



CHAPTER THIRTEEN

IMPROVING HEALTH THROUGH COMMUNITY ORGANIZATION AND COMMUNITY BUILDING

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Although a number of new approaches and change strategies have been developed and adapted by health education professionals in recent years, the principles and methods loosely referred to as community organization remain a central method of practice. For the purposes of this chapter, community organization will be defined as the process by which community groups are helped to identify common problems or goals, mobilize resources, and in other ways develop and implement strategies for reaching the goals they collectively have set. The newer and related concept of community building* will be seen, as Walter (forthcoming) suggests, not as a method so much as an orientation to the ways in which people who identify as members of a shared community engage together in the process of community change.

Implicit in both of these definitions is the concept of empowerment, viewed as an enabling process through which individuals or communities take control over their lives and their environment (Rappaport, 1984). Indeed, Murray Ross, widely regarded as the father of community-organizing practice, argued early on that com-

* The term *community building* is increasingly being used in fields such as urban planning but in a broader sense. Although placing a similarly strong emphasis on identifying and promoting community strengths and capacity, for example, this more macro conceptualization also emphasizes regional economic development and federal and state policy level reinvestment in local communities (Blackwell and Colmenar, 2000).