

U10A1 — Political Advocacy Campaign

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Introduction

Social workers as inter-disciplinarians are constantly influencing, or advocating for, change whether that is at a micro, mezzo, or macro level. A social workers ability to influence legislation is based on understanding the interconnections of policy, process, players, and politics within these levels (Griffin & Thurber, 2015). By understanding the interconnections through the stakeholder lenses of both grievances and benefits, social workers are able to help negotiate local considerations for the advancement of community-wide policy changes.

In Minnesota a state-sanctioned bill that allowed temporary 6-to-12-month permits to house owners wanting to place "drop homes" in back yards was enacted into law by legislation. The permitting regulations allow an ailing family member with a specific, generally temporary, mental or physical illness to live in the drop home. Typically the ill family member would benefit from living independently, yet close to the caregiving family unit rather than in a far away facility that involves additional cost and time for travel (Adler & Nelson, 2016).

After the permitting law was enacted, many law cities around the state shared opposition to the legislation, primarily due to de-localized oversight and loss of control over local governing (Longworth, 2016). Some cities have opt-ed out of the permitting availability forfeiting a beneficial option for families interested in temporary, local caregiving within their communities. to add inclusive amendments to the state-based permitting law. In order to assist interested families in still having access to the permit, stakeholders should be brought together in inter-organizational networking and collaborative events. The ultimate goal of the "Keep Grandma At Home: Permitting Amendment Conversations" events would be to provide education,

understanding, and mutually beneficial law amendments that could help the permitting law be accepted state-wide.

Stakeholders

A few stakeholders for this policy include homeowners (both for and against this policy), affordable housing not-for-profit organizations like Habitat for Humanity (for), housing policy representatives (against), the tiny house advocates like NextDoor Housing and tiny house homeowners (for), the League of MN Cities (against), and assisted living facility owners (against). While there are multiple family, health, and economic benefits to this policy option, not all community members are in favor of allowing permitting within their cities, especially due to business and safety considerations along with lack of input from locally-based leaders (Longworth, 2016). Yet, cross-politically, the better policy advocates can understand the importance issues of community members, the higher the chance will be that a policy can be customized to meet the communities' needs (Charlesworth & Fien, 2012).

Anti-Law Stakeholders

The League of MN Cities supports local choice for city zoning, so immediately there was resistance to any state over-sight once the permitting laws went into effect state-wide. Additional concerns from city members include aesthetics, effects on property values, and safety from natural occurrences like tornadoes which are common in MN (Longworth, 2016).

From a housing policy representative (or city zoner) perspective, some of the outstanding questions in relation to drop home permitting are 1) How will utility payments or usage change? 2) Will parking be an issue? 3) Is property tax included in the cost of the permit? 4) What is the emergency preparedness plan? All of these questions can and should be addressed within the

local community forums with both policy makers and citizens. Couples across Minnesota have already had luck working together with city officials for variance creation for structures similar to drop homes and have created recommendation listings for assisting others who are going through the process (Tiny House Build, 2016).

Assisted living facility owners have business investments that could be negatively impacted by the promotion of drop homes within communities as it could start to limit the quantity of older adults who depend on care during a medical crisis, in turn reducing profits for these companies. The possibility could arise that if drop home business owners could partner with assisted living facility owners for providing medical care team members to the drop homes, that portions of medical insurance percentages could be split between the two businesses rather than fully deflecting assisted living facility's clientele funding. Additional outreach and collaboration of possibilities would need to be assessed to ensure adequate legal, business, and medical regulations were followed.

Pro-law Stakeholders

NextDoor Housing is the drop home company whose owners initiated the permitting law through a series of advocacy events and conversations with legislators after being disappointed by having limited options for housing placement of their ailing senior family member. With the assistance of local representatives, the permitting bill was placed on the Minnesota legislative floor for discussion through multiple committees before being approved as a state law. This bill was passed into law within six months of being proposed and is a positive step for Aging In Place advocates, intergenerational and affordable housing advocates, and tiny house advocates.

Twin Cities Habitat for Humanity (TCHFH) promotes a number of affordable housing initiatives which help reduce the stigma of Not-In-My-Backyard (NIMBY) thinking while alleviating poverty and keeping communities vibrant by offering stability for families. TCHFH hosts multiple educational events regarding homelessness and the importance of maintaining family stability. Offering drop homes in backyards should be seen as a complementary affordable housing options for seniors who want to remain close to their family members without spending their entire social security check on housing within an assisted living facility. This Aging in Place mentality can reduce the impact of a move for a senior, promote less social isolation, increase clinical outcomes, and help seniors have higher disposable incomes.

Intersectionality is defined as the layers of systematic oppression that keep individuals, particularly minority populations, from attaining equity in their quality of life. The permitting law is working at the intersection of health, aging and housing by creating opportunities for temporarily ill family members to stay in drop homes in backyards. "Working to promote social justice and equity is about being responsible scientists, teachers, and practitioners" who are engaged in intersectional thinking and this permitting law exemplifies inclusiveness and family security through the use of unconventional drop homes (Rosenthal, 2016, p. 476).

Targeted Change

The repeated inter-organizational networking and collaborative consultation event "Keep Grandma At Home: Permitting Amendment Conversations" would travel into both rural and urban centers redefining local understanding of drop homes, affordable housing myths, and multi-generational health / housing options. Participation at cultural gatherings like the MN State Fair, State Capital Rallies, and 4-H Competitions would also help gain awareness of the

cause. Stakeholders for and against the permitting law would be welcome at the events in order to share their stories. Professional facilitators would be asked to accompany each event as backup peace keeping moderators for when conversations became heightened. Affordable housing education would be provided and drop houses could be showcased in order to facilitate ongoing amendment solutions for city-specific ordinance needs. This inclusive networking would encourage homeowners to share and adapt their concerns to unmet needs for the cities through discussion, collaboration, problem-solving, demonstration, and networking between state-based housing organizations and researchers.

NextDoor Housing is already bringing their -- very beautiful and well crafted -- drop homes into communities around the state to help people understand that many of their fears and concerns have already been addressed and that policy makers are willing to work together to find solutions to the remaining concerns. Twin Cities Habitat for Humanity's affordable housing resources such as "Six Things You Might Not Know About Affordable Housing" list positive facts related to property values, building quality, school benefits, vibrancy of communities, benefit to wealthy homeowners, and affordable housing need (MacKenzie, 2018).

The overlapping educational resources related to economic and community vibrancy that TCHFH has created can assist in gaining buy-in from fear-based concerns of community members since TCHFH has already spent years addressing similar issues (Hodgson, 2015). Creating these hands-on interactive educational displays helps community members invest organically in understanding positive influences of drop homes. Family success stories along with logistical considerations will be posted on billboards around the drop home showcase events so that citizens can navigate the educational pieces at their leisure before or after

attending community forums. In-person suggestion boxes and social media surveys will also be available for sharing opinions.

Community Engagement Methods

According to Goldkind and Wolf (2015), mobile access is possible for over 6 billion members of our 7 billion population, yet functionally toilets are only accessible for 4.5 billion people. This data gives us the impression that ease of access to information and connection to others dominates our priorities as a culture. Advocacy through mobile platforms is a strong way, then, to connect a message around a broad audience. Mobile technologies, specifically, come in the form of social media connection, health monitoring, financial management tools, and educational assistance (Goldkind & Wolf, 2015). One way to assist with event promotion and advocacy efforts would be to promote on business and social media platforms like LinkedIn, Facebook and Twitter. Business professions — who are typically also a sandwich middle aged generation caring for both their aging parents and their children — and caregiving homeowners would be the primary target audiences for advertising.

Colby, Dulmus and Sowers (2013) discussed the five goals of social policy as those that improve quality of life, redistribute resources to eliminate social inequalities, create equal treatment of individuals, add resources to those who are not able to meet their own needs, and encourage self-sufficiency. Social work therefore targets advocacy of social policy such that it influences well being for marginalized and in-need communities (NASW, 2019). Both pro-law and anti-law community organization leaders from Minnesota Coalition for Homelessness, The Minnesota Board on Aging, Care Providers MN, and the League of MN Cities would be given flyers and social media templates in order to share the event agenda with community members.

Mobilization Analysis

The “Keep Grandma At Home: Permitting Amendment Conversations” event would showcase one or two rental-able drop homes and include educational activities and forums to help all stakeholders engage in the process of sharing both grievances and benefits to the permitting law. The NASW Code of Ethics provides a firm guidance baseline which can assist social workers in finding means for the developing of methods of change. The strongest advice of the Code of Ethics is to pursue professional consultation and political action when engaged in decision-making. When preparing strategies for change, social workers must listen effectively to stakeholder involved in the policies in question while using professional skills to encourage collaboration and education.

If homeowners against the proposed policy, could understand the approaches of housing advocates there could be amendments made to the state “drop home” law in order to fit into specific suburb regulations while continuing to have local representatives be the leading voice for change within their own communities. By including homeowners within the showcasing and advocacy networking event, engaged dialogue can make sure that understanding and representation of local city voices are being heard, addressed, and incorporating into future updating of the “drop home” policy (Hodgson, 2015).

Section 5.02 of the Code of Ethics defines Evaluation and Research as strong skills for social workers utilization of understanding, monitoring, and ability to affect change within interactions with policy or clients. Section 6.04 offers guidelines for Social and Political Action ensuring that communities have access to public services and social justice defenses while Section 1.04 ensure that Competence within a field be maintained for the highest utilization of

interventions and techniques for working in a particular field. The Code of Ethics Guidelines ensures that social workers have built and continue to build capacity towards negotiation skills and a framework for developing continuing education resources. When stakeholders are able to come to the table and continually rework concerns into feasible solutions, change can be positive rather than fear-based. The details of the stakeholder concerns will be documented at each event, forum, and discussion group and will grow into a final permit amendment recommendation that would eventually be given to the state legislators who wrote the bill before it became law.

Advocacy Campaign Design

The “Keep Grandma At Home: Permitting Amendment Conversations” traveling campaign would be designed for open engagement, reflection, and analysis of stakeholder opinions both for and against the current permitting law. Research within the affordable housing sector has shown the high benefits of keeping families together and is complementary to understanding the community benefit of the permitting law. Engaging affordable housing researchers to share their knowledge at the “Keep Grandma At Home: Permitting Amendment Conversations” could help dispel local fears or myths regarding drop home usage. The incorporation of a drop home showcase gives a physical presence and explanation to the Aging In Place option while educational displays from affordable housing advocates and multi-generational researchers offers factual, financial, and familial influence to the campaign.

Implementation

Having researched the League of Minnesota Cities (2019) regional meeting schedules and annual meeting dates, leaders of the “Keep Grandma At Home: Permitting Amendment Conversations” campaign would ask to attend these meetings. Pro-law campaign advocates

would come prepared with educational presentations to address previously researched concerns of anti-law advocates as well as field additional questions from meeting attendees. The showcased drop home would be available onsite for observation and tours. A full event list would be created by campaign volunteers so social media postings and flyers could be prepared and distributed as previously discussed.

Traveling around the state would serve as a social action for the campaign while sharing facts about the positive benefits of family-centered drop home environments adds a competency to community knowledge that could help persuade anti-law proponents to eventually support the permitting law or the amendment. Hosting community forums at “Keep Grandma At Home: Permitting Amendment Conversations” also helps validate negative feedback and concerns of community members while promoting discussion, collaboration, problem-solving, and networking between pro-law and anti-law community members. Continuing to frame this law as one option amongst many with partnership options available is another way to support both unconventional and conventional pathways to Aging In Place care through drop homes.

Evaluation

Continued understanding of how drop homes could be beneficial to keeping families local and with continuity of care is still being explored. The politics and policies involved within city housing regulations are important factors for building companies to understand, and forums for community members to alleviate their concerns about loss of independence when state laws are created without citizen input should not be neglected. Communities need to continue to have open dialogue involving inter-organizational networking and collaboration to promote education

and understanding of how best to use drop home as an economic and social investment that will strengthen rather than divide families and communities (Hodgson, 2015).

Drop homes are a form of impact investing whose effect can be measured strategically through the use of the theory of change model (Jackson, 2012). For impacts on social and economic changes, the theory of change model has proven to be useful and initiated through program evaluation researchers. Jackson (2012) explained that the theory of change model is a cost-effective analysis tool that asks specific questions relating to the validity and relevance of the intervention used, considers if obstacles thwarting success were removed, and defines how an intervention promoted change for stakeholders involved. This tool can be used at all levels (micro, mezzo, and macro) of policy change impact investment and can be combined with other tools for greater depth of analysis.

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