PRACTICAL SOCIAL WORK

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Social work is at an important stage in its development. All professions must be responsive to changing social and economic conditions if they are to meet the needs of those they serve. This series focuses on sound practice and the specific contribution which social workers can make to the well-being of our society.

The British Association of Social Workers has always been conscious of its role in setting guidelines for practice and in seeking to raise professional standards. The conception of the Practical Social Work series arose from a survey of BASW members to discover where they, the practitioners in social work, felt there was the most need for new literature. The response was overwhelming and enthusiastic, and the result is a carefully planned, coherent series of books. The emphasis is firmly on practice, set in a theoretical framework. The books will inform, stimulate and promote discussion, thus adding to the further development of skills and high professional standards. All the authors are practitioners and teachers of social work representing a wide variety of experience.

JO CAMPLING

PRACTICAL SOCIAL WORK

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Foreword

When the new model of a particular type of car comes out it may look very much the same as the previous one. But it can be quite different under the bonnet.

It's a bit like that with this book. I wrote the earlier edition in the 1980s and based nearly all of what I wrote on my experiences as a neighbourhood community worker. Ten years later community work, or what can be seen as community work, is mainly not neighbourhood work, though I still believe that the best way of describing it is to use 'the neighbourhood model', which is what I have done. In the 1990s, however, the challenge is to adapt the model, or rather, the skills and value system underlying it to a range of different settings and to the far-reaching institutional changes which took place during the 1980s.

Readers who know me and my writing will also perhaps note a changed emphasis on ideology. I had always resisted neo-Marxist approaches to practice because they often seemed to suggest approaches to action which I 'knew' from my experience would not work, and appeared to devalue a lot of the good practical community work I saw going on around me. However, two things have changed: the first being myself. I am now considerably more sympathetic to Marxist or perhaps socialist feminist interpretations of how Western society came to exist in its present form, though I am still sceptical of some of the approaches to practice which are often taken to flow from that broad perspective. Second, however, there seems to me to be a much greater realism within those whose roots are in this 'radical' tradition, about

how to go about practice in a way which brings results. Thus, I have attempted in this edition to synthesise, albeit in a modest way, what I had previously seen as contending approaches to community work.

This book is intended primarily for those who have done little community work, who want to know what it is and how they might go about it. There are also fairly extensive suggestions for further reading where I have indicated with some texts the main relevance, in my view, of what they have to say.

Many of the lessons I draw come from my own practice and from mistakes I have made, and I make no apology for this, since I think one learns best from making mistakes. Some readers may also consider that my tone is, in some places, a little pessimistic. That is not because I am pessimistic about community work: I am in fact very optimistic since I now see many people acknowledging the importance of community work skills, though they may not think of themselves as community workers. It is because the new worker often underestimates the difficulties in doing good community work that I have identified its difficulties. I have also emphasised apparently simple points, because in my experience it is often the simple things we forget and which cause the big problems rather than the complicated points.

I hope readers will use the book to develop their own ideas of what community work is rather than simply adopting, or rejecting, my model. I cannot tell you what community work is, only what it is for me, and perhaps for some other people, in the hope that this will help you work it out for yourself. If any reader would like to make any comments after reading the book I would very much like to receive them.

Most of my thanks go to people who need to be nameless; to those many people whose care and respect helped me grow during the last few years, also to those people who have disagreed with me and who may have forced me to rethink my ideas, to Peter Baldock, who as an 'anonymous' reviewer made several comments on the book, many of which I have incorporated, to Judith Bevan who made me realise that community workers can be rather a serious bunch and that we perhaps need to laugh at ourselves a bit more, and to Denise

Johns my loyal typist who actually says she misses poring over my ghastly handwriting if she does not receive a regular supply!

I have used 'she' almost entirely throughout, rather than 'he' because I believe that the language we use can sometimes serve to re-inforce sex role stereotyping.

ALAN TWELVETREES