliner. Reproduced with permission of Greenwood Publishing Group, Inc.

**BOX 13.8.****Guidelines for Critical Community Practitioners and Community Involvement**

- Identify and know your own values, agendas, interests, and goals and those of the people you are working with, and distinguish between the two.
- Own your own role and power; recognize the skills and information you have and never assume that others share it.
- Recognize that it is essential to enable people's involvement, social self-determination, and empowerment for community work; these cannot be taken for granted in the pursuit of other laudable goals.
- Build on the skills and experience that people have.
- Give people the opportunity to work out their own objectives and forms for involvement and social self-determination, and be aware of the danger of unintentionally imposing your own goals and objectives.
- Make realistic assessments with people of what is actually achievable in any given situation, what the possible outcomes are, and what the costs may be, so that people can make a truly informed decision about what they want to do.
- Be sensitive to the fears and uncertainties people have.
- Appreciate and respond to people's need for self-confidence and assertiveness in working with you.
- Recognize and fulfill your modeling and teaching responsibilities.

Source: Croft and Beresford (1988, pp. 278–279). Copyright *Community Development Journal*. Used with permission of Oxford University Press and the authors. Supplemented with Butcher, Banks, & Henderson, with Robertson (2007).

5. As names are suggested, critically assess whether they bring a new perspective from an underrepresented community segment and whether they have a following in that segment. Again, leaders have followers.

Box 13.8 presents additional guidelines for critical community practice.

### Illustrative Exercise

The purpose is to involve all stakeholders, especially the powerless, in community building during a time when communities are under severe strain. The City has allocated your agency \$200,000 of stimulus money to form an advisory council to advise the City on youth programming cutbacks strategies during the Great Recession. The council is to have representation from youth service programs, youth groups, the youth community, and other relevant community segments with “an interest in the youth community” (the mayor’s words). It looks like an onerous community-building task—spending scarce resources to form a community advisory council to advise on how not to spend money. What kinds of individuals, groups, and organizations will you contact? Be specific as to the segments of people (by organization type, group,

and position or status within the group). How will you determine the leaders of the different segments?

### Innovative Change Philosophies

Some organizing approaches to change require new constructions of reality. Cultural activism, multicultural organizing, feminist organizing, and the Freirean approach are examples. These approaches share common elements: (a) a strong oral tradition, (b) self- and group realization, (c) cognitive liberation, and (d) the resilience and expressive power of people. *Cognitive liberation* (Ash, 1972; McAdam, 1982) means freedom from prevailing dogma and openness to new possibilities—that other species can be treated unjustly, for instance, or that God is feminine. Like Lee’s (1994) empowerment practice and critical community practice, cognitive liberation requires recognition of the collective history, the social realities of class, gender, and sexual orientation, and ethnicity, and that all relations are political. *Resilience* embodies the human capacity for laughter and the ability to rebound from adversity and tragedy (Felkins, 2002, p. 55; Irving & Young, 2002, p. 25). With deconstruction and critical analysis comes reconstruction. Self-expression can serve the purpose of liberation

and rebellion, as with the Chicano *corridos*, the music of the history, heroes, and villains of local communities in the United States and Mexico. Folk music has long served this purpose.

### Cultural Activism

Scottish patriot Andrew Fletcher once wrote, "If one were permitted to make all the ballads, one need not care who should make the laws of a nation" (Cultural Environment Movement, 1999). Thus, cultural activism can arise from any population; for example, francophones who want to preserve French cuisine and language in Canada, the Mexican-American's *corridos*, and the urban rappers. Artists and other culture workers use cultural symbols in their organizing.

Cultural activism is a means to dramatize and expose injustice and strengthen those who struggle by connecting them to their history. The past is prelude to the present and future. Lee (1994) points out that cultural history can serve as a personal as well as a social change strategy by instilling political consciousness and political unity. Organizers consider how to challenge the dominant view and to connect disregarded people in vision and action, as Luis Valdez (1996) did with *El Teatro Campesino* with plays such as *Quinta Temporada* during the National Farm Workers Association strikes.

Tactics vary: it can be song, visual and performing arts, or the Philadelphia murals. Cultural activism creates opposition to pervasive but invisible consciousness shaping and subtle education. Why is there a business but not a labor section in the newspaper? (Hofrichter, 1993, p. 88). Why is there a society section but not a people section? People are overwhelmed by corporate-controlled culture inundating them from the media, and the change agent helps people analyze links between communication, power, and politics. "I watch soap operas," said Paulo Freire, "and I learn a lot by criticizing them. . . I fight with [television], if you can understand. A commercial rarely catches me unawares" (as cited in Gadotti, 1994, p. 78).

To create concrete applications, we must become attuned to others' experiential realities. Kahn (1997) urges social workers to reach people through "cultural work," which he defines as "the conscious and strategic use of culture, craft and

art to achieve political goals . . . The power of culture can also be an antidote to people's racialized and gendered inertia, to their inability to see beyond their own eyes. . . . Cultural work can transform consciousness, can perform the acts of political education that, combined with community organizing, make social change transformational" (p. 128).

Woody Guthrie, Pete Seeger, and Bruce Springsteen's protest music can inspire and unite. *We Shall Overcome*, a gospel song by 19th-century black minister Charles Albert Tindley, was adapted by Pete Seeger to become the civil rights movement's anthem and then a worldwide protest and resistance anthem. It was sung at the fall of the Berlin Wall and in South Africa with the end of apartheid. It has even been sung at Tea Bagger rallies.

*Multicultural Organizing.* "Disenfranchised, abandoned, and underserved communities of color need organizers . . . [to help] these communities establish and reestablish dignity and opportunity," Rivera and Erlich declared (1998, p. 256). Other subjugated groups in liberation struggles also need new ways to engage, inspire, and unleash the imagination. Since transformation can be visceral and emotional, old organizing approaches may not work. Intellectual education methods "aren't always adequate to deal with a transformative process, particularly one which challenges racism, sexism, homophobia, anti-Semitism, and other barriers that divide people from each other," asserts Kahn (1997, p. 128). Glugoski, Reisch, and Rivera (1994) recommend that we "identify similarities as well as differences shared by all groups" (p. 85) and "adopt the role of an active listener interested in discovering the people's world through dialogue" (p. 90). To do so requires in-depth exploring of least one facet of another's world.

Care must be exercised to go beyond divisive identity politics (Appiah, 2005). Salcido (1993) urges culturally appropriate interactions, such as the interactions that occur when Anglos reach out to Latinos and Latinos to African-Americans. Cultural labeling can also hide differences within cultures or may have limited relevance. How much, for instance, does a native-born African-American social worker know about West Indians and African-born blacks? What do they

share beyond discrimination and skin color? They do not share a common language other than English or a common history. What unites Hispanics beyond language and perhaps religion? Do Mexican-Americans, Cuban-Americans, and Bolivian-Americans share the same culture? And what unites Asian-Americans after millenniums of conflict in Asia? Muslim cultures embrace Bosnians, Iraqis, Iranians, Nigerians, and Indonesians, among many, many others. The glue that bonds these groups in America may be discrimination rather than shared culture.

Cultural labels are, at best, a starting point in assessment and organizing, not a place to end. The better acquainted we become with cultures other than our own, the more commonalities we see. This is reason enough to learn about the cultures for community building—to build from what we share.

### Feminist Organizing

Social issues that affect women differently than men because of different social roles and power include day care and rape and sexual assault. Providing quality day care and eliminating sexual assault should be gender-neutral goals, but unfortunately they are not; they are presented as “women’s issues,” as if no men are involved in childbirth, abuse, or rape (Goodman, 2010). Action such as “taking back the night,” defending abortion clinics, and guaranteeing fairness to prospective lesbian and gay adoptive parents are presented as feminist.

There are differences in *feminist* organizing, as distinct from *women* organizing. Feminist organizing is a philosophy that guides tactics. Mizrahi (2007) concluded after a qualitative study of 48 women that women organizers were less likely to stereotype, make a greater use of interpersonal relationships, and are more tenacious than are male organizers. Two related themes emerged regarding participants’ styles: a developmental approach that focused on the relationship between the self/individual and the group/collective, and a holistic approach connecting the issues to the women’s lives.

Mizrahi and Lombe (2007) in a subsequent study found the gender alone did not overcome all differences. While feminism for the feminist

organizers did define both identity and style of organizing, it was not enough to unite all women. They recognized, to varying degrees, that the complexity of identity was nested also in race, class, age, and sexual orientation and how each of these are positioned and interact to influence the women’s perception of reality and the salience of issues to them. The challenge for women organizers, indeed all organizers, and their stakeholders is to acknowledge the complexity of the multilayered entities that define identity. It is not possible to organize around a single, albeit a singularly significant, trait.

Most feminist organizing (Bricker-Jenkins & Lockett, 1995; Hyde, 2001; Peterson & Lieberman, 2001; Weil, 2001) theorists agree with Mizrahi and Lombe (2007). Gutierrez and Lewis’s (1994) philosophy about feminist organizing “involves both the rational and nonrational elements of human experiences, with emotions, spirituality, and artistic expression used as tactics for unifying women and expressing issues. Involvement in social change is considered organic, not an adjunct, to women’s lives” (p. 31). The practice of caring about others is not inherently female; both genders exhibit it when encouraged and socialized to do so. Unfortunately, cruelty and meanness are not gender-bound, either, as recent harassment incidents indicate (Clifford, 2009; Eckholm & Zezima, 2010).

*Freirean Approach.* Indigent and indigenous communities are the focus of this approach. To get a sense of the political world as Paulo Freire saw it, imagine the Southern Hemisphere with a giant mouth—forced open—into which the North pours its culture. Then imagine the poor and illiterate, prohibited from resisting, while the dominant in their own country demand passivity and the educated force-feed knowledge down their throats. Box 13.9 and 13.10 illustrates Freire organizing ideology.

Freire thought that everything was political and that humans had critical curiosity ready to be triggered in a situation of learning among equals. Freire (1994) viewed popular education as informal interchange with people discovering they are capable of knowing (pp. 46–47). Education, he believed, triggers reflection and action (praxis) and social transformation. Like critical community practice and empowerment

**BOX 13.9. Paulo Freire and Liberation**

Born in 1921 in Recife, Brazil, Paulo Freire (in Portuguese, pronounced Pall-ou FRAY-ree) studied law, but became a teacher. His philosophy was to relate education to a social context and to avoid “banking”—where students are empty vessels into which teachers pour their accumulated knowledge and maintain external authority. Interested in illiterates, who would benefit from social transformation, Freire started working in cultural circles, exploring liberating themes and words (hunger rather than food) that related to problems lived by the group.

What a track record he had! In northeast Brazil, he taught 300 adults to read and write in 45 days. At Con Edison in New York, he used an inner-city vocabulary to teach functional illiterates to read at a sixth- to seventh-grade level in 13 weeks. He wrote books such as *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* that still

sell worldwide. Exiled from his own country for 15 years, the good-natured Freire made common cause with others, including social workers who admired his bottom-up change model. During his career, he held government positions in education and worked for diverse institutions—the Institute of Cultural Action in Geneva, Harvard University, and the World Council of Churches.

With a goal of political transformation, Freire modeled quiet ways to liberate the oppressed. An optimist, he experimented his entire life with ways to enable people to break out of passivity and silent subjugation.

Sources: Based on Associated Press (1997), Cashmore & Rojek (1999), and Gadotti (1994).

social work practice, Freire’s empowerment education, according to Wallerstein (1993), “offers a three-stage method. The first step is listening for the key issues and emotional concerns of community people. . . . The second step is promoting participatory dialogue about these concerns. The third step is taking action about the concerns that are discussed” (p. 222).

As a person who was able to politicize as he taught literacy, Freire grew in influence as organizers looked for role models that not only respected oppressed and discounted people but

also immersed themselves in their world. Among the U.S. models were social worker Dorothy Day, who established Catholic Worker hospitality houses, and Myles Horton of the Highlander Center in Tennessee (Horton & Freire, 1990).

Additional tenets of Freire’s philosophy that are relevant to community practice include the following:

- Basing informal education on everyday experience (Castelloe & Watson, 1999, pp. 73–76; Gadotti, 1994, pp. 18–19)

**BOX 13.10. Dialogue: A “Space of Possibility”**

Members of popular (populist) groups and illiterate people looked up to Paulo Freire for having studied. In the following excerpt from his book, *Pedagogy of Hope* (1994), Freire recalls the dialogue that occurred at one of his meetings:

[Freire] “And why couldn’t your parents send you to school?”

[Audience member] “Because they were peasants like us.”

“And what is ‘being a peasant’?”

“It’s not having an education . . . not owning anything . . . working from sun to sun . . . having no rights . . . having no hope.”

“And why doesn’t a peasant have any of this?”

“The will of God.”

“And who is God?”

“The Father of us all.”

“And who is a father here this evening?”

Almost all raised their hands, and said they were.

[Freire] picked out one of them and asked him, “How many children do you have?”

“Three.”

“Would you be willing to sacrifice two of them, and make them suffer so that the other one could go to school and have a good life, in Recife? . . .”

“No!”

- Giving up the superiority of being more learned (Carroll & Minkler, 2000, p. 28; Freire, 1994, pp. 46–47)
- Becoming humble to empower someone else (Blackburn, 2000, p. 13; Freire, 1994, pp. 22–27; Glugoski, Reisch & Rivera, 1994, p. 90)
- Facing and overcoming limit situations (i.e., concrete realities) (Freire, 1994, pp. 205–207; Sachs & Newdom, 1999, p. 98)
- Bringing forth social, political, and critical consciousness (Gadotti, 1994, pp. 147–149; Reisch, Wenocur, & Sherman, 1981)

## Narration

Narration is used to tell us something about people, their worldview, and their needs. Narration is a dimension and a tool of cultural activism, multicultural organizing, feminist organizing, and Freirean popular education. Narrative deals with meaning, myth, metaphor, dialogue, and culture transmittal. A narrative can lament or celebrate an individual, a group, a community, a tribe, or a quest. It can exemplify shared experience and convey respect for roots. It can crystallize professional values and highlight whether we do what we say we value—practice what we preach (Walz, 1991). A narrative can be in the form of stories, rap, a Chicano *corridos*, or Merle Haggard’s *Tulare Dust/They’re Tearin’ the Labor Camps Down*, a lament to the Dust Bowl migrants. The message may be overt or covert, such as resistance to oppression or the injustices of the economic system. Davis (2002) contrasts self-narratives that are personal with movement narratives that are oppositional and subversive—that is, war stories that help form collective recognition and identities (pp. 22–26).

Clinicians can use narrative therapy, which holds that “people can continually and actively re-author their lives” (Freedman & Combs, 1996, pp. 15–16). Community practitioners can shape or direct narrative to help people come together, achieve something, overcome a difficulty or change, or regain self-respect. Oral histories, a form of narrative, can reveal journeys from accommodation to self-determination and effective resistance. In interviews he conducted,

Couto (1993) found “common elements in the stories such as a member of the community looking at a dominant person in the eye and the art of challenging a dominant person without incurring retaliation” (p. 70). If the conventions of daily life in society so dominate us that we are unable to challenge, as some theorists believe, then narratives provide a means of liberation from conventionality and passivity (Loeb, 1999, p. 212). Thus, narratives offer “new possibilities for staging a resistance to the damaging effects of social, cultural, and political dominant narratives and for inviting subjects to write for themselves more empowering, less subjugated narratives” [*italics added*] (Wyile & Paré, 2001, p. 171).

Narratives have potency at the macro level. A narrative both reveals the story of its narrator and is useful in identifying others with like experiences. The telling of the stories provides ways to build solidarity, from folk tales to the confessions at Alcoholics Anonymous meetings. Professionals can elicit, hear, and steer narratives to encourage empowerment and liberation. Persuasive arguments embedded in a story form can be an effective springboard for internal transformation of an organization, declared Denning (2001), and for gaining support from external constituencies, according to Heugens (2002). Community practitioners can use narratives to help people make a leap in understanding, to encourage groups to bridge their differences, to create confederations, and to forward causes. Social movements are created and sustained by “bundles of narratives” (Fine, 2002). Davis (2002) said, “Through stories, participants, actual and potential, are called . . . to identify and empathize with real protagonists, to be repelled by antagonists, to enter into and feel morally involved in configurations of events that specify injustice and prefigure change. . . . [Key] events—be they sit-ins, nuclear accidents, or court decisions—are interpreted and made the basis for action through stories. . . . [Storytelling] specifies valued endpoints and stimulates creative participation” (pp. 24–27).

Narrative also allows movements to reach those who cannot read. Song stories, *corridos*, and folk and protest songs have often served this purpose. Mexican revolutionary leader *subcomandante* Marcos (2001) wrote about values in

free verse, which is more easily memorized than most expository political statements: “Zapatismo poses the question[s]: ‘What is it that has excluded me?’ [and] ‘What is it that has isolated me?’” (p. 440). Marcos writes parables and updates old stories that can be related and discussed around a bonfire, part of normal social practices. Some poke fun at the weaknesses of the establishment (“The Parrot’s Victory”), while others encourage acceptance of differences such as sexual orientation (“The Tale of the Little Seamstress”). Zapatistas use the Internet to spread their message, so they reach computer-literate sympathizers around the globe as well as illiterate indigenous people. Thus, the narration method can include the broad use of simplified stories to liberate and to combat oppression and to provide information, mental images, and coordinated messages (Themba, 1999, pp. 140–141).

At a psychological level, narratives allow the powerless to reframe their lives. Just as many individuals spend time in therapy ridding themselves of limiting personal scripts inculcated in them by others, so people in certain aggregates cope with social typing that limits them. Those who live in public housing deal with “pathological narratives” from outsiders. In response, residents tell defending stories and group enhancement stories (Salzer, 1998, pp. 578–579). Despite people’s reluctance to forgo their defending stories, there need to be transforming possibilities in their group enhancement stories. As Woody Guthrie sang, it’s not enough to simply tell the world about feeling bad. You must to declare that you “ain’t gonna be treated this a-way.”<sup>8</sup>

### Telling or Hearing Stories Establishes Connections

Ultimately the storyteller should come to view himself or herself as a story *maker*. The Midwest

Academy, in its training of social activists and community organizers, included a session on storytelling as an organizing tool. The focus is on the need to know people’s life stories as a necessary step in developing leadership and framing issues (Ganz, 2001). In the same vein, both author and lecturer “gain new skills, meet new people, hear and heed new stories” (p. 214).

To recap, the narrative has been used in myriad ways to link disparate people and unify communities, build revolutions, or stop conflict between human groups. Narratives are used in social action to rally supporters, “rub raw the sores of discontent,” and instill a common spirit. Caseworkers and clinicians can elicit client narratives and highlight them as they stage public issues. Through client narratives they can find common patterns of collective identity and a common sense of grievance and community discontent or achievement. Similarly, rural and urban practitioners can help get narratives disseminated, draw linkages with community problems and assets, and note commonalities of narratives that allow disparate groups to find common ground.

### The Theme of Connecting

Community practitioners are networkers and connectors in the pursuit of community solidarity, community betterment, and social justice. The connecting is for all three: social problem resolution, building caring communities and citizens, and promoting social justice. They are inseparable. Communities built on caring and mutual support are needed now as much or more as anytime in our collective histories. The physician’s quote in Chapter 4 needs to become a historical artifact: “American culture simply has never been based on caring about what happened to your neighbor” (Smith, 2009). Caring must be the core of community.

#### Discussion Exercises

1. Which way of creating or better using assets (asset building, asset claiming, asset identification and mobilization, individual leadership assets, cultural assets) most interests you, and why? Do you have

*personal or professional experience with any of the described programs?*

2. Is your agency engaged in community building? Does it give annual “hero awards” to those improving community life, to make the work of such people known to everyone?

3. Why are associations as important as individuals to social work practice? In your view, are communities “bowling alone” in the sense of disengagement or “bowling along” in the sense of building anew and muddling through? Look up Robert Putnam on the Internet to learn his views on civic participation and association (try American Prospect at <http://www.prospect.org/cs/search?keyword=Putnam>. <http://www.movingideas.org/links/civiclincs.html>).
4. Using the Internet and other resources, research government funding sources for community projects. Start with the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development’s revitalization HOPE VI funds and the Community Outreach Partnership Centers.
5. Gina Johnson, age 45, has a job, a home, five dogs, and one cat. Young men have beaten her up. She videotapes drug transactions and prostitution and has worked for years to get more law enforcement on the streets. Finally, an undercover officer came but was killed—and she still feels guilty. Some see her as bold, others as prickly, some as reclusive. She has come to your community office wanting help with crime and in forming some type of action group. How can you learn more about Ms. Johnson as an individual in relationship to the neighborhood? How could she be an asset? A liability? What is your obligation to her?
6. Many people who die in storms live in manufactured housing. A proposed solution is to require trailer park owners to install huge storm cellars that can accommodate residents. Debate the issues (the costs that will be passed on to residents versus saving lives). If the trailer park population is divided over this issue, how can the positions be reconciled, or can they? Draft statements to give before a state legislative committee. How does it build community to consider the well-being of a portion of the populace? If the trailer park residents must hire experts, what associations might help with fundraising?
7. Role-play: You tell your governing board of a grant-making organization that you want to involve interested indigenous leaders, service users, and service providers in the grant-making decisions. Board members appropriately ask (a) how you will define and identify interested and indigenous stakeholders, and (b) why you want to line up those already interested rather than expand participation to include those who never participate but should be interested as they are affected by the grant-making. Respond.
8. If a homophobic act occurred in your community, explain how will you respond and help the community respond.

## Notes

1. From letter to Big Bill Hayward just before he was executed by a Utah firing squad.
2. For more complete listings see: <http://www.star-guide.org/orgs> and <http://www.CommonDreams.org>.
3. <http://www.communityactionpartnership.com/>
4. See the discussions of assessment and assets inventory and mapping in the assessment chapters.
5. For a history of the California farm labor organizing efforts, see Cornfield (1995), Dunne, (1967), and Weber (1994).
6. For example, see the FOX Web site for any Tea Bagger posting during the 2010 campaign: <http://www.foxnews.com/opinion>
7. The 2010 flash riots by Philadelphia-area teenagers were coordinated by Facebook, tweets and cell phone networks.
8. “Going down the road feeling bad, Lord, Lord, An’ I ain’t gonna be treated this a-way.” From Woody Guthrie’s Dust Bowl migrant anthem, *Blowing*

*Down That Old Dust Road*, April 1940, C. Hollis Music Inc., New York, 1960.

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