

• PART THREE •

# LIFE-MODELED PRACTICE AT COMMUNITY, ORGANIZATION, AND POLITICAL LEVELS

Part 3 examines life-modeled practice designed to influence the quality of community life through engaging residents, to advocate for needed policy and program changes in human service organizations, and to use political methods and skills to advance the cause of social justice. Porter Lee, in his 1929 presidential address to the National Conference of Social Work (Lee, 1929b), noted that social work was moving away from a concern with a cause (social reform) and was assuming the character of a function (direct services). In Lee's view, both cause and function are valuable and essential for social welfare: a cause once won depends on organization, methods, and skills for its implementation. But a tendency to become overly preoccupied with organizational maintenance and professional prerogatives can lead to a blunting of commitment. Lee (1929b) envisioned a synthesis in which social work would develop its service as a function of well-organized community life without sacrificing its capacity to inspire enthusiasm for a cause.

Unfortunately, direct practitioners have shied away from "cause" practice, identifying it as the province of community organizers, administrators, and policy practitioners: for community organizers to mobilize and organize communities to improve community life; for social work administrators to change service delivery and accountability structures; and for policy practitioners to create new legislation, improve existing ones, or defeat the policy initiatives of other groups. These community, organizational, and policy "specialists" engage a system on behalf of a class of clients. These macro specialists are essential to carrying out the profession's social justice mandate. However, for the profession to fully fulfill its

social justice commitment, community, agency, and policy practice must be carried out by generalist practitioners in their day-to-day activities as well as by advanced specialists. In order for social workers to help oppressed and disadvantaged populations, both generalists and specialists must engage in community, organizational, and legislative practice.

In helping individuals, families, and groups with their life stressors and issues, social work practitioners daily encounter the lack of fit between people's needs and the resources available in communities, organizations, and broader society. Thus, the life-modeled generalist practitioner must assume professional responsibility for mobilizing community resources to influence quality of life in the community, for influencing unresponsive organizations to develop responsive policies and services, and for influencing local, state, and federal legislation and regulations to improve the lives of their clients. Part 3 of this book deals with the expansion of direct practice activities from helping individual, families, and groups deal with life stressors to influencing community and neighborhood life (chapter 13); employing organizations (chapter 14); and legislation, regulations, and electoral politics (chapter 15).