Dealing with Vulnerability, Dependency, and Resistance

**Vulnerability, dependency, and resistance** are three of the most important factors in delivery of human services. They often constitute a bugaboo for human service workers, thwarting their best efforts and leading to frustration on the part of all participants in helping transactions. Their origins lie both within the individual and within society, and reactions to them tend to be both value laden and culture bound.

Vulnerability

 In every society, there are people who can be characterized as more vulnerable than others—more vulnerable to illness, to unemployment or underemployment, to violence, to social isolation, to failure. They are more vulnerable to the changes that take place in the society, first and longest penalized by them. The most prominent of these are the poor, minorities, the handicapped, the elderly, and children. To be poor in an affluent society, to be old and slow in a world that values youth and speed, to be a child when family structures are weakening and changing and when proliferating no-fault divorces are mainly concerned with the rights of adults, to b e a member of a minor it y group that is considered inferior, to be so handicapped as to be unable to use available resources—to be any of these is to be isolated, stereotyped, and dehumanized. It is to know that within the society there are institutionalized supports that tend to maintain prejudice and discrimination and to close the doors of opportunity. It is to know the frustration of powerlessness, the bitterness of coping with harsh conditions that tend to be self-perpetuating, the

Levine, Joanne. Working with People: The Helping Process (Page 215). Pearson Education. Kindle Edition.

loneliness of being the outsider, and the deadening defeat of unfulfilled potential. It is to be afraid. People caught in such situations may develop one of three patterns of behavior in coping with their vulnerability:

1. hey can mobilize personal and social resources to deal with this reality and, if possible, change it (as in the successful activity of pressure groups of elderly people, minorities, and the handicapped).

2. hey can become helpless and dependent—although not always consciously—and force the society to care for them by not caring for themselves (as with many of the crisis-prone, multiproblem families who cling to welfare programs).

3. hey can strike out in fear and rage at forces they often do not fully understand and cannot control (as do the violent gangs within the ghettos in our cities).

Human service workers in all areas are in immediate and personal contact with our social victims—the physician in the emergency room, the social worker in the welfare department, the teacher in the ghetto classroom, the public health nurse visiting the old person in an isolated rural farmhouse, the foster care worker facing the 13-year-old nobody wants, the minister developing a food program to feed the hungry.

Workers respond to such situations in various ways. They can “identify with the aggressor,” placing the cause for such problems on the individuals caught in them, distancing themselves as far as possible from the people with whom they work, partly out of a sense of hopelessness and frustration, or they can respond with moral indignation. But indignation is not enough; it needs to be translated into responsible action.

In preparing themselves to face this challenge, workers need to be equipped with special knowledge and skills soundly based in a personal value system that assures commitment to understanding these problems in all their magnitude, and motivation to work for their alleviation. Prevention and remediation need to go hand in hand in approaching the needs of vulnerable people. It is important to know who these people are and where they are found in our present social organization, and how their number and the severity of their problems correlate with changing social conditions. Examples of direct correlation can be seen in the emergence of hunger as a national problem, in the fact that one in every five children lives in poverty, and in the quadrupling of the number of babies born outside of marriage since 1950. he groups of vulnerable people specified here are not necessarily all those who share the characteristics of (1) being stereotyped, segregated, and discriminated against and (2) finding themselves personally powerless to deal with the social forces operating to maintain them in this position.

Re s e arch e r s have studied character development in a hostile environment characterized by social injustice, societal inconsistency, and personal impotence. his type of environment tends to place responsibility for the problem situation on the individual rather than on the society. It poses a massive personal task of integration in order to make a healthy adaptation to the demands of a society that denigrates both the individual and the group. To survive in the larger society, members of these groups are

Levine, Joanne. Working with People: The Helping Process (Page 216). Pearson Education. Kindle Edition.

forced to come to terms with a potent force that constantly, and in many ways, says they are no good. his is truly an impossible dilemma, and it is not surprising that people react with rage and fear, turning inward against themselves or outward against others. It is surprising that so many of the victims of this situation retain the ability to function adequately and to mobilize themselves and others in a constructive way to try to change the society in which they must live.

One of the less constructive ways that clients may use to cope with this situation is a learned helplessness, which may consciously or unconsciously be adopted as a mechanism of defense. Psychology has come up with some interesting laboratory experiments dealing with the effect of learned helplessness on motivation and capacity to survive in animals. Rats, when physically restrained for periods of time, will struggle frantically for a while and then lapse into passivity. When dropped into containers of water, they give up and drown much more quickly than those in the control groups who have not been restrained and who make much greater efforts to survive. The feeling of helplessness appears to involve physical changes as well as changes in motivation, cognition, and emotion.

Although there is some danger in applying the findings of laboratory research on animals to human beings in a “free” setting, we can clearly observe the same dynamics operating with people who have never developed (or who have lost) the sense of being able to control their inescapable situations. Generally, they too will fight until they learn that their efforts to control outcomes are ineffectual. When the sense of ineffectualness becomes overwhelming, passivity, dependency, and depression cannot be far behind. he major goal of workers in such situations must be to help clients develop and maintain feelings of personal adequacy that will help them mobilize themselves and others to change the destructive environment. However, workers will have to deal first with the feelings involved and must expect that these feelings will be dumped on them as representatives of the destructive society with which these vulnerable people must cope. These feelings were well expressed by the skinny 10-year-old foster child who turned on her worker shouting, “Don’t you come around here bringing me a pop and telling me you love me when next week you’ll be gone.” Increasingly, workers report their own frustration and concern about the apathy, anger, and possible violence that they must face. The answer does not lie in teaching workers karate or other means of self-defense, as has been done in some welfare programs, although there might be situations in which this could be useful. The answer lies in recognizing the normality and predictability of such reactions and in being prepared to cope with them in a more constructive manner while often, at the same time, being required to administer programs that are in themselves reflective of the destructive forces in the society that created them. Although workers cannot totally defuse a situation with a client who is using a worker as a scapegoat for personal frustrations and the ills of the system, it is possible to be forewarned and prepared to deal more effectively with the situation.

Workers must see clearly what is happening, be prepared by knowing how they as individuals it into what is happening, and be able to maintain within themselves “an

Levine, Joanne. Working with People: The Helping Process (Page 217). Pearson Education. Kindle Edition..

oasis of sanity” in a schizophrenic situation. They need to be equipped with five major tools in working with vulnerable people:

1. Self-awareness. Workers must know how they stand in relation to people who are considered of lesser worth by much of society. hey must know that sympathy is important but that empathy and objectivity are even more so.

2. Awareness of the impact of the worker’s self on others, and of how worker and situation are perceived by clients.

3. Motivation and ability to deal with the special problems of communication brought on by differences in language and culture.

4. Possession of concrete data regarding the group and the client as a member of that group. As no group is monolithic, individualization is of tremendous importance; stereotyping is not only stupid, but ineffectual, and often leads to denial of basic human rights.

5. Understanding of the social situation that contributes so largely to developing and perpetuating problems, and knowledge and skill in working to change both society and its institutions.

On the basis of these values, this knowledge, and these skills, the worker attempts to remedy the destructive effects of the social situation and to prevent their continuance. A major role in serving clients (which, it must be remembered, is also serving the total society) is that of advocacy in both the legal context of “one who pleads the cause of another” and the political definition of “one who argues for, defends, maintains, or recommends a cause or proposal”:

• As an advocate on an individual level, the worker, as a guidance counselor in the school system, might go to bat for a troublesome teenage boy who had been excluded from the school because he got into a fight. The appeal would be based on his legal right to an education, his commitment to improve his behavior, and his participation in a counseling program.

• On a citywide level, the worker, as a health service planner, might spearhead a community effort to develop a maternal and child health clinic in the inner city that is poorly served by hospitals. he clients in this instance would be the people of the neighborhood, and the advocacy would be based on the right of all people to adequate healthcare.

• On a state level, the worker, as a social worker on the commission on aging, might work to ensure adequate inspection of nursing homes, enforcement of standards of care, and improvement of those standards. he clients in this instance would be old people and their families, and the advocacy would be based on the right of all people to safe and adequate living situations.

• On a national level, workers from many different specializations in the human services might work to ensure the passage of legislation to put teeth into the housing laws that permit people to live wherever they wish regardless of race, creed, or color. he client in this instance would be primarily members of racial and religious minorities and the poor, and the advocacy would be based on the right under the law of all people to live where they wish.

Levine, Joanne. Working with People: The Helping Process (Page 218). Pearson Education. Kindle Edition.

As is obvious from the examples cited here, workers cannot be effective advocates without considerable knowledge of the rights to which people are entitled—both inherent rights and those guaranteed under the Constitution and the laws of the country. One of the major problems of human service workers in their role as advocates is that they tend to champion people and causes on the basis of ideals and emotions rather than on the basis of hard knowledge.

Rights are those things to which people or society have a just claim and cannot, in American society, be denied without due process of law (Garrett, 1973). Both individual and societal rights are relative and exist within a state of balance that may fluctuate as relationships are perceived differently, as technology develops, or as conditions change. For example, individuals owning land have the right of private property, but when coal is discovered under that land in a time of energy shortages, the society has a right to use that coal for the “greatest good for the greatest number”—particularly if that land happens to be a Native American reservation! he teenager in our first example has the legal right to an education, but the other students have equal rights in this area, and the school system has administrative rights to operate an effective educational program. A current question, in light of what we know about the nature of human development and the demands of parenthood, is whether young adolescents, 12 to 15 years of age, have the right to have children. Statistics being gathered seem to indicate a correlation between dependency on public support and adolescent parenthood, as well as between child abuse and adolescent parenthood. Public welfare and family counseling agencies express increasing concern over the numbers of young people, still children themselves in many ways, who are taking on the demands of parenthood with no real awareness of what is involved. If the pressures become great enough, society will decide if this is an inherent or a legal right.

This relativity, expressed by Rousseau in the Social Contract, dating as far back as 1762, is even more meaningful in our present complex society with its many different people and demands. Rousseau said, “Social order is a right—a sacred right that serves as a basis for all other rights; it does not low from force. Yet it does not low from nature either. It therefore rests upon agreements.” Such agreements are in a constant process of being reworked, and we are presently taking a hard look at those relating to the rights of individuals and those of groups.

It is easy to see that there are built-in conflicts in the concept of rights, and workers who aspire to be effective in this area must be prepared to understand and deal with them. To be effective, they must either be personally knowledgeable regarding the laws on all government levels that codify and establish most of the rights that we have or have access to resources that will provide the necessary know-how. Increasingly, law schools are emphasizing humanistic aspects of the law; the American Civil Liberties Union is an invaluable resource, and educational programs for human service workers in all areas are including in their curricula knowledge of the legal system and ways to use it.

In addition to knowledge of the legal system, knowledge of the legislative process is of paramount importance. Not only must workers know how to develop, introduce, and support legislation effectively, but they must also know how to be pragmatic lobbyists. One of the major current trends in human service systems is what is known as their “politicization”—the entry into politics in an effort to affect the system in which we live,

Levine, Joanne. Working with People: The Helping Process (Page 219). Pearson Education. Kindle Edition.

not only in the interests of the system but also in the interests of its clients. Workers who operate here effectively will do so on the basis of knowing how to communicate innovation, having the ability to form and work with coalitions, and knowing how and when to compromise—all of which must rest on a realistic assessment of social situations.

The role of advocate and that of social changer go hand in hand. Changes involve three different levels: 1. The society as a whole, when conditions exist that are destructive to people. he society gives final and overall sanction to change and therefore must be involved.

2. The large social system, such as political parties and professional disciplines, which may, either unknowingly or because of self-interest, perpetuate destructive patterns. These groups are, in a sense, the gatekeepers of change, which is passed on to the society through adoption and enforcement of laws and policies and through the education of practitioners.

3. Organizations that, for many reasons, may not be responsive to changes in their environment such as population shifts and modifications in public policies, practice methods, social values, and organizational styles.

Because societal change is generally a long-term process and comes in response to a multitude of variables, workers will need to be able to mobilize a variety of people and interests in their efforts to facilitate such change. One of the most useful and effective tools is mobilization of vulnerable people into self-help groups. his is one of the great strengths of a pluralistic society, providing, through numbers and organization, power to the powerless. When a number of such groups exist, coalitions among them to work on common interests can provide even greater strength and bargaining power. Such groups are seen at present in the American Association of Retired Persons and other organizations of older people, in the various racial caucuses and groups, such as the Rainbow PUSH Coalition, and in the organizations of the poor. Only the vulnerable children cannot use this tool themselves and need people, such as the parents of developmentally challenged children, to use it in their interest.

As with individual rights, group rights are a matter of balance between those of the total society and those of the subgroups, and among the rights of the subgroups. When one group benefits at the expense of others, it can lead to a polarization that is potentially destructive to the whole. In developing self-help groups, workers need to keep this reality in mind. In stating such efforts, the worker’s role is an enabling one—enabling people to use their own strength so that the worker bows out and people take over for themselves—which is as it should be.

Organizational change is often equally difficult, as workers may be faced with the need to make changes in organizations of which they are a part, and there is an element of personal risk involved. While it is a generally accepted concept that systems (an organization is defined as a social system created for a specific purpose) tend to move toward closure and self-maintenance rather than toward dynamic productivity, we often forget that there is an equal tendency toward survival, development, and realization of potential for growth and change. No organization is impermeable to the changes that take place in its environment, and environments are dynamic and always changing. Organizations may accept or reject pressures, but they cannot ignore them. For example, the

Levine, Joanne. Working with People: The Helping Process (Page 220). Pearson Education. Kindle Edition.

adoption of an affirmative action policy on a national level—and the attachment of this to the allocation of federal funds—constituted an environmental change for organizations such as hospitals and universities that mandated internal change. A good organization has built-in provisions for self-appraisal and established channels for input from its environment, the consumer, and its own personnel. Changes in policy and personnel that reflect the environmental changes going on around the organization can often be initiated by concerned people within the organization. he role of the human service worker in serving the vulnerable people cannot be limited to work designed to enable individuals to adapt to the status quo. his merely perpetuates the destructive nature of the situation and the problems inherent in it. here is certainly a place for work with individuals and families struggling to deal with their environment in a constructive way, but along with this must go an all-out effort to make the environment a healthier one. here is an old story of a social psychiatrist and a psychoanalyst walking together along a river. They came upon a drowning man, jumped in, and rescued him. A little farther along they saw another and rescued him. When they came to the third, the social psychiatrist said to the analyst, “You jump in and pull him out. I’ll run ahead and see who’s pushing them in.” It is time we ran ahead.

A motorcycle accident in his late teens left Johnny Wilson legally blind, badly scarred, lacking use of one arm, and with impaired judgment when faced with complex issues. His mother got him a job as an attendant at a self-parking lot—he was pleasant with people, reliable, and able to make change, and so his employers were pleased with him. Essentially a lonely person, Johnny became friendly with a group of high school boys who hung out at the fast-food place where he had lunch. He invited them to visit him on the job. The boys realized almost immediately that he was vulnerable, and while one distracted him, another stole from the cash box. Johnny was brought into court for stealing, a particularly serious charge as he had previously shoplifted small items. Fortunately, the neighboring shoe repair man had a run-in with the boys over their behavior, came forward, and the police were able to find the real culprit. But Johnny lost his job. His lawyer advised his mother to seek help from a social agency. Because of his handicap, Johnny was vulnerable to exploitation of all kinds. His divorced father had remarried and moved away; his mother alternated between rejection, guilt, overprotection, and anxiety about his future. The worker’s task was threefold: (1) to help Johnny, to the extent he was able, to protect himself and find friends; (2) to utilize social resources to protect him; and (3) to help his mother deal with her feelings and make practical plans for the future. The first involved helping Johnny enroll with a group of people with mental impairments who were learning social skills; the second, helping him get a job in a sheltered workshop; the third, giving his mother understanding, support, and information about the possibility of a legal guardian for Johnny. Fortunately, theirs was a community where legal aid services, sheltered workshops, and group homes for the physically and mentally impaired were available. Had they not been, the worker’s task would have been much more difficult, and her responsibility would have included working for the development of such essential services.

Levine, Joanne. Working with People: The Helping Process (Page 221). Pearson Education. Kindle Edition.

Dependency

In winter, the plains of Nebraska are often swept by snow and ice storms and severe cold. Life for both humans and animals can be difficult. The friend who sat beside the worker’s desk was a child of the pioneers who, a short hundred years ago, learned to live with this land. She was six months pregnant with her first child, her husband was out of town, and her tears were occasioned by the fact that the pump on the windmill was frozen, the cattle were without water, and the truck she drove to do the morning chores was stuck in the frozen ice and mud in the barnyard. “Surely there’s someone in your family who can help you with this work,” the worker suggested. This occasioned fresh tears. “I want to do it myself!” she sputtered angrily. This resolute, determined young woman who found it so difficult to say, “I need help,” or “I need to depend on someone else” developed from a people within a culture at a particular time in history.

The ethic that lauds independence as the great virtue is so strongly inculcated in our society that it is so difficult to admit and voice the need for help, and the fear and loathing of “dependency” is so great that often only a tragedy makes it possible for people to request necessary assistance. In our society, there is something shameful in admitting that one is incapable of dealing alone with the demands of living. Human service workers—physicians, teachers, social workers, police officers, ministers—are all too familiar with the people who come for help too late and then only when a crisis occurs that permits no other solution.

Why do we protest so greatly what is a natural, necessary state? Why do we deny this part of ourselves and worship the myth of an isolated and independent soul riding alone into the sunset? Like Shakespeare’s lady who doth protest too much, is the extremity of our denial an expression of our very need to be dependent on each other?

The whole question of dependence is fraught with emotion and characterized by cloudy thinking and inconsistent behavior. Our society sets no clear guidelines for its members. By creating absolutes of the two states—dependence and independence—we have lost sight of their relative nature and their essential coexistence. By glorifying the kind of competitiveness that must inevitably end in a winner and a loser, we have created a system that does not allow people to relate naturally to each other in a supportive way.

No one is ever totally dependent or totally independent. We are interdependent both as individuals and as societies, and interdependence is made up of both dependence and independence in a state of balance. In themselves, these two characteristics are neither good nor bad; rather, it is the totality, the weaving together, the balance in which they occur, that makes them desirable or undesirable, constructive or destructive.

Humans as a species are characterized by the need for a longer period of nurturing than any other life form. Despite this, there is a drive toward self-determination within the infant, whose dependence is only a matter of degree appropriate to its particular stage of development. If one tries to confine the seemingly haphazard movements of an infant’s arms or legs, its face will redden with rage as it opens its mouth to scream. The infant In winter, the plains of Nebraska are often swept by snow and ice storms and severe cold. Life for both humans and animals can be difficult. The friend who sat beside the worker’s desk was a child of the pioneers who, a short hundred years ago, learned to live with this land. She was six months pregnant with her first child, her husband was out of town, and her tears were occasioned by the fact that the pump on the windmill was frozen, the cattle were without water, and the truck she drove to do the morning chores was stuck in the frozen ice and mud in the barnyard. “Surely there’s someone in your family who can help you with this work,” the worker suggested. This occasioned fresh tears. “I want to do it myself!” she sputtered angrily. This resolute, determined young woman who found it so difficult to say, “I need help,” or “I need to depend on someone else” developed from a people within a culture at a particular time in history.

Levine, Joanne. Working with People: The Helping Process (Page 222). Pearson Education. Kindle Edition.

wants to do what it wants to do when and how it wants to do it. he extent of and the manner in which these early strivings develop will depend on the way they are dealt with.

A child can be given total freedom of movement, thought, and feeling or can be wrapped in intellectually, emotionally, physically, socially, and spiritually confining swaddling clothes. The need to free oneself for development in all life areas is built in and scheduled to unfold in accordance with one’s own individual timetable. In no sense, however, does one develop from one absolute state to another—from absolute dependence to absolute independence. Rather, one exists in a state of relative dependence–independence according to one’s need at a particular time in the life cycle. Given a perfectly healthy individual in a perfectly healthy milieu, a perfectly healthy balance of these two needs would result. In specifying a healthy milieu, however, it must be emphasized that we do not mean one without stress, which is ultimately essential for development, but one in which there is a good balance of challenge and support.

**The Flexible Continuum of Interdependence**

Using the concepts from systems theory provides an effective way of looking at interdependence. When we define a system as a whole made up of interrelated parts, we are also defining interdependence. Each part supplements and complements the others, and the system that attempts to function without this give-and-take relationship gradually moves toward ineffectualness and eventual calcification through its own rigidity and isolation. So it is with the individual’s balance of dependence–independence needs. However, perfect balance is a static concept and can scarcely be applicable to anything as dynamic as life. When we look at individuals, groups, and societies, we see a constant shifting and changing as they adapt to changes in each other. he healthy system possesses a lexibility that enables it to make these adaptations to both internal and external changes. his adaptability, this capacity for adjustment and readjustment, is the essence of healthy interdependence. he individual who requires hospitalization is a case in point. One of the secrets of a successful hospital stay is the capacity to be dependent, but it is equally important that upon recovery the patient be capable of giving up this dependence and moving again toward independently making the decisions and performing the activities that were done by others during the illness. Diverse problems arise when the patient needs and wants to remain a patient. Thus we could say that every system—and the individual is as much a system as are groups—possesses a range of capacity for interdependence, involving a continuum from extreme dependence to extreme independence. Adaptations to the demands of living require the ability to move back and forth freely along the scale, and inability to function except at one extreme or the other tends to be pathological. he person who needs and wants to be totally free of commitments, of give-and-take relationships with others, constitutes as great a problem to self and society as the person who can never walk alone.

**Two Aspects of Interdependence**

Our interdependent society might be viewed from two different frames of reference: (1) that which revolves around the essential give and take that is required to provide

Levine, Joanne. Working with People: The Helping Process (Page 223). Pearson Education. Kindle Edition.

material needs and services and (2) that which relates to self-determination, capacity for decision making, and relationships with others. Given the myth of the independent individual, which is fostered from earliest infancy in the society, one who is in a position of requiring outside help in either of these two areas frequently finds that admitting need and seeking help create as much trouble as the actual difficulty itself. The very nature of human services requires that practitioners deal constantly with the problems caused by such negative attitudes toward dependence, with those engendered by individuals who are on either extreme of the continuum of interdependence, and with those that arise from the character of the helping relationship itself, which contains within it elements of both dependence and authority.

**The Role of the Worker**

Workers themselves are products of this society and culture, which have created an unrealistic monolith and made a fetish of independence. They cannot avoid being affected by these attitudes. In addition, they have within themselves the same dependence– independence strivings that are a part of each individual’s identity. They may have selected their jobs because of their own needs to control others and have others dependent on them. Consequently, they sometimes approach their work as a divided person, as did the student who wrote in his analysis of the impact of his own cultural conditioning, “I will always have to watch my own attitudes in working with men who do not support their families. In my home town, that man was the lowest of the low.”

As always, the worker’s first task is to look at the reality of the situation and consider if it should and how it can be changed. he problem created by society’s attitudes is a frustrating one because it not only creates difficulties for individuals in need but also prevents the enactment of laws and the development of programs that would create the conditions leading to the growth of each individual’s capacity for healthy interdependence. Fortunately, however, we seem to be maturing in our acceptance of not only our own personal needs for outside help but also the similar needs of other people. he willingness of society in general to be accepting of the reality of human needs and the assumption of greater responsibility for those who are unable to provide for themselves will vary with the times and the situation. When the causes of dependency can be visibly demonstrated, a with children, old people, and t h e physically handicapped, recognition of the need for social responsibility comes more easily than, for example, with the healthy-appearing adult who cannot work.

Despite these attitudes, recognition of the interdependence of all people seems more pervasive than ever before. he very existence of wide-range planning to enable people to realize their maximum potential—regardless of how limited it may be—bears witness to this. he ecological movement extends this philosophy, and we are beginning to recognize the interrelationship of all life forms. A major problem seems to hinge on developing the knowledge necessary to enable us to create a good society, but if the dynamic developments in the behavioral sciences have any validity, we should find ourselves possessed of increasingly effective tools for this purpose.

However, workers’ tasks go beyond developing new knowledge. hey must use what we presently know (1) to attempt to create the social conditions that lead to the fullest

Levine, Joanne. Working with People: The Helping Process (Page 224). Pearson Education. Kindle Edition.

development of the individual’s capacity for interdependence and (2) to utilize sound practice methods that tend to lessen the client’s need to function on either extreme of this continuum. What must the society provide so that its members may develop, to the greatest extent, their potential for healthy functioning? It must provide the basic human needs: • Assurance of access to adequate material resources—food, clothing, shelter. • Provision of opportunity for growth in all areas, according to the potential of the individual. • Provision of a climate that does not overprotect and ask too little, or demand so much that it cannot be achieved, but one that involves a balance of opportunity and responsibility. • Provision of reward for risk and supports in failure. • Provision for increasing self-determination and involvement in decision making according to the capacities of the individual. • Provision of opportunity for satisfaction of emotional needs, and the development of a value system that gives meaning to life. The reader will note that not only should these six conditions be a part of the entire social order, but that they are also an essential part of family life. The developing child who has these advantages within the smaller family unit has a good chance of developing into a healthy adult who possesses a flexible balance of dependence and independence.

**Social Change**

It is obvious in looking at the foregoing list that there are many people in our society who do not have even some of these advantages. As a society, we pay dearly in human suffering, in loss of the potential strength that these people represent, and in the actual financial cost of caring for them. It is to the advantage of the total group that its members develop a healthy capacity for interdependence. It is equally clear that the individual worker cannot effect the massive social changes necessary to make this possible. Collective planning and action on the part of clients, workers, and representatives of the general public are essential, for all of us have a stake in the necessary changes. The unique contribution of the worker to this undertaking should be knowledge of how to proceed that is not derived from any one discipline or approach. For example, so simple yet fundamental a change as safeguarding small children from nibbling at lead paint in slum dwellings requires varied knowledge of: (1) drafting and putting through ordinances that will require this protection, such as those in some cities that require covering the painted walls with plasterboard; (2) knowing and utilizing the power structure and bureaucracies in the city to see that the laws are enforced; (3) developing and using channels of communication to enable the people involved—landlords, tenants, and homeowners—to know their rights and responsibilities and how to discharge them; and (4) knowing how to work with people to help them to secure and use necessary legislation and develop the motivation to act. All this, for one small aspect of the problem, and we have not even touched on the basic problem—the absence of decent housing that people can afford.

Levine, Joanne. Working with People: The Helping Process (Page 225). Pearson Education. Kindle Edition.