

Advocacy Action Plan for Esperanza

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Advocacy is an essential aspect of providing quality care to clients, particularly when there are systemic barriers that inhibit the client's wellbeing. In the case of Esperanza, there are external barriers such as ethnic marginalization, discrimination against sexual orientation, and gender discrimination. However, her case also features familial and religious barriers, as she has low levels of perceived support among family members and believes that her religion will reject her for her sexual orientation. Furthermore, as a wife and a mother, she has roles that conflict with her individuality, as she seeks a divorce and custody of her daughter but fears she will be unable to. Esperanza is in need of consistent support, and advocacy can help to guide here.

There are two dimensions of advocacy one regards the level of client engagement in the advocacy plan, which incorporates the advocacy that is conducted in collaboration with the client. The second dimension of advocacy is the level of advocacy intervention, which regards whether the intervention takes place at individual, organizational, or community levels, or a combination of these (Lewis, et al., 2018). To work through the religious barriers to Esperanza's well-being one approach is to seek a congregation that would support her sexual orientation. There are Christian congregations that are open to the LGBTQ+ community and that's what allows her to maintain her faith but also pursue her personal preferences. For example, New Ways Ministry is an organization that has been striving to bridge the gap between the church and the LGBTQ+ community that can connect Esperanza with others in similar situations within her community, and in online communities. To address Esperanza's familial barriers to subjective well-being another approach is to communicate with family members based on who might be most receptive to supporting Esperanza in her transition. For example, a sister, cousin, or even a

a close friend might be a suitable figure to provide Esperanza with kinship support. Further, advocacy pertains to supplying adequate knowledge skills and behaviors that can facilitate the clients' well-being both during and outside of sessions.

The overarching objective of advocacy is to address the following six domains: “empowerment, client advocacy, community collaboration, systems advocacy, collective action and social/political advocacy” (Lewis, et al., 2018, p. 2). Thus, a counselor's competencies must be able to apply a lens of multiculturalism and intersectionality to these aims. This is a case that requires social justice advocacy at individual, community and organizational levels, with the specific organization in this case pertaining to the Catholic church, and specific communities including LGBTQ+, Mexican American, and other communities relevant to Esperanza's experiences and cultural framework of identity. As described by Ratts & Hutchins, “The need to make social justice advocacy a clearer presence in the field, and reconnect the profession with its roots, is primarily fueled by a desire to more adequately address systems of oppression that negatively affect client/student development” (p. 269). Therefore, because there is a range of systemic discriminations against the various identities that Esperanza relates to, and has assumed in the process of acculturation, this has amplified the need to incorporate social justice advocacy in this case. As addressed, advocacy can include measures to boost empowerment and to engage Esperanza in community resources that she can collaborate and engage with. This can also entail advocacy on the clients behalf with close family members and church members who, ideally, would be more accepting of Esperanza's wishes and desire to express her individuality. Furthermore, advocacy can be conducted on the policy level, such as supporting LGBTQ+ rights,

immigrant rights, and other social issues that often fuel mental health challenges for clients and the public overall. This may entail communications with policymakers regarding the harmful effects of discriminatory or exclusionary policy on marginalized groups.

The objective of this action plan would be to target each of the advocacy competencies, with attention to both the dimensions of client engagement and the level of advocacy. In this case, Esperanza struggles with balancing conflicting identities, including that of a wife and mother, with experiencing feelings of isolation, anger, anxiety, and sleeplessness related to the subjugation of her personal needs at the expense of familial and cultural expectations. Next, this action plan would strive to apply these two dimensions to the listed competencies at individual, familial, organizational, and community levels. This includes directly-engaging activities such as measures to improve empowerment, which can involve linking Esperanza with resources to increase social capital, or motivating Esperanza to engage in self-care practices that build self-efficacy and self-worth. This also includes activities that engage Esperanza and others in her life, such as helping to facilitate healthy communications between her and her daughter, and engaging her husband and effort to reach mutually agreeable terms regarding custody of their daughter. Beyond this, a key objective would be to cultivate a close kinship or friendship with someone who can provide Esperanza with ongoing support in everyday life. Beyond these engaging levels of advocacy, this action plan aims to expand to the broader need for social justice advocacy. This can involve supporting movements that combat anti-immigration, anti-gay, and other behaviors in the American population. This may also entail engagement with local politicians, advocating the implications of discrimination on mental health and subjective wellbeing. Furthermore, this can entail advocating the need for more social justice education for

counselors, including cultural competency training as an ongoing process that is revisited on an annual or even quarterly basis to encourage greater cultural awareness. This can include advocating that cultural competency is a mode of lifelong learning and requires ongoing measures to continually learn more about diverse cultures, and how to communicate and empower diverse individuals accordingly.

References

Lewis, J. A., Arnold, M., House, R., & Toporek, R. (2018). American counseling association advocacy competencies. *American Counseling Association*.

Ratts, M. J., & Hutchins, A. M. (2009). ACA advocacy competencies: Social justice advocacy at the client/student level. *Journal of Counseling & Development*, 87(3), 269-275.