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Community Building: Renewal, Well-being and Shared Responsibility. Patricia L. Ewalt, Edith M. Freeman and Dennis L. Poole (Eds.).

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Book Notes

Patricia L. Ewalt, Edith M. Freeman and Dennis L. Poole (Eds.), *Community Building: Renewal, Well-being and Shared Responsibility*. Washington DC: NASW Press, 1997. \$ 37.95 papercover.

Although community organizing featured prominently in social work in the 1960s, interest in the field waned and it is only in recent years that social workers are again emphasizing the importance of community practice. More research is being undertaken in the field and the literature on the subject is expanding. This is creating a substantive body of knowledge which practitioners can draw on as they work with communities.

This collection of previously published articles on community practice topics reveals the extent to which community practice has become an important topic in social work. The articles, which appeared in the journal *Social Work* over the last few years, cover a diverse range of issues. Some are relatively familiar but others show the new directions that community social work practice has taken. Traditionally, community practice has been concerned with local social service delivery or community activism. While both continue to be important elements of community social work, they have been enhanced by a new emphasis on economic development projects which address pressing material needs. This new emphasis is reflected in the inclusion of several innovative articles on community economic development. They deal with asset development, self-employment, community enterprises and urban reinvestment. The inclusion of these articles in the book shows that social workers are finally recognizing the need for linking traditional social work practice approaches with economic development strategies.

The book also contains valuable material on the role of community participation in problems prevention and management. These articles reveal that community involvement in dealing with child abuse, youth gangs, interpersonal violence and other critical social problems enhances the effectiveness of social work intervention, and should be regarded as an integral part of any attempt to manage these problems.

This is a useful collection which should be widely consulted by all social workers irrespective of whether they are engaged in community practice or not. It shows the importance of linking community interventions with other forms of social work so that social work can respond effectively to all social needs.

James D. Smith and Ronald J. Mancoske (Eds.), *Rural Gays and Lesbians: Building on the Strengths of Communities*. New York: Haworth Press, 1998. \$ 29.95 hardcover, \$ 14.95 papercover.

This unique book deals with the much neglected topic of how gay people in rural communities deal with the many challenges they face, and how social workers can best assist them. It consists of eight chapters that examine different aspects of the gay experience in rural areas. It also contains three moving poems on the subject. It is the first of its kind and its simple message is an important one.

The central theme of the book is that gay people living in rural areas face a high degree of ostracism and discrimination. While all gay people are subjected to these pressures, those in urban communities have been able to organize and establish networks which sustain, protect and nurture them to a greater extent than is possible in rural areas. Rural gays and lesbians do not have networks of this kind and they often remain hidden, isolated and threatened knowing that they face significant risks if their identity is revealed. Their very location in the rural environment creates unique challenges which social workers need to understand and be willing and able to address. The various chapters of the book either expand on this theme or provide specific examples of how social workers can work with gay people in rural areas to enhance their functioning and better cope with these challenges.

The book is often poignant showing how flagrant prejudice, discrimination and even hatred continues to permeate communities that are no longer isolated, uneducated and ill-formed. These problems are exacerbated by a lack of social services and supports in rural areas. Gay people with HIV, victims of discrimination and violence, and even those with routine emotional and social needs face particular challenges. The authors and editors of this collection deserve recognition for their attempt to bring the issue to the attention of the wider social work community.