

The Chinese University of Hong Kong
Department of Social Work
SOWK 2230 Community Work
Term paper

Name: Lai Ying Tung

Prof. Wong Hung

Introduction

Having experienced a whole semester of lessons related to community work, it is undeniable that we have a closer interaction with the community as well as gaining deeper understanding on the needs of different vulnerable groups. I would like to take this valuable chance to analysis and reflect on different method of intervention used when exploring the agency and the community.

Brief description of the agency

Our group visited the agency called HKSKH Lady MacLehose Centre. It is one of the Community Centre in Hong Kong established since 1973. The services provided were based on the ideology of “Constructing the community, care-taking of the community, community health and building social capital”. The main objective of the centre is to provide equal opportunities to strengthen the power of the different individuals personally, morally and spiritually so as to boost the power of the community as a whole. Various activities and services were implemented targeting different needs and social problems of the community, for instance remedial groups, counseling services and religious activities.

Evaluation of intervention

The center is located in the district of Kwai Hing, an area of Kwai Chung Town. Recently, we have followed the footprint of the centre to explore the community with different intervention method namely site visit of the centre and the community nearby, home visit and setting up stalls in the community. Following will be the evaluation of each intervention method with stating their rationale, strategies, methods, expected outcome as well as the detailed process and task of the intervention.

Site visit of the centre and the community

To start with, we begin our journey to explore and understand the district by visiting the centre and the community nearby. It is an important starting step for need assessment. Through the verbal introduction by the experienced social worker working in the HKSKH Lady MacLehose Centre, we have a far more clear

impression on the district that I seldom pay attention to. The worker introduced to us that the major target groups of the centre are the people living under sub-divided units, new arrivals and the ethnic minorities etc. Also, the workers we have been working with are specializing in the housing issues of the district. They briefly introduced to us the different and unique pattern of housing in Kwai Hing, like the interim housing, private housing and terms like squatter shacks that we have seldom heard of. Getting to know more about the brief housing condition help us to create a general picture on the community that we were going to take care of. In this district, about 60% of the housing are public housing, and the vacant rate of the interim housing is extremely high, which is around 40% to 50%. Moreover, the unemployment rate, 3.8%, is known as high among different districts in Hong Kong. The above factual information provided us with great opportunity to adjust our expectation and impression before visiting the community, which can further prevent us from misinterpreting the real situation of the district by just placing our limited recognition.

Having listened to the sharing by the worker, we then stepped into the district. The worker brought us to walk around. I must admit that it was absolutely a great chance for us to have a deeper understanding and connection with the district. Firstly, we met many ethnic minorities and elderly when passing by the street and it matched with the statistics that around 16% of the population in this district is elderly. This indeed reminded me to pay more attention to the supporting network and facilities for elderly. Is the environment elderly-friendly? We can notice that there are many private elderly home along the street, representing that there is huge demand for elderly care service. Yet, we can also see that there are large number of steep slopes in this district as quite a large number of residential housing were built along the hillside. It is inconvenient for the daily activities of the neighbor living there as we can see the elderly stopped for times to rest when walking up the long stair to travel from the wet market to their home. The worker reminded us to bear these “little findings” in mind that can easily be ignored since it is a serious matter including the concept of city planning and network of supporting facilities.

Visiting the centre and community nearby seems not difficult as we are not restricted by many constraints and the workers are willing to share their working experience. Nevertheless, in what degree can we explore the community do matter. Observation is a constructive method in letting oneself to communicate and know more about the community in an identity and eyesight of stranger. This gave us the first hand information of how our city looks like and how the people get adapted to the living environment. So as to fully utilize this intervention method, we should pay more attention to every tiny things happening around us as these little things probably reflect the needs and problems faced by the people living in the community, which is extremely crucial for need assessment.

Home visit

Secondly, the intervention method we applied was home visit. There are two main kinds of contact namely explorative contact and recruiting contact. (Wu, 1997) The rationale of this explorative intervention was to communicate and gather the information of the neighbor by delivering the leaflets about various kind of social welfare to them. The main target of this intervention method is to advertise some social welfare policy like the Community Care Fund and the low-income working family allowance. Also, we would like to record down the popularity of sub-divided unit of the building we visited and the personal information and contact of the needed family, which also go on with the same line with our expected outcome. It is also a method of introducing the community center to the neighbor.

By times of trial and error, we have concluded some effective strategies. The first strategy of home visit is to arouse neighbor's interest in interacting with you. It is useful to knock the door loudly and without hesitation. Along with the announcement of providing more information of applying social welfare, which is related to the tangible needs of the residents, it can usually catch their attention as majority of neighbor show concerns and are curious about the financial aid provided by the government. (Wu, 1997) The opening speech should be clear, which briefly introduce who we are and what our intention is.

Showing them the card which show our identity for example the volunteer identity card of the centre can increase their sense of security to open door for us.

When I recalled the experience of home visit months ago, I must admit that it was not a successful experience as we only entered one house and talked with the neighbor in the planned time of one hour. Moreover, the family we successfully interacted only shown little interest on the welfare policy that we were promoting and I felt quite discouraged after the home visit. One difficulty I faced is that I was not familiar with the social welfare policy and I had no confidence as well as evidence in answering their questions. One solution to cope with this obstacle is to tell the neighbor honestly that I am not sure and ask for their contact so that the center's social worker could do some follow up action. Secondly, when it comes to the situation where the neighbor show no interest in what you are promoting and keep talking about the area that they are interested, it provides a good platform for you to understand their needs as well as having a reflection on whether your intention for home visit suit the real concerns of the residents.

Couples of value and principles of community work were used in the intervention method of home visit. Firstly, it consists the strength-based perspective. Despite having many agenda, we should be aware that we are not over-controlled by them. Just like what I experienced in the home visit, the social worker distributed some questionnaire to us and asked us to invite the residents to fill the form for us as an intervention method. Yet, we should not see filling the questionnaire as the most important target and task to be done. Otherwise, we would have less conscious and intention in exploring the resources and the strength of the residents like their neighborhood relationship.

Moreover, home visit reminded me the importance in staying in a status of "not knowing". Being humble when having home visit is extremely vital because experiencing through the context of the residents can help us to view the social problems and needs of residents in their perspectives by stepping in their shoes.

On the other hand, focuses should be put on subjective feelings rather than objective facts. We are now working with people but not machines, where people would have distinct emotion and values upon different issues. As a result, we should be highly aware of their expressed feeling because their responses often show their opinion on specific issues as well as their degree of satisfaction with the government. For example, one resident complained with anger that she thought the procedure for applying social welfare is too complicated. Not only does it represent his dissatisfaction with the concerned department's operation, but it also reminded us the task that the worker can do, like explaining the law and regulations with simplified language to them.

The value of non-judgmental attitude is presented in the intervention of home visit too. When you are communicating with the residents, you may find that the values you uphold are having conflicts with the value that the residents believed. In this case, one should bear in mind that there is motion under every action and efforts should be paid in understanding what is their considerations and how social phenomenon are shaping their values and thinking. Worker should avoid questioning the truth and validity or even showing denial to the residents. Showing respect is the basic attitude to create room for mutual understanding among individuals.

Setting up stalls in the community

The third intervention we used was setting up stalls in the community. The rationale of this intervention was to get in touch with the residents in the community by setting up booths in the area, which is convenient and approachable to the residents. We had set up four objectives for this intervention at that time. Firstly of all, we would like to promote some government oriented social policy like the community care fund. Secondly, we would like to come into contact with the residents living in this district as well as acquainting ourselves with the needs of the community Thirdly, we would like to organize the residents to join some advocacy movement for instance the "Residents of sub divided units Alliance". Lastly, we would like to intensify the relationship between the centre and the residents as we are setting stalls on behalf of the HKSKH Lady

MacLehose Centre, which places high focus on maintaining a mutual support relationship in the district.

The effectiveness of this intervention method actually depends greatly on the strategies taken. The preparation beforehand is extremely important because the organizer should be fully aware of the pattern and habits of the residents. Choosing the right place and right time would definitely allow you to get in touch with more residents as well as gaining more insights. Take our last time experience as example, we set our target group as the general public, probably those underprivileged family who needs social welfare support. As a result, we firstly considered the living pattern of these groups of people and we confirmed setting up stalls outside the wet market with full stream of people. Also, we kept ourselves familiar with the qualification of applying different social welfare in case the residents asked for more details. Moreover, the strategy we conducted in the on-site was division of labor. Some classmates were responsible for the announcement with the assistance of microphone while some classmates at the same time were delivering the handbills promoting different social welfare policy and answer the questions of the residents.

The response of residents was quite active that day. Quite a lot of residents directly came to stall and ask for details for applying different social welfare policy and some even expressed their dissatisfaction on the government's performance. We collected about ten questionnaires done by the residents and some of them even left their personal information for follow up actions. Yet, some people shown no interest and pass by our stalls directly.

Some values of community work were shown in this intervention method. First of all, it shows the direction and process of making changes, starting from contacting with the residents to organizing the concerned public and with the power of groups, eventually leading to changes. Setting up stalls unavoidably raises the social awareness; on the other hand, it encourages more and more people to pay closer attention to social issues and to give an impetus to them to

join social action. Locality development, social planning and social action are the three model of community organization practice. (Rothman, 1976) In fact, it creates a sense of citizenship to the residents by acquiring them with more issues and policies that are actually influencing them. This action indeed raises the resident's awareness and creates a hope for them that they are capable and have the power of making changes.

One difficulty I shared in the debriefing session was that a resident kept talking about his feeling towards retirement welfare policy and at that time I was not sure if I should follow his flow and discuss this issue with him or should I move to the topic for what we initially planned to promote. Yet, this struggle reminded me to think more about the relationship between the presenting problems and the real needs. When one people approach you and talk about his dissatisfaction towards the government or some policies, it seems that their concerns run far from what the topic you proposed. However, as a social worker, one should be sensitive to the potential needs of the residents, rather than assuming that they have no underlying needs. In fact, we are living in an interrelated system, where people and the environment are affecting each other in a circular way. Consequently, one should realize that social problems are socially constructed. Some residents show no interest in the topic you are proposing may be attributed to the fact that they are not aware of how seriously they are influenced by the environment or they are having some misconceptions on those topics like the qualification of applying social welfare subsidies. In such way, worker can play an important role of educator and broker so as to provide more information to the residents and correct their misperception as long as motivate them to plan some action for changes.

Equal Sharing Session in Sham Shui Po

In the last tutorial, we went to Sham Shui Po district to visit the sub-divided units as well as interacting with the homeless people by having an equal sharing session. Though this time of intervention was not carried out and led by the centre, I would like to record what I experienced and how I view this kind of intervention method.

I still remember that we went to the root top of a building. By walking up the stairs, what inspired me most was the environment and the facilities supported. Since we have also visited the sub divided building in Kwai Hing before, I must admit that the one we visited in Sham Shui Po was of far poorer environment. The root top slum was surrounded by trash and the lighting of stair was far from satisfaction. That was the first time I experienced what we usually heard from the mass media, saying that how dangerous are these old building with lots of sub divided units. The experience of site visit undeniably brought me closer to the reality and not just only touch the city by viewing secondary information in the social network or mass media. Such intervention allows me to snuggle closer with the real society and not just apply my limited expectation and assumption to identify a social situation.

When it comes to the evaluation of equal sharing session with the homeless, I must admit that I am still struggling with the effectiveness of this intervention method. On one hand, I agree that visiting them by share our resource can let us get to know more about this target group, for example what problem are they facing and what are their daily routine. Yet on the other hand, I think such intervention method disturb their lives in some degree. Though it is named as “sharing” rather than “giving”, we are indeed giving them resources and seem like asking for returns, like we expect the homeless people would talk with us and we would gain better understanding towards them. Besides, why do we need to share some resources to them in order to let us feel more comfortable in opening the room for communication? This pattern of targeting a specific group of people and unconsciously waiting something for return indicated that we are viewing this group of people differently, somehow from a point that we believe they need our care and resources and at the same time assuming that they will be happy for having someone to visit them, isn't that we are placing a halo on top of our head and thinking that what we do for them are definitely beneficial to them?

With the above worries and concerns, I understand that different

intervention method may have their limitations and this bring me to the concept of empathy. When planning an intervention in community work, I try to be more sensitive in estimating the possible disturbances and benefits bring to them. Understanding that each intervention method has their own aims and objectives, I wish to achieve those targets with a humble and empathetic attitude. Process-oriented and goal oriented are both important to be attained and both of them should be put into serious consideration so as not to lay particular stress on either one side.

Further exploration of the agency

Although emphasis were put on the community development intervention, I would like to further introduce some other services provided by the HKSKH Lady MacLehose Centre so as to have an all-rounded evaluation on the intervention they adopted. A dispensary was set up in the community centre where the neighbor living nearby can consult doctor with a relatively cheaper and affordable price. The set up of the dispensary indeed provides care for the tangible needs of the residents. The fee of consulting doctor is regarded as one of the heaviest burden by the lower class family and the provision of affordable medical service can greatly increase the residents' intention to receive more information of services provided by the community center. The emergence of the dispensary in fact link up the residents with the social resources.

Impact of community work on individual and community

Community work brings impact to both individual and community as a collective. From the viewpoint of the individual, community work raise their self-awareness of how they are influenced by the system around them. Since community work concerns the welfare of the general public, issues about advocacy of social policy as well as social movement against injustice policies will be mentioned. It is undeniable that the residents will be more alert of the news around them and the members in the community will come to a status of critical consciousness. (Wu, 1997) Secondly, community work could help to solve the tangible needs of individual. By home visit and setting up stalls in the community, social workers play the role of broker, which helps to link the

individual needs to social services. In such way, some workers may satisfy their individual needs by applying social welfare services. Thirdly, community work helps to build up better social bonding among different individuals. The residents will gain sense of belonging among the community as the advocacy work in the community work often encourage a group of residents who are having the same concerns to unite and to cooperate. (Kam, 2013) This actually helps with the relationship building of different individual and individual may experience a status of “all in the same boat”. On the other hand, it also reduces the feeling of alienation built by the modern society. (Kam, 2013)

From the viewpoint of the community, community work help with building a mutual support atmosphere among the community. Extending from different individuals to the formation of groups, the belief of having someone going on the same way with you will develop. With the spirit of social self-determination, meaning that the residents can decide on which way of social action they would like to take and how it is presented, most importantly, they were not controlled by anyone. This indeed reflects the idea of empowerment and the process of removing the indirect power blocks gradually, which solve the problem of powerlessness. (Soloman, 1976) At the same time, community work emphasis cooperation among different individual and such cooperation pattern can help with building social relationship, as well as creating external bridging social capital, like building trust and cooperation among different community (Saegert, Thompson and Warren, 2001), which is beneficial to the sustainable development of the community and society as a whole.

Sustainability of the changes

To summarize the changes from the above four times of experience and intervention, I must honestly admit that changes made are not obvious. Rather than helping the community, I would think that the residents gave us more insights and new perspectives in viewing the society. To conclude, I would think the possible changes brought to the community would be the raise in personal awareness. For example, home visit and the stalls provide the residents with more information about various kinds of social welfare policies; this indeed

evoked resident's curiosity whether they were qualified in applying them. Moreover, the equal share session may show to the homeless people that someone cares for their living and they can seek help from the social workers or the agency. Changes I observed was not as big and as ideal as creating a more justice society since we only took little steps in interacting with the residents that we have never met before. Yet, I do think every little step creates a stronger power and awareness of making changes in the society.

To decide whether the changes made are sustainable, we have to firstly consider the indicator of sustainability. Yet, there is no quick solution. It is well said that sustainability cannot be developed and imposed on a community by someone outside this community. Sustainability would not work unless it is created and developed by the community itself. (Achterberg, 1996) We, social workers, are only outside experts who can provide assistance at crucial point of time. Nevertheless, the people living in the community are the only one who can perfectly decide if our assistance suits their taste. They are the real experts of the community. Still, to make the changes more sustainable and lessen the limitation of different intervention method, it is believed that holding hope and belief is very important. Any other field like casework and groupwork can never replace community work, as I believed that changes could be brought from two sides. The first one is to change the person to fit in the environment and the other one is to change the environment to fit in the needs of the people. In light of the importance of community work, each and every one of us plays an important role in

Conclusion

The experience of community work intervention undoubtedly broaden my horizons and understanding in recognizing the community as well as raising my social awareness on different social issues. At the same time, I am better familiar with the real context and practice of community work. I am looking forward to having more experience in this field in the coming future.

Reference:

甘炳光、胡文龍、馮國堅、梁祖彬。(1997)。社區工作技巧。香港：中文大學出版社。

甘炳光、梁祖彬、陳麗雲、林香生、胡文龍、馮國堅、黃文泰。(2013)。社區工作：理論與實踐。香港：中文大學出版社。

Twelvetrees, A. (1982). *What is Community Work?* (pp. 4-19).
Macmillan Education UK.

Achterberg, W. (1996). Sustainability, community and democracy.
Democracy and green political thought: Sustainability, rights and citizenship, 170-187.

A (26/30)

It is an excellent paper written with heart and thoughtfulness. You have genuine and in-depth reflection on your intervention and the (power) relationship with the clients, which increase your sensitivity, awareness and determination to understand and work with the clients. You can apply knowledge and concepts from references and classroom learning to what you observe and experience in a coherent and accurate way. Congratulation and I enjoy reading this paper and share your joy of advancement.

Wong Hung