

Who Is in Charge of This: Service Learning as a Context for Youth Empowerment through Policy Participation in an After-School Program

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Introduction

Professional social work practice carries an obligation to work for social justice with and on behalf of vulnerable populations. *Who Is in Charge of This*, a project model designed for this purpose, was implemented as a service learning assignment for bachelor's of social work (BSW) students at the University of South Florida (USF) who carried out a social policy project with African-American children under 12 years old. It was intended to illustrate what it means to be a social work change agent and to provide children with an empowering policy participation experience. The context for this work was a required Social Welfare Policy and Programs course in the curriculum at the USF School of Social Work and an after-school program operated by the Tampa Department of Parks and Recreation. The focus of the Tampa Department of Parks and Recreation is to promote pro-social behavior in youths ages 5 to 17 through positive supervision and recreational activities in a safe environment.

Students in the BSW program take their policy course in the last semester before they graduate. Until then, they are primarily focused on learning direct service models of intervention. The project offered a practical introduction to community-based social work practice to create understanding of interventions beyond the individual or family as targets of change. Twenty-six BSW students worked with a group of young children for four sessions, each approximately 2 hr in duration, in a community setting. The BSW students' evaluative responses to the project indicated that it was valuable for their learning, and the children, who were very productive in the project, enjoyed their policy participation activity.

The project was conducted in a community where there are many environmental conditions that can increase the socioeconomic risk factors for vulnerable young children who live there. The risk factors that impede academic achievement by African-American and other minority children living at or near the poverty level are well established in the social work and human service literature. These children are exposed to community violence (Howard, 1996). They are vulnerable because of unsafe environments and the negative behavior of other children (Gerdes & Benson, 1995) and are at risk for underachievement and academic failure (Tucker,

1999). They experience great disparities in health care (Myers & Taylor, 1998). They frequently lack sustained and positive adult interactions. Parents living in stressed communities who are dependent on public assistance are challenged to provide good child care given limited affordable child care options and at the same time comply with work requirements under welfare reform (Crewe, 2003).

On reflection, one develops a picture of a large population of youngsters about whom adults research, discuss, and prognosticate. Much has been written about them, but their voices are infrequently included in the empirical messages conveyed in academic and human service domains. This article adds to evolving literature that emphasizes that children are able to participate in processes concerning their care and well-being in the context of being “looked after” in respective service systems (Kufeldt, Simard, & Vachon, 2003; Munro, 2001).

Service learning pedagogy has demonstrated its capacity to enhance student learning and civic engagement (Astin & Sax, 1998; Batchelder & Root, 1994; Giles & Eyler, 1994; Markus, Howard, & King, 1993). It involves the conduct of services or programs that meet a particular human need in such a way that student learning objectives are also accomplished through the respective exercises or initiatives. This assignment created an opportunity for BSW students in a Social Welfare Policy and Practice class to apply classroom knowledge in a community setting and an opportunity to work with a largely unfamiliar population: African-American children and youths.

Empowerment and Self Advocacy

The project was based in empowerment theory, which emphasizes problem solving by exercising influence over circumstances in one’s own life (Perkins, 1995). The project’s development was also influenced by self-efficacy theory and research, which shows that direct experience contributes to personal self-efficacy, a belief that a person can engage in action that will result in the achievement of a particular goal (Bandura, Barbaranelli, Caprara, & Pastorelli, 2001). Research has shown that adults who provide encouragement and serve as role models can increase self-efficacy in children and, in particular, have a positive impact on academic achievement (Bandura et al., 2001; Rosenfeld, Richman, & Bowen, 2000).

The intent of the project was to create a new opportunity for children to practice policy participation through letter writing to elected officials and public administrators, as suggested by

Segal and Brzuzny (1998, p. 251). The premise underlying this work is that it would be possible for BSW students to stimulate young children to become aware that they can exert influence in their community environments. Children hold and can express perspectives about their life circumstances, but they need help to participate (Cavet & Sloper, 2004; Kufeldt et al., 2003).

Empowerment theory was first advocated in social work literature by Barbara Solomon (1976) as an ideology and strategy to intervene in the lives of African-American families. Since the 1970s, it has been fully embraced as an ideology and value orientation by most social scientists concerned with improvements in social functioning. There remains ambiguity in the way it is defined and applied. However, it has become so pervasive in use and in professional literature that one is safe, in this instance, to adopt a definition that pertains to enabling youths to find voice and take actions to influence the conditions in their community. "Empowerment is the process of gaining influence over events and outcomes of importance" (Fawcett et al., 1994, p. 678). This process is applicable to an individual, group, or community and therefore the concept can be found in analyses of issues devoted to micro, meso, and macro levels of the society.

In addition to empowerment theory, the *Who Is in Charge of This* project is based in the assumption that some childhood risk factors can be mediated if youths are helped to develop the ability to analyze and understand conditions born from social policy implementation or an absence thereof. Once a problem is defined, it is empowering to learn that one can become a self-advocate to remedy a situation or to influence the development of more sensitive and rational alternatives. The second step is to take constructive action. This is a powerful concept for people who are objectified by dominant groups in the society. Children residing in impoverished and low-income communities lack opportunities to engage in this kind of self-advocacy.

Although the problems encountered by African-American children are frequently described, emphasis similarly needs to be placed on remedies that assist children in learning how to intervene on their own behalf. Recent research has suggested the need to examine self-esteem and self-efficacy in African-American youths as critical factors in academic achievement (Jonson-Reid et al., 2005). The project's conceptualization was strengthened by the work of those researchers who have sought to find ways to empower youths to resolve life course problems in a way that supports their positive development (e.g., Oyserman, Bybee, Terry, & Hart-Johnson, 2004; Tucker, 1999). Tucker devised a project that emphasized the importance of

helping youths to become self-motivated, to teach themselves to manage social behavior, and to learn to praise themselves for their progress and successes. Her research findings concluded that it is necessary to teach African-American youths to acquire successful behaviors and adaptive life skills, including communication and socialization skills and engagement in behaviors that lead to success. At the University of Michigan, Oyserman et al. (2004) conducted research with similar groups of children to show the value of providing structured learning situations for youths to help them to visualize their future, as well as strategies to achieve their objectives. In this way, the children can begin to actualize their “possible selves.” This work shows the critical need for youths to be assisted in developing both visions of their future and strategies for accomplishing stated goals (Oyserman et al., 2004, p. 130).

Advocating for social justice is a role available to all citizens and is indeed an ethical responsibility of professional social workers (Code of Ethics, 1999). However, to actualize self-advocacy, one first has to believe in the utility of one’s action and embrace a belief in one’s personal self-efficacy (Lent & Hackett, 1987). The *Who Is in Charge of This* project was designed to help BSW students see policy practice as action by which they could help others and gain a glimpse of themselves as change agents. The project was also intended to create a socially empowering experience for a group of young children. A similar project, called *My Voice*, was created by Dundon (1999-2000). Her service learning project was based on reflection. Young students were encouraged to speak out about their life experiences, engage in creative expression through a variety of idioms and engage in dialogue with attentive adults. Dundon described her work as an “advocacy approach to service learning” (p. 34).

Project Location: The Sulphur Springs Community

The *Who Is in Charge of This* project was conducted in the low- to moderate-income community of Sulphur Springs in Tampa, Florida, located approximately 12 miles from USF. Tampa Planning Department data in 2000 showed that the community had a population of approximately 6,308 residents. See Table 1 for an examination of household income in Sulphur Springs.

Table 1

Household Income in 1999 for Census Tract 7

| Income | Frequency | % |
|----------------------|-----------|--------|
| Less than \$10,000 | 527 | 25.52 |
| \$10,000 to \$24,999 | 627 | 30.36 |
| \$25,00 to 39,999 | 400 | 19.37 |
| \$40,000 to \$59,000 | 337 | 16.32 |
| \$60,000 to \$99,999 | 117 | 5.67 |
| \$100,000 | 57 | 2.76 |
| Total | 2,065 | 100.00 |

Reprinted from "P-52 Household Income in 1999 (Total Population--Census Tract 7)" (Census 2000 Summary File 3 Sample Data). Retrieved March 5, 2004

Although there was a range of incomes in Sulphur Springs, over 40% of the neighborhood residents fell below the poverty level at the time of the 1999 census. The community is ethnically mixed, with a population that was 58% African-American and 32% White. There are also people of Hispanic origin and other ethnic groups living there. A striking characteristic of the community is that 44% of the residents are children under the age of 19 (City of Tampa. Community Development Block Grant Community Needs Recommendations GY2004- 2005).

The community's demography makes the Tampa Department of Parks and Recreation Center that sponsors the after-school program in Sulphur Springs a very important place. Without the center, many children who live there would lack a supportive and supervised environment at critical phases of their development. There are other institutions offering guidance to children in the community, including schools and churches, but they do not provide daily after-school programs at no out-of-pocket expense to families. After-school programs have not been fully exploited for the benefits that they can provide to children and families (Witt, 2001). They are natural settings devoted to recreation and academic support and are perfect places to promote pro-social development. They provide a non-stigmatizing environment that is beneficial to children who, through poverty and limited social opportunities, may be predisposed

to develop behavioral problems and mental disorders or to engage in activities that lead to juvenile justice encounters.

The Who Is in Charge of This project was integrated into an existing programmatic conceptualization used by the Recreation Department, named PRIDE (City of Tampa Department of Parks and Recreation, n.d.). The acronym was derived from the following goals for youths:

PRESENT myself as a proud and productive individual.

REALIZE that I am as good as I think I am.

INCLUDE myself in positive activities that are suitable for me.

DIRECT my anger and aggression in an acceptable manner.

EXCHANGE bad habits and behaviors for good ones.

These concepts incorporate self-efficacy and self-control. The *Who Is in Charge of This* project reinforced these desired social skills to promote constructive expression and management of aggressive feelings, which, if left unattended, can lead to acting-out behaviors. Acting-out behaviors can cause self-esteem to be compromised and personal self-efficacy diminished. The Tampa recreation program seeks to prevent such maladaptive behavior.

Adult Concerns About the Community

Residents of the Sulphur Springs community have had reasons to be concerned about their neighborhoods. Housing conditions, the quality of their children's education, and the fact that many individuals who have been sexual predators reside there are three prime examples of the problems that cause anxiety. Adult Sulphur Springs residents have also been concerned about the conversion of single-family homes into duplex apartments. Some believe this has led to a decrease in the quality of community life and an increase in the rate of criminal activity. The disproportionate number of sexual offenders residing there is especially troublesome, since there are so many children under age 18 living in the community. In January 2006, the *Tampa Tribune* distributed a newsletter prepared by the Hillsborough County Sheriff's office that contained the pictures and addresses of sexual predators and offenders in respective communities. Ninety-two

individuals were shown with addresses in the zip code assigned to Sulphur Springs (Gee, 2006).

Although the community has the attention of local, state, and federal governments and plans to address community concerns are underway, Sulphur Springs was described by the *St. Petersburg Times* as

a depressed place scarred by two major roadways and split lengthwise by the interstate. Its physical divide symbolizes the community's reputation for rootlessness. The Springs is one of the city's busiest places for drug dealers, prostitutes and thieves. . . . In two years, city building inspectors have issued more than 2,300 code violations. On side streets and behind the thrift stores and beneath towering oaks, junk piles up outside dilapidated homes. (Hill, 2005, p. 14A)

In 2003, when this project was conducted, the Hillsborough County Board of Education evaluated the performance of the Sulphur Springs elementary school as C, and this grade was sustained until 2006–2007, when the school was graded F. In 2006–2007, 97% of the students in the school were minorities, and 95% of them came from families whose economic status entitled them to free or reduced-price lunches. These data and news reports give validation to community residents' concerns and also convey that children and youths have a great stake in what actions are taken by those charged with responsibility for community well-being.

Who Is in Charge of This Project Implementation

This active learning (Faust & Paulson, 1998) project was 8 weeks in duration. The first 4 weeks of the 4-credit hour Social Welfare Policy and Practice course was spent studying social welfare policy, history, and government and policy analysis. Four weeks were conducted on-site at the recreation center. The objectives of the project for BSW students were (a) to acquire understanding of contemporary social problems in a local community through the eyes of children, (b) to develop policy analysis skills, and (c) to acquire an understanding of the roles that social workers can play as change agents.

All students were engaged in the planning and implementation of the project through subcommittee assignments before the first visit to the community. A budget committee planned the use of the \$2,000 allocated to the project through a service learning grant. A subcommittee

researched the respective city departments that had responsibility for policies governing and implementing city services in Sulphur Springs. A zip-code committee provided demographic information, and a purchasing committee decided on the arts and craft materials that were used in the project, purchased books that were donated to the recreation center's program, and bought the USF tee shirts used as final gifts for both sets of students on the last day of the project. Students made reports regarding their committee findings in class. Following their research and activities, they also wrote policy briefs that summarized their research about city agency policies and identified administrators who were responsible for various programs and services. This was in preparation for the guidance they would need to give to the children in the recreation center program. The assignment also required all BSW students to write a weekly narrative about their experience and an evaluative statement about how they assessed the learning experience as it pertained to course objectives.

When the project went on-site, approximately 35 to 40 children attending the after-school program were met at the end of their school day and escorted by staff to the recreation center. During the project, interested BSW students volunteered to participate in escorting as a way to get to know the children. Once the elementary school children were in the recreation center, BSW students played with them to build rapport and to establish a context for their working together. Their activities included assisting with homework assigned by the recreation center and conducting arts and crafts activities. Refreshments were also served to the children. The BSW students acted as tutors, consultants, and mentors. Once the children were comfortable and engaged, BSW students began discussions to ascertain whether there were social policies or social issues about which the children had questions or concerns. They then introduced the concept that there is someone "in charge of" running all aspects of the community life. They also introduced the idea that the young children could share their concerns with the adults who have administrative and leadership jobs with responsibility to respond to citizen issues and to find or recommend remedies for their concerns or problems.

Outcome

Youths' and Adults' Responses

Twenty-five youths were successfully engaged and wrote letters about their concerns with the assistance of the BSW students. Others were too young to participate, disinterested, or

absent from the program. One anticipated outcome was that the elected officials and administrators who received letters from the children would respond to them, thereby reinforcing constructive civic participation. I sent each recipient a letter along with each child's letter to explain the purpose of the project and to ask for his or her response. The recreation center address was used for each child, as this project did not include parental involvement.

Excerpts from selected letters convey their issues:

- MS, age 9, wrote, "There is a lot of trash in my neighborhood and it is very smelly. Please can someone come to [my] neighborhood and pick [up] the trash. Also it is very smelly."
- DH, age 10, wrote, "I want to see more trash cans so there is not litter on the ground."
- FH, age 9, wrote, "We need more security to protect people from robbers. That is why I'm sending this letter. So we can have more security. Security can help catch robbers if there is a crime. I would like it if you sent some security to be here for us when someone gets hurt."
- JM, age 11, wrote to the governor, "The reason I sent you this letter is because I want you to make more money and send it to all the schools. We need computers, books, classroom equipment, sport equipment, art equipment and better food like Burger King food. We want more community services programs concerts and events."
- JK, age 11, wrote, "Can you tell your deputies to pay more attention to the drug dealers. I'm scared to live here. I was just wondering if you could. Please write back soon."
- YC, age 12, wrote, "I am writing you letters because I am having some problems with other students in the class. My request is that you help solve the problem. The problem is that some kids bully me around all the time, pick on me and make fun of my family and all of it mostly happens in class. . . . I need you to please ask those people not to pick on me any more. I will be very grateful if you may answer my request."
- DM, age 7, wrote to the Board of Education because "during lunch, people are just too loud. My friends and I would like to have a peaceful lunch. If there is anything you could do about this,[I'd} I be very happy."
- RH, age 6, wrote that "February is Black History month and I would like it if my school could teach us more about Black History."
- VM, age 10, was a fifth grader who wrote, "In our school cafeteria the cleanliness and taste of the food is nasty and disgusting. I have experienced hair in my food[;] the lunch ladies don't wear gloves and when they are serving food they only give out food at certain times [even] if it is ready. The bread is stale and the lunch room is dirty. I want to change this because about the health of myself and my [classmates.] I understand that I am only 10 years old but that does not mean I don't deserve respect and the right to a healthy meal at my school. I want to have a snack in my [class] because I get hungry."

In addition to the letter-writing activity, the project also incorporated a “town hall meeting,” during which the children in the after-school program demonstrated their interest and ability to engage the two city representatives who participated in discussions about the children’s concerns and answered their questions about various aspects of community life. The children needed little prompting by the BSW students once it became clear to them that it was their forum. The representatives were unable to commit to immediate changes that were being discussed, but they were very respectful and validated the importance of the children’s observations and desired improvements in their community. They also encouraged the students to talk with their parents at home and to encourage their parents to join them in sharing their sentiments with officials. The staff of the recreation center gave the students points in the center’s reward system for their participation and good behavior in the program and displayed the craft work that several students completed.

The town hall meeting and their letters showed that children were concerned about their educational experiences, bullying in school, littering in the community, sanitation and food service in their school cafeteria, the need for improved recreational facilities and equipment, drug use in their community, and public safety. In addition, there was the theme of wanting more positive regard for their feelings, or more respect shown to them, a need that professionals must routinely be mindful of when working with and on behalf of young children. At the end of the project, children were rewarded for their participation with refreshments and USF tee shirts.

Letters were received by all of the children who had an issue falling under the authority of the Board of Education, from an administrator who wrote a personal note to each child. The Office of the Governor responded with a letter several weeks after the end of the project, and while I appreciated it, the response written was more appropriate for an adult recipient. A city official also wrote to the children who were concerned about littering and trash collection in the neighborhood.

Some individuals failed to respond to the children’s letters. The adult officials who did not respond missed an opportunity to reinforce the development of mutual respect and

constructive community participation for children whose interest had been stimulated for civic engagement. Dundon (1999–2000) took children in her service learning project to the sites where adults were located and was therefore more successful in achieving 100% participation in terms of adult-to-child interaction. This might be a modification that should be tried in a repeat of this project. I do not have follow-up information about the reaction of children who did not get responses to their letters.

Some of the children continue to participate in the after-school program. However, according to its director, many families who were able have moved out of the community because of their concerns that the community elementary school is failing to teach their children. The recreation center is in need of more volunteers to help in the after-school program because there are so many children who are slow to acquire reading skills. Few changes have been made at the center since the project was implemented in 2003. The center staff have been told that a new building will be constructed for the community, but as of January 2008, only one meeting has been held, and they have not seen concrete plans. The center continues to serve approximately 40 children on a daily basis (D. Washington, personal communication, January 28, 2008). The streets are clean, and when one drives through the area, there is no evidence of homelessness. However, police reports suggest that crime continues to be a substantive problem in the zip code where the recreation center is located.

There is no evidence to suggest that the letters written by the children had any policy impact on community services or educational programs in Sulphur Springs. However, the project was not designed to effect change in the community but rather was intended to provide an empowering experience for children that might be instrumental in their future problem solving.

BSW Students' Response

The BSW students had an overwhelmingly positive response to the project. Only 3 of the 26 students wrote that the objectives for the project were not achieved and that their learning was not facilitated. One wrote that the child population was not an appropriate target. She would have preferred to work with adults and felt that the project would have been more effective had that been the case. Another found her assigned children unable to participate and wrote that the project did not live up to her expectations; she cited the fact that she was the only student who

did not get a USF tee shirt because the numbers needed had been miscalculated. Some students engaged more than one child. The children were eager for BSW attention, so it would have been possible for this student to have a more positive experience with another child if she had made her feelings known during the project. The third student experienced the entire project as chaotic and too unstructured to be of benefit. The large open space in the center with tables of children and noise was unsettling to her.

In contrast, some BSW students who wrote about children in their evaluations and who had little experience with young children felt some initial apprehension but were very pleased to see the positive responses that the children had toward them. They believed that they had a very positive impact, and this was a source of pride and personal satisfaction. Others wrote about their love of children and how they welcomed the interactions with them. Although most students recommended that the project be continued in the next semesters, one student also wrote about her guilt over engaging students and then leaving after 4 weeks. She cautioned the instructor that she would need to be aware of risk factors for both the children and the BSW students in this regard.

I use quotations from selected evaluations to convey the students' assessments of how the project met the stated learning objectives. For privacy reasons, students are identified by numbers rather than names.

From the beginning of the assignment the class had to work together to brainstorm and execute the project. . . . Also as a student it was my responsibility to grasp the policy process in our community so I could enter the community center and explain the procedure to an elementary student at his or her level.
(Student 1)

The project also reinforced BSW students' understanding of how public policy is implemented; they could begin to see their knowledge as a precursor to their actions as change agents. As Student 2 stated,

The project was a great way to experience what is occurring at lower socioeconomic environments such as the Sulphur Spring community. . . . It was a great way for Sulphur Spring students to learn more about policy and to become more aware of the needs of their community and that they could play a role in making a difference through writing a letter. . . . This project enabled [elementary school children] to have a voice[,] whereas before they had none, and just had to accept their conditions.

Student 2 also believed that the young children's experience with BSW students might encourage them to go to college someday.

Student 3 wrote,

Policy is a difficult thing to understand sometimes and it is ever changing and being tweaked to meet the growing communities and peoples of today. What I have taken away from this project is that for a social worker to be an effective change agent he/she must first know their subject, know who is in control over it and an effective investigator of what can be done about it. . . . This project was a dynamic representation of policy and the social work value of advocating for change to improve the standard of life for all.

Student 4 wrote,

I was definitely glad to be part of the project and hope that if even for [only] a moment, I made an impact on the life of a child. As a policy student, I [learned] how complicated it is to implement a project in the community. I did not realize how much time has to go into getting a grant, planning how to use the budget and all of the other parts of it that I learned about. I am glad to have been a participant in the project and will take many things from it when I venture into the world of social work with my BSW.

Student 5 wrote,

Originally I believed that it would be difficult to direct a ten-year-old in the identification of a specific social issue that was bothering [her] but it turned out to be all too easy. Although the identified issues ran the gamut of concerns, from trash in the neighborhood to the need for community pool, many focused on issues at the national level. . . . This, in itself, was very significant to me.

Student 5 also noted that the project helped BSW students to understand the interactions among micro, meso, and macro levels of the environment.

Student 6 expressed her appreciation for the project:

I am so glad that we did this. Thank you so much for allowing us this great learning opportunity. It is more fun to be able to learn hands on than from a book or classroom setting. And it is not just more fun it also gave us a greater learning perspective. I have learned things during this service learning project experience that I never . . . would even have come across.

Finally, Student 7 also wrote about the benefits of a hands-on experience as the best learning mode for him and how helpful it was for him to be able to successfully complete the assignment with the help of class members. His evaluation was as follows:

Before this class and primarily before this project, I did not know the first thing about policy. I have learned that every institution, program, school, business, you name it has some kind of policies in place, and also what they have to abide by. I never thought it was in this much detail. Throughout the project, we have encountered so many hurdles that through policy we have learned what we were able to do, what we were not able to do, when to do it and how to do it. . . . This has taught me many things. Without learning policy, I do not know what kind of trouble I could have gotten myself into. I am glad I had this experience and recommend it for future classes.

Summary

This project targeted two sets of students: BSW students and young children in an after-school program. The objective of providing the young children with the experience of a sense of empowerment was achieved, and 25 letters were written through the consultation, guidance, and support provided by BSW students. Despite the failure to achieve 100% adult response to the letters that were mailed by the children, the major objectives of the project were achieved.

The *Who Is in Charge of This* project provided a new opportunity for a group of children between the ages of 6 and 13 to practice civic participation in their home community: Sulphur Springs. *Who Is in Charge of This* was a way of making civic participation real for the children because they were led to think about their life in their home community and the power centers

that govern it. It also structured a way for adults to model responsiveness to children. Children who are positively reinforced by interested adults for their ideas and assessments stand a better chance of developing the personal self-efficacy required for good academic achievement and productive social functioning.

Too many young children are at risk for social and academic failure, and too many are ending up in the juvenile justice system. Community environments have to be considered as one of the factors that can lead to poor social development. It is possible that through reinforcing personal self-efficacy, one can mitigate against social problems stemming from isolation and community disengagement.

This project provided BSW students an opportunity to practice engaging young children in policy participation and to obtain a glimpse of themselves as change agents. They also acquired an understanding of the demands of policy practice and the importance of this information for their future social work practice. They learned that the concerns of children and youths can mirror those of adults. They learned that through their efforts they could guide children to constructively express their ideas and to make requests for remedies. The project aligns with the definition of service learning as a strategy in which students meet community needs and earn academic credit for doing so. This helps them to integrate their understanding of the dynamic interaction among social, political, and personal life experiences (Aberle-Grasse, 2000). Such experiences can help to bridge the social and economic distances that can exist between some beginning social workers and their clients and lead to more sensitive and effective interventions. BSW students who are introduced to these ideas in their academic program via service learning may be better equipped to assume their ethical responsibility to work for social justice for vulnerable populations after they graduate.

The student excerpts incorporated into this paper are representative of 23 BSW student evaluations. They support the conclusion that the goals of this project were achieved because the majority of the BSW students (a) acquired understanding of contemporary social problems in a

local community through the eyes of children, (b) further developed policy analysis skills, and (c) acquired a new understanding of the roles that social workers can play as change agents. It is expected that this experience will be useful to them in future social work practice.

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