

Process of Social Action

The role of the social action worker is to facilitate the group through a five-stage process. The intention is to change the traditional relationship between service users and the professionals employed to work with them.

A social action worker is a facilitator, not a provider. In this process service users are not just consumers, they are active agents for change.

Working alongside **community** members in this way requires the ability to plan and prepare well, to be creative, to listen actively, to be patient, to be disciplined and to be interested in people's lives. It is also essential to maintain a consistent and realistic level of optimism and enthusiasm that will fire the group.

Process of Social Action

The five stages of Social Action Process are as follows:

1: What

This is all about discovery, finding out what is happening in people's lives.

What are their issues, problems and concerns? What makes them angry, frightened, happy, and frustrated? What occupies their thoughts?

The social action worker designs ways in which the community members can express all this, creating as comprehensive a picture as possible of what is going on in their lives at present, without interpretation and without at this stage having to worry about what to do with the material.

This is often the longest stage of the social action process. Video, role-play, photography, drawing and discussion will all be used during this exploration of life in the community.

2: Why

Once the issues have been agreed it is important to identify the reasons why

they exist so that any solutions devised will attack root causes and not just symptoms.

Asking 'why?' helps people examine their private troubles in the wider context. It provides them with a deeper understanding of their causes. This is necessary if community members and service users are to go on to create and own positive social change.

This stage of the process allows the **community** members to engage in analysis and to present their understanding of the problems facing them. It also helps to discover the most effective point of intervention; the place at which it is possible to make changes that will affect the final outcomes.

This analysis is accepted by the social action worker, without interpretation once again, reinforcing one of our basic beliefs: people are experts in their own lives.

3: How

So what do we do with this understanding? How can the **community** members change things in a meaningful way themselves?

Here the role of the social action worker changes. The responsibility now is to create safe spaces where the group can test out their ideas for change before putting them into practice.

It is vital that the community members are not set up to fail and that their ideas undergo a rigorous examination before taking them to the world outside the group. The decision on which ideas will be taken forward lies in the hands of the group, but the social action worker must question their viability without crushing enthusiasm.

4: Action

The group then put their idea(s) for change into effect. They should by now

have a realistic sense of the possible outcomes, whether it will solve their problem or simply be the first stage in a longer struggle.

Even if the action disappoints, as sometimes happens, the legacy of the work is that the group members now have an understanding and practical experience of the tools needed for dealing with problems that they will face in the future.

5: Reflection

The fifth stage is for the **social action** worker to bring the group together and ask: 'what happened? Now that we have carried out our action, are the issues, problems and concerns the same?'

This critical reflection enables the community members to learn from their experience and to plan future actions for change. The What, Why, How process begins again.