**Chapter 9: Becoming Policy Advocates in the Safety-Net Sector**

***Policy Advocacy Learning Challenges and Exercises***

***Excerpted from the book***

**POLICY ADVOCACY LEARNING CHALLENGE 9.1**

**Connecting Micro, Mezzo, and Macro Policy Advocacy**

Divergent Views About People Seeking Welfare

The State of Florida enacted a law that required applicants for welfare to obtain drug tests. Its backers believed it would reduce applications and catch significant numbers of drug users. State data revealed that it accomplished neither of these goals, as only 2.6% of welfare applicants failed the drug test during a four-month period (Alvarez, 2012). In fact, Florida may have lost money on this experiment because it reimbursed passing applicants $30 each for the cost of their test, for a total of $118,140. Advocates of the law insisted that it be retained because it “was really meant to make sure that kids were protected (and that) our money wasn’t going to addicts, that taxpayer generosity was being used on diapers and Wheaties and food and clothing.” The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) of Florida sued the state for unconstitutional invasion of applicants’ privacy as protected by the Fourth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution. On December 8, 2014, the 11th Circuit Court struck down the Florida law, finding it to be unconstitutional, in a unanimous ruling by a bipartisan panel of judges. The Court decided that Florida failed to show any evidence that it was necessary to force applicants seeking TANF to surrender their constitutional rights to receive aid (see Mataconis, 2014).

**Learning Exercise**

1. Discuss why backers of this law in Florida were confident that it *would* catch many drug offenders.
2. Can you think of public programs used by middle- and upper-income families that would require drug

tests?

1. Do similar views exist with respect to users of SNAP, the EITC, Section 8 housing, or other safety-net

programs?

1. Is the Florida law consonant with social workers’ values as stated in the National Association of
   1. Social Workers Code of Ethics?

**POLICY ADVOCACY LEARNING CHALLENGE 9.2**

**Connecting Micro, Mezzo, and Macro Policy Advocacy**

Do the Math to Decide What a Family Needs to Survive

Some contend that eligibility levels for many safety-net programs are excessively high, allowing people to gain benefits from them when they do not truly need them. Using the Internet, find the eligibility level of the food stamps program (now called SNAP) for a single mother with two dependent children. The eligibility level of TANF varies by state. Find the eligibility level for your state on the Internet for a mother with two children.

Determine likely expenditures for the single mother and her two dependent chil­dren, including rent, living expenses like utilities and heat, food, transportation, clothing, necessary personal items, entertainment, medical and dental expenses, and miscellaneous expenditures. Use your personal experience to make your estimates.

Compare the eligibility level of SNAP and TANF with your calculations. Are they excessively high? Compare the actual benefits this woman and her children would receive under SNAP and TANF. Are they excessively high?

Now assume that the mother finds work at the minimum wage in your state (i.e., the federal minimum wage or the minimum wage established by your state, which­ever is higher; find these figures on the Internet). Her working hours are from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. with one hour’s release time for lunch. Assume she has to travel 15 miles to get to work, or 30 miles round trip. Assume she has to use childcare for both children from 3 p.m. (when preschool ends) to 5:45 (when she returns from work). Select a probable rent level for this woman and her family in a relatively safe neighbor­hood. Would SNAP and TANF suffice to meet the family’s expenses?

Where do you position yourself in the debate about whether safety-net programs are excessively generous or punitive? Would you support or oppose political candi­dates who want to markedly cut or markedly increase the eligibility levels and benefits of SNAP?

**POLICY ADVOCACY LEARNING CHALLENGE 9.3**

**Connecting Micro, Mezzo, and Macro Policy Advocacy**

Initiating a Community Outreach Campaign

A social worker was worried because many of her clients from low- and moderate-income families were not using SNAP, to the detriment of their food intake as well as their family finances. She discovered a tendency of many of them to curtail food expenses, such as by organizing their meals around low-cost items like macaroni and cheese instead of eating vegetables, fish, fruit, chicken, and low-fat meat. She discovered on a website established by the Food and Nutrition Service of the U.S. Department of Agriculture (FNS) that federal officials welcomed collaboration with state and local agencies, advocates, employers, and community- and faith-based organizations in reaching out to eligible low-income people *not* using SNAP. Go to their website at <http://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/outreach/> and develop some ideas for an outreach strategy in your local area or region.

**POLICY ADVOCACY LEARNING CHALLENGE 9.5**

**Connecting Micro, Mezzo, and Macro Policy Advocacy**

Advocacy to Promote Mental Health for TANF Recipients

Discuss how a social worker might engage in micro policy advocacy to obtain mental health or substance abuse services for a specific TANF recipient. How might she use mezzo policy advocacy to place mental health services within TANF offices or offices that take applications for SNAP? How might she use macro policy advocacy to change local or state TANF regulations related to specialized services for recipients with mental health or substance abuse challenges?