

# Approaches to Cultivating Social Change

## 1. Charitable Giving

One way we can contribute to social justice movements is by donating money or goods to organizations such as Amnesty International, United for a Fair Economy, Black Lives Matter, or even a local food shelf. People often choose this route to activism when they want to do something that will ease their own conscience, but don't want to associate in deeper ways with a particular cause or if associating in deeper ways might put them at some sort of risk.

## 2. Service & Volunteerism

Opportunities to work for social justice through service and volunteerism are plentiful. You can organize a fundraiser for a social justice organization, help build houses for economically marginalized families, volunteer at a battered women's shelter, or get trained to become an advocate for youth with (dis)abilities. The key point is that you are *actively involved* beyond charitable giving. You might not be doing the work necessary to threaten the existence of injustice, but you can help alleviate some forms of suffering for marginalized communities. Service and volunteerism require that we work *with* these communities, avoid the "savior syndrome," and abolish the hierarchies that remain in place when, for example, wealthy kids are sent into poor neighborhoods to do service-learning, but never discuss how their relative wealth *is connected with* the relative poverty of the people inhabiting those neighborhoods.

## 3. Individual Advocacy

People whose activism primarily reflects this approach empathize deeply with ways injustices affect people at an individual level—particularly people with whom they have personal relationships. This is positive work. People who are experiencing racism, heterosexism, or other oppressions often can benefit from the advocacy of somebody who will stand with them against oppression. Of course, usually where there is one person in need of advocacy there are many people being similarly marginalized, oppressed, or exploited, so we can expand our influence by finding ways to work on the conditions creating the advocacy need.

## 4. Fighting for Mitigative Change

One way to expand our influence is to fight for mitigative change. That means we organize and act in response to specific instances or manifestations of structural oppression without necessarily organizing and acting to address the bigger structural injustice. For example, we might fight for an immediate remedy to suffering, like securing rights for survivors of human trafficking. This is important work, despite not necessarily being a threat to the existence of the bigger problem of human trafficking. We mitigate the impact of human trafficking without working to eliminate it because its survivors can't afford to wait for us to eliminate the whole thing before we fight with them for their rights and protections.

## 5. Fighting for Transformative Change

Of course, if all our energy goes into mitigative change we have no chance to create the bigger structural change we want to see. Fighting for transformative change means identifying the root issues of oppression and working on change at that root level. We don't just organize to protect basic rights of economically marginalized people or to help secure for them a subsistence living. We also address the existence of poverty, wealth and income inequality, and socioeconomic conditions that guarantee the persistence of these injustices.