

Grassroots Activism Impacting Rural LGBTQIA+ Communities: Implications for Social Work

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Abstract: *In 2022, the American Civil Liberties Union tracked over 200 anti-LGBTQIA+ bills in the legislative session. Policy protections for LGBTQIA+ people can only advance when large numbers of people push for change, which requires greater public awareness of the implicit and explicit barriers for LGBTQIA+ persons. One promising practice for increasing visibility and public awareness is through grassroots activism. Grassroots work spans micro, mezzo, and macro social work practice as it builds local power to influence improvements in services and the well-being for a particular group or issue. LGBTQIA+ grassroots activism provides visibility and community and builds relationships with local resources and leaders to address specific needs. This paper looks at the impact of rural grassroots work on policy change, specifically emphasizing the influence of LGBTQIA+ people leading local efforts to establish greater equity in their communities. The authors provide three examples of LGBTQIA+ organizations doing grassroots work in rural areas in order to increase attention to this foundational level of policy change. These organizations and many more across the country must be acknowledged and supported by social workers to increase the important momentum of self-represented movements for justice.*

Keywords: *Policy; activism; grassroots work; LGBTQ+; rural communities*

For historically minoritized groups, lobbying for change starts with obtaining basic human rights. For the LGBTQIA+ population this has meant policies that protect the right to marry, to foster and adopt, to receive equitable treatment in medical settings, to be served by private businesses, and for transgender and gender expansive individuals to use the bathroom of their choice. Despite huge strides forward in these areas, in 2022 over 200 anti-LGBTQIA+ bills were proposed in the U.S. (American Civil Liberties Union [ACLU], 2022). These bills proposed limits to LGBTQIA+ protections in non-discrimination policies, access to affirming transgender care, and sports participation (ACLU, 2022). Other proposed legislation included non-affirming policies related to gender markers on IDs, limitations to affirming school or curriculum, and religious exemptions for services (ACLU, 2022). Not all of these bills were adopted into law, but the success of some and the threat of others was felt in the LGBTQIA+ community (ACLU, 2022). Looking to the next few years, there are also concerns that previous Supreme Court precedents protecting LGBTQIA+ rights, such as the right to marry, may be reconsidered (Stolberg, 2022). Grassroots organizations as well as larger advocacy groups have been and will continue to be hard at work organizing for increased protections (ACLU, 2022).

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Another factor to consider in the on-going work to secure basic protections for LGBTQIA+ people is geographical location. The Movement Advancement Project (MAP, 2019) has found that LGBTQIA+ individuals located in rural areas have not benefitted from protections and social progress in the same ways as urban located LGBTQIA+ people. In rural areas, there are fewer LGBTQIA+ elected officials and fewer nondiscrimination policies in place (MAP, 2019). Consequently, in these areas there is a greater need “to focus on more basic public education about LGBT+ people” in order to gain support for more equitable policies (MAP, 2019, p. vi).

Using an intersectional lens, this paper provides an overview of rural grassroots work on LGBTQIA+ policy change at the community level. Intersectionality is a framework that considers how overlapping aspects of identity like race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, religion, and location can impact access to power, health, opportunities, and resources (Cho et al., 2013; Gkiouleka et al., 2018; hooks, 1984; Meyer, 2003). Intersectional perspectives bring awareness to the nuances of lived experience based on many parts of one’s identity. In this paper, the authors seek to bring attention to the slow, hard, and empowering work of rural LGBTQIA+ people, who are engaging with community organizing in pursuit of equity and liberation.

Social workers are required by the Code of Ethics to acknowledge the dignity and worth of all people and to enhance social justice (National Association of Social Workers [NASW], 2021). Beyond these ethical values, the Code is clear that social workers are to be politically active, and the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE, 2022) requires that all social workers receive training in mezzo and macro interventions. In the current socio-political moment, social work practitioners, educators, and researchers should be aware of LGBTQIA+ led activism in rural areas in order to support increased power and protections at the local level. The authors provide an overview of the grassroots work being done at this intersection, discussing the influences of the community context, challenges related to gaining a powerbase for change, and the importance of LGBTQIA+ leadership at the forefront of this work.

Rural America and LGBTQIA+ Experiences

A 2019 report by the Movement Advancement Project (MAP) states that approximately 2.9 to 3.8 million LGBTQIA+ people live in rural areas. The report states the LGBTQIA+ individuals living in these areas may feel they stand out more or will be outed due to the interconnected nature of rural communities (MAP, 2019). This interconnectedness can also compound experiences of social isolation. For instance, MAP (2019) notes that since family and faith are at the core of many social relationships and networking in rural areas, exclusion from one or both based on LGBTQIA+ identity can limit overall well-being and opportunity. Other intersectional identities for rural LGBTQIA+ persons can lead to varied experiences of discrimination in schools, the legal system, and social interactions, creating economic and emotional hardship (Daley, 2015; MAP, 2019). The rural setting also compounds these hardships because there are usually fewer support structures and alternatives when faced with discrimination in healthcare, employment, or housing (MAP, 2019).

A survey by the Pew Research Center (2018) sheds light on why LGBTQIA+ people in rural communities in the United States have different struggles compared to their urban-based peers. Rural communities typically hold more conservative opinions on social issues than those in urban or suburban settings and have a higher concentration of Republican voters (54%), compared to suburban areas (45%) and urban areas (31%; Pew Research Center, 2018). Moreover, Pew Research Center (2018) found that Republican voters in rural areas are more likely than urban Republicans to hold conservative stances on social issues. Conversely, rural and urban Democrats were not as divided in social views but did report some differences in regard to supporting same-sex marriage and other LGBTQIA+ protections (Pew Research Center, 2018). This research shows evidence of intersectional power differences that rural LGBTQIA+ people may face.

Another factor affecting LGBTQIA+ populations in rural communities is the influence of religion. Religion has greater influence in rural areas (Daley, 2015; Pew Research Center, 2018), and religious beliefs frequently affirm only cisgender heterosexual relationships (Daley, 2015). When traditional moral and religious views of sexuality and gender are embedded in a community, LGBTQIA+ people may feel the need to remain invisible in order to protect their physical and emotional well-being (Daley, 2015). Research has also found that religion can increase risk for suicidality and trauma for members of the LGBTQIA+ community (Gibbs & Goldbach, 2015; James et al., 2016; Lytle et al., 2018; Pacey et al., 2017). Since religious and moral beliefs are typically slow to change, social advancement for LGBTQIA+ individuals in highly religious communities can originate in relationship building through grassroots advocacy.

Considering the cultural and political makeup of these rural communities, it can be said that local power is often held by community members that emphasize traditional views on family, gender roles, and faith. Although this information appears discouraging, rural LGBTQIA+ individuals are making great advances in political and social change through grassroots work. Rurally located LGBTQIA+ people are fostering relationships among themselves and with community stakeholders, resulting in an increased sense of agency, interpersonal protections against minority stress related health disparities, and greater political influence (Bain & Podmore, 2020; Scheadler et al., 2022). To consider the purpose and role of grassroots work in policy change, it is important to understand the varied goals of *equality*, *equity*, and *liberation*.

Moving From Equality to Liberation

Equality is defined as having equal access to opportunities and resources (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2021; Milken Institute School of Public Health, 2020). Equality assumes that all people have the same starting point; therefore, justice is achieved by ensuring *equal* opportunity for basic rights. Equal opportunity is an important aspect of progress but achieving equality alone fails to address the historical minoritization of certain groups (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2021; Milken Institute School of Public Health, 2020). *Equity* goes a step further by striving to ensure distribution of resources to reach equivalent outcomes by all (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2021; Milken Institute School of Public Health, 2020). From this perspective, justice is achieved through policies that allocate

resources based on the varied needs and barriers of individuals (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2021; Milken Institute School of Public Health, 2020). Intersecting identities and one's cultural location are factors that require consideration when addressing equity across a variety of circumstances (Pew Research Center, 2018).

Going one step further, there has been a return to the language of liberation (Crook, 2018; Gutierrez & Condor, 2007; hooks, 1984; Kurtis & Adams, 2015; Taylor, 2016). *Liberation* is a term that has been used throughout history in social movements for racial equality, women's rights, LGBTQIA+ rights, and even religion-based struggles for justice (Gutierrez & Condor, 2007; Hay, 1997; Kurtis & Adams, 2015; Taylor, 2016). Liberation is a call for social change that emancipates people, personally and politically, from dominant power structures that seek to maintain social influence and control (Gutierrez & Condor, 2007; Hay, 1997; Kurtis & Adams, 2015; Taylor, 2016). Bell hooks, a distinguished author who led from her lived experience as a queer Black feminist, said the dominant power structure could be defined as the imperialist, white supremacist, capitalist heteropatriarchy (Medine, 2022). Hooks (1984) wrote that liberation must consider the complexity of overlapping power structures in order for all to flourish. Through this lens, liberation goes beyond equality and equity to prioritize self-determination, human thriving, and the power of participation in all realms of society (Gutierrez & Condor, 2007; hooks, 1984; Kurtis & Adams, 2015). Kurtis and Adams (2015) say that "personal liberation necessitates broad societal transformation, and in another sense, that any theory of the person is simultaneously a theory of and an intervention into political space" (p. 391). Consequently, the goal of liberation is to end legal and social discrimination of LGBTQIA+ people, which requires a complex combination of policy change, advocacy, education, and local-based movements (Crook, 2018; Kurtis & Adams, 2015).

Understanding Grassroots Organizing

Community organizing is a powerful tool in striving for equity and liberation. Community organizing is defined as a process in which localized groups and individuals come together to build social power and to leverage that power in systematic change efforts (Christens et al., 2021; Speer et al., 2021). When community organizing is established by those outside a community and does not allow for leadership and participation by those most affected by an issue, it becomes a top-down approach that creates a sense of "pretend power" (McAlevy, 2016, p. 199). In contrast, when those most impacted by an issue are able to be the center of their own activism, real power is generated (McAlevy, 2016). Thus, when rural LGBTQIA+ people are leading change in their own community, power structures upholding discriminatory policies are dismantled alongside policy change wins (Kitafuna, 2022; McAlevy, 2016; Speer et al., 2021).

This type of bottom-up approach is the core feature of grassroots community organizing. Community Catalyst (2022), an organization that supports grassroots movements, defines grassroots work as:

a process of building power by involving a constituency in identifying both the problems they share and the solutions to those problems; identifying the targets that could make those solutions possible; engaging with those targets through

negotiation, confrontation and pressure; and developing the capacity to take on further problems. (Community Catalyst, 2022, para. 2)

Since policy change requires public awareness and motivation, minoritized groups have successfully used grassroots activism to increase the society's receptiveness to change and to shift social relationships for progress (Christens et al., 2021; Kitafuna, 2022; McAlevey, 2016; Speer et al., 2021).

Grassroots organizing is particularly effective in rural areas because the work is very relational and community connections are already embedded in the culture (Daley, 2015). The term rural, or non-urban, is typically defined as any area with a population under 50,000 (Health Resources & Services Administration, 2021). According to an interactive map available through the U.S. Department of Agriculture (2021), rural concentrations are largely in the Midwest and South. Thus it is not surprising that a survey conducted by the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health et al. (2017) found that only 47% of LGBTQIA+ people in the Midwest report feeling well-represented by their local government, while nearly three-quarters of LGBTQIA+ residents in the Western (72%) and Northeastern parts of the US (71%) reported the same. As the rural and urban divide widens on LGBTQIA+ rights, rural grassroots activism serves to increase LGBTQIA+ visibility, leadership of LGBTQIA+ persons and allies in government positions, and advocacy efforts for interpersonal and political inclusion, which are essential for reaching the collective goal of liberation (Scheidler et al., 2022). Moreover, grassroots activism and organizing has been found to address interpersonal discrimination and policy change through its relational nature and location-specific work (Auyero et al., 2019; Christens, 2010; Unsay, 2020).

In looking for peer-reviewed articles that focus on grassroots work by and for LGBTQIA+ people in the United States, the authors found limited peer-reviewed sources. This gap in the literature is likely due to difficulty in measuring causal impact and outcomes from grassroots work, but also suggests that researchers may be overlooking the connection of local organizing on larger shifts in state and national policy. The few articles and dissertations that were identified show that LGBTQIA+ grassroots work has a synergetic effect, progressing policy and providing immediate positive effects for the LGBTQIA+ community. One of the main positive effects beyond policy change was increased access to safe spaces for identity exploration, affirmation, and synthesis (Bain & Podmore, 2020; Handschy, 2021; Scheidler et al., 2022).

Specifically, Scheidler and colleagues (2022) found that LGBTQIA+ participants in grassroots work experienced an increased sense of community and resilience. Their participation also fostered a culture of healing, personal growth, adaptive coping skills, ownership in the movement, and a self-reported sense of hope for the future (Scheidler et al., 2022). Furthermore, Bain and Podmore (2020) studied two communities in Canada, finding that grassroots work had an immediate impact on the availability of safe spaces in both communities. For instance, a few passionate LGBTQIA+ activists in one of the communities, discovered they "lack[ed] the critical mass to leverage large demonstrations and rework institutions" (Bain & Podmore, 2020, p. 1515), so they focused their efforts on securing more safe spaces. In the other community, LGBTQIA+ activists were met with

more mutuality and were able to work for both increased visibility and policy change (Bain & Podmore, 2020). This research highlights the uniqueness of each community and the flexibility of grassroots work to respond to their specific needs (Bain & Podmore, 2020).

The authors identified several organizations from their home or practice regions as examples of grassroots work at this intersection of rural location and LGBTQIA+ identity. The organizations include Equity North Carolina (Equality NC, n.d.), Country Queers, and the Center for Artistic Revolution. These organizations are building capacity for LGBTQIA+ individuals to become leaders in their communities while also providing resources, safe spaces, story projects, education, and visibility to these communities and shifting some of the cultural patterns reflected above. The stakeholders supporting these programs include: LGBTQIA+ individuals and allies living in rural areas, advocacy organizations and non-profits in their state and local communities, allied religious leaders and organizations, and followers garnered through social media and crowdsourcing. Below is a brief overview of each program, showing the similarities and unique purposes of each organization as they work toward equity and liberation in their context. Though research is needed to understand the specific impacts of each organization, our purpose in highlighting these organizations is to expand the social work profession's understanding of grassroots community organizing and policy change as well as to call social workers to locate and support similar organizations in their areas.

Organizational Models for Grassroots Work for LGBTQ Equity in Rural Areas

Equality North Carolina

Equality NC is a nonprofit organization committed to the macro and micro level work of policy change for LGBTQIA+ people in the state of North Carolina. The organization was founded in 1979 to provide legal services to those who were criminally charged related to their LGBTQIA+ status (Equality NC, 2020). Over time, the group expanded its focus to include education programs about LGBTQIA+ issues, support for state Pride events, and the development of locally-based LGBTQIA+ organizations throughout the state (Equality NC, 2020). In the 1990's, the organization began to support policy advocacy and political candidates in order to extend the rights of LGBTQIA+ individuals in the state (Equality NC, 2020).

The goal of Equality NC is that “beyond legal rights and justice, we win ‘lived equality’ including safety and acceptance in the community at large for all LGBTQ North Carolinians” (Equality NC, 2020, “Vision”). The vision asserts that equitable treatment from social and systemic barriers, and not just basic rights, is the end goal. The program has a number of community and corporate partners ranging from legal and advocacy organizations, local LGBTQIA+ centers, and faith-based organizations.

One of the specific rural initiatives is the *Rural Youth Empowerment Fellowship* (Equality NC, 2020). This program provides young people who identify as LGBTQIA+ with a year of mentoring and training in macro level advocacy and community organization practices to help them carry out a social justice project in their rural communities. The

website states that the goal of the fellowship program is to empower LGBTQIA+ youth to name and create change for themselves (Equality NC, 2020). The program provides stipends to help these youth carry out their projects (Equality NC, 2020). Recent projects have included programs to address ageism in the LGBTQIA+ community through intergenerational relationship building, document the lived experience of LGBTQIA+ folks in the Appalachian region, create an online collaborative magazine focused on queer experiences in the South, and establish a rural safe space with an intersectional lens. These programs build LGBTQIA+ visibility in rural communities which is an essential aspect to bringing change in rural communities.

The STAY Project and the Evolution of Country Queers

The STAY Project began out of an Appalachian Studies Association Conference where youths in attendance reported that they did not know how to create meaningful social change in their communities (STAY Project, n.d.). STAY stands for Stay Together Appalachian Youth (STAY Project, n.d.). The organization's website notes that the Appalachian region has seen many young adults leave the area due to limited educational and employment opportunities (STAY Project, n.d.). As a way to support youth and create leaders that would invest in the community, the STAY Project was started (STAY Project, n.d.). The goal is to have "youth ask each other what they want and need in order to stay and work in their home communities" and to connect them to resources to make those changes happen (STAY Project, n.d., "What we do"). Though the STAY project is not a specific LGBTQIA+ organization, many of the leaders are members or allies of the LGBTQIA+ community (Nichols, 2020). It was through STAY that Rae Garringer (they/them) initiated the idea for Country Queers in 2013. They work to create community and record the lived experiences of LGBTQIA+ individuals in Appalachia (Country Queers, n.d.; Garringer, 2017). This regional project evolved into a project called Country Queers that now includes stories of rural LGBTQIA+ individuals from 15 states (Country Queers, n.d.).

Country Queers is a multimedia history project that seeks to capture the past and present experiences of rural LGBTQIA+ individuals (Country Queers, n.d.). The goals of the project include: expanding narratives about rural communities, documenting the diverse experiences of queer people in those communities, challenging the belief that LGBTQIA+ individuals can only thrive in urban areas, and building a sense of community among rural LGBTQIA+ people to reduce social and emotional isolation (Country Queers, n.d.). Currently, the project has completed 60 interviews with individuals identifying as country queers and "a traveling gallery exhibit featuring images and oral histories gathered through the project" (Country Queers, n.d., para. 3). The organization also launched a podcast in June of 2020 (Country Queers, n.d.).

This project is supported through volunteers, STAY project associates, and crowdsourcing through Kickstarter, Patreon, and GoFundMe. Though the powerbase of the individual contributors may be small, there is power in the collective nature of the work, the independence of funding sources, and the geographical reach it has by extending across multiple states. This project's grassroots nature and internet reach protects the advocacy

work from political and local challengers who want to interrupt or stop the work. The greatest threat opponents pose is through silencing those who would like to share their story but for whom sharing it in a public way would bring social, emotional, or even physical harm to themselves or their family. These social and emotional barriers relate specifically to the concerns expressed in the MAP (2019) report noted above.

The Center for Artistic Revolution

The Center for Artistic Revolution (CAR) in Little Rock, Arkansas has been advocating for LGBTQIA+ Arkansans since 2003 (Koon, 2013; Little Rock Convention & Visitors Bureau 2021) and first organized against a legislative proposal to ban LGBTQIA+ adoption and marriage in 2004 (Center for Artistic Revolution, n.d.; Zarco & Romo, 2006). According to its founders, Sabrina Zarco and Randi Romo (2006), through the use of art and creativity, CAR “respectfully connects people to one another, encouraging them to see past prejudices and discover ways to work together for the benefit of their communities” (para. 1). Though CAR is based in the Little Rock area, with an office located in the First Presbyterian Church, it is a statewide advocacy organization aimed at bringing awareness to the forgotten faces of LGBTQIA+ individuals in Arkansas (Center for Artistic Revolution, n.d.; Koon, 2013; Zarco & Romo, 2006).

Originating from the founders’ Chicana heritage and their own identities as artists, CAR draws its approach from Teatro Campesino, a labor organizer in the 1960s. Campesino used actors on the back of flatbed truck to tell the stories of farm laborers and to teach laborers ways to fight for their own rights (Zarco & Romo, 2006). Art and music were also a part of this organizing work. Inspired by the use of art for activism, in 2006 CAR organized a group painting of a mural during Pride, which was the catalyst for conversations among those participating and those observing the mural creation (Zarco & Romo, 2006). After the 2000 census data showed Arkansas had around 4,500 LGBTQIA+ people, CAR organized an art installation entitled, “We the People.” The artists placed faces of LGBTQIA+ Arkansans on pink wooden triangles and left others blank to indicate how difficult and stigmatizing it can be to come out in the many rural areas throughout the state (Zarco & Romo, 2006).

CAR clearly operates from an intersectional lens. Both founders identify as Chicana and, as stated above, draw from the heritage of Teatro Campesino. The work has led to CAR members who are of Mexican heritage creating an altar for Dia de los Muertos, or Day of the Dead (Zarco & Romo, 2006). The altar was created at Little Rock Unitarian Church. Through the art of creating an altar and cooking a dinner where guests were fed traditional Mexican foods, participants were able to engage in a question-and-answer session designed to counteract misconceptions about LGBTQIA+ residents in the state (Zarco & Romo, 2006).

In addition to their activist work, the group also provides a safe place for LGBTQIA+ youth and their ally friends to share and create together. This group is important to both empowering LGBTQIA+ youth and reducing isolation. The organization combines activism, which is focused outwardly on society, with creating safe spaces, which is focused on the internal support for those in the LGBTQIA+ population (Center for Artistic

Revolution, n.d.; Koon, 2013; Zarco & Romo, 2006). Currently, their social media shows the organization's education, activism, and support around the anti-trans bills recently passed in Arkansas (Center for Artistic Revolution, n.d.).

The Power and Role of Grassroots Organizing

The outcomes of grassroots and community organizing are often hard to quantify. In a study by Orsi (2014), leaders from a grassroots organization used a concept map to help quantify outcomes of their work. After brainstorming outcomes and clustering them into themes, five categories were developed to best capture the grassroots work—victories, personal development, public leadership skills, relationship with power structures, and benefits from a culture of civic engagement (Orsi, 2014). *Victories* were obviously successes that occurred with events, engagements, partnerships, policy development, or funding. *Personal growth* was related to empowerment and self-awareness that developed in those who participated in the work. The theme of *public leadership* focused on refining and increasing skills in advocacy and public discourse. *Relationship with power structures* included establishing relationships with people and organizations of influence to grow impact, and *benefits from a culture of civic engagement* reflected on participants' positive experiences of being a part of something bigger than oneself.

Though more research is needed to see if these outcomes fit with other grassroots organizations and movements, there is anecdotal evidence that the LGBTQIA+ grassroots programs are advancing some of the same outcomes found in Orsi's (2014) study. In general, these outcomes demonstrate how grassroots work can shift culture through on-the-ground policy work, increasing the empowerment of rural LGBTQIA+ people, building relationships with power structures, and developing leadership skills that are essential to winning the local and cultural victories that are important for equity and liberation for the rural LGBTQIA+ population. Scheadler et al. (2022) demonstrates support of Orsi's findings, indicating that LGBTQIA+ folks benefit immensely from engaging in the work of activism. The development of resilience and agency further enables them to effectively influence progress within their communities through actions that align with their personal values (Scheidler et al., 2022).

Discussion and Implications

According to the social work *Code of Ethics*, "Social workers should engage in social and political action that seeks to ensure that all people have equal access to the resources, employment, services, and opportunities they require to meet their basic human needs and to develop fully" (National Association of Social Work, 2021, Standard 6.04). Some ways LGBTQIA+ allied social workers can support LGBTQIA+ led grassroots movements is to be present at events, donate money and/or time, refer LGBTQIA+ clients and acquaintances to events or resources, purchase products from these groups, and offer access for these groups to speak to one's employment-based and/or social groups. Another important way that social workers can engage this ethical standard is to educate themselves about this type of work in their area and celebrate the often overlooked progress being made by these groups in their social spheres of influence.

Furthermore, mezzo and macro level social work practitioners and researchers should continue to find ways to document how grassroots work moves policy change for LGBTQIA+ individuals beyond equality into the realm of equity and liberation. According to Alicia Garza (2020), one of the founders of the Black Lives Matter movement,

Before we can know where we are going- which is the first question for anything that calls itself a movement- we need to know where we are, who we are, where we come from, and what we care most about in the here and now. That's where the potential for every movement begins. (p. 4)

The organizations presented in this paper reflect this important work of naming where and who rural LGBTQIA+ people are and what is most important for their liberation. These organizations and many more across the country must be acknowledged and supported by social workers to increase the important momentum of self-represented movements for justice.

Additionally, social work educators are tasked with helping social work students obtain competencies related to advancing human rights (competency two), using an anti-racism, diversity, equity, and inclusion lens in practice (competency three), and engaging in policy practice (competency five; CSWE, 2022). Specifically, competency five of the Education and Accreditation Policy states that social workers are to “identify social policy at the local, state, federal, and global level that affects wellbeing, human rights and justice, service delivery, and access to social services” and “recognize the historical, social, racial, cultural, economic, organizational, environmental, and global influences that affect social policy” (CSWE, 2022, p. 10). Grassroots organizing impacts local and state policies as well as considers the contextual influences of one's particular community in barriers to policy change. Social work educators can create assignments for students to locate these types of organizations in their area and learn about their work. Educators may also use information and resources from this paper as reading assignments or to create discussion in their classroom about grassroots practices.

Finally, due to the gap in current research, we encourage social work researchers to use this paper as a resource for engaging and documenting the important work being done in this arena. The nature of grassroots work would be measurable by some quantitative outcomes; however, there are many gradual or implicit impacts that influence visibility and relationship building occurring in rural communities. Program evaluations and research in this area should consider both qualitative and quantitative methods to provide more empirical evidence for the impact of this work. Researchers should keep in mind the nature of shifting leadership and focus of these organizations. Often leadership is based on volunteers and limited funding. As leaders, volunteers, and funding shifts so can the organizations' focus and engagement. Social work should continue to grow in its awareness and participation in important ground level policy work through grassroots activism for historically marginalized people in rural areas.

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