Identifying Policy Issues Arising from Practice Settings

An important competency for policy practice involves learning how to identify policy issues arising from one’s one practice setting, either one’s field practicum or one’s human service job. This assignment is geared towards learning how to do so. Because a related competency is collaborating with colleagues and clients for effective policy action, this also involves discussions with other students in the classroom, discussions with your field instructor or supervisor or other agency-based personnel, etc..

Instead of basing your policy analysis paper or policy brief topic choice merely on your own existing interests, past research, etc., this helps you learn to identify other policy issues of immediate importance to the clients and communities we are serving.

The assignment involves one or more of the following steps, but the instructor is open to other ways in which the student can effectively identify a policy issue arising from your practice settings. First, what is a policy issue? A policy issue is an unresolved social problem, either large or small, which can be documented and which either is not currently being addressed by an existing social policy at the organizational, community or societal level or is being addressed in a manner which is either ineffective or problematic in its own right. In other words, a policy issue is not necessarily related to a policy itself: a policy issue can be related either to the lack of a policy which addresses the identified social problem or it can be an existing policy which addresses an identified problem ineffectively. Policies themselves range from the details of an agency’s policy and procedure manual to a treaty ratified by the U.S. Senate. Policies can take the form of law, or regulations implementing a law, or the policies of a private foundation. Therefore, policy issues can either be very specific or very broad in their nature. How can such policy issues be identified in a practice setting?

Try at least one source of written information and one source of verbal information from interviews with relevant parties:

A. Locate Written Information:

1. Locate the annual report of your agency/workplace and see what issues are being discussed.
2. Locate the agency’s budget and identify the funding sources of your agency/workplace; ascertain what threats and opportunities exist related to funding.
3. Identify existing needs assessment reports about the population you agency serves or wishes to reach out to, and what issues they imply.
4. Find out how your agency is evaluated by its funding sources and locate copies of the evaluation studies or report.
5. Search for published newspaper, magazine, or journal articles about the field of practice of your agency and ascertain issues which seem to you to apply to your own setting.
6. Review agency records and files of client service, looking for patterns related to unmet service needs of clients.
7. Utilize theories of human need and principles of human rights, so that you can think holistically about the needs of the people served in your agency. In doing so, identify ways in
which their human needs are not being met or their human rights are being violated in your agency.

8. Another form of written information to be identified by the student.

B. Interview a Relevant Party:

1. Interview your field instructor or supervisor.
2. Speak to the agency director.
3. Talk with other students or agency workers.
4. Bring up the issue at a relevant meeting.
5. Conduct an informal survey.
6. Speak with other social workers or helping professional familiar with your setting, including those who refer clients to your agency or those to whom you refer client.
7. Another source of verbal information identified by the student.

To complete this assignment, devote one solid paragraph to each of the following questions. Copy the below questions and intersperse your answers. Submit to blackboard by due date.

1. Identify and describe the type of written information you used from the above list.
2. Identify and describe the type(s) of interview(s) you did with relevant parties from the above list.
3. Identify and describe in a solid paragraph the scope and nature of one discrete problem identified.
4. Identify and describe in at least one solid paragraph the nature of the one current policy which is most directly related to this problem, being sure to describe the level of the policy (agency policy, regulations, laws, etc.). If there is no such policy, discuss any efforts you are away of to address this problem in your setting.
5. Assess in a preliminary manner whether you feel this policy issue would be a good subject for a policy analysis paper or policy brief in this course, either for you or another student with whom you might collaborate.