

Advocacy Manual and Workbook

Community and Advocacy Support Unit

March 2010

Opportunities for people with a disability

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How to use this manual.

This manual and workbook is designed to give the person new to the adventure of advocacy a basic background into advocacy. This manual talks about how to conduct your activities at the systemic level; to start you out to do systems advocacy in your local community.

The manual and workbook covers three main themes

Firstly, information about advocacy is covered in:

- The Goal of Advocacy,
- Defining Advocacy, and
- Types of Advocacy

Secondly, the manual contains the strategies and objectives of advocacy in:

- How do you change people's minds through advocacy?

Lastly, the workbook is designed to breakdown the strategies into a series of activities that together form a systemic advocacy campaign.

This manual and workbook is a work in progress. It will be reviewed at regular intervals to ensure that the contents remain relevant for advocates.

The Goal of Advocacy

- To change people's minds.
- All law, policy and implementation are just reflections of what is in people's minds.
- Your job as an advocate is to help change people's minds about what they think about people with disability.

“Advocacy is really the art of getting policy and practice changed by people in power.

“It's the skills and techniques you use to effectively persuade governments or others who have power to change their ways of thinking and doing things.

“There are real strengths in our sector around advocacy but I think for a lot of organizations there are many lessons that can be learned to make them more effective.

“Never underestimate the power of people to change the behavior and thinking of governments. This sector has many, many strengths but we need to remind ourselves sometimes because we forget our own power.”

Marc Purcell, Director of the Australian Council for International Development

Defining Advocacy

Australian Definition

Advocacy is speaking acting, writing with minimal conflict of interest on behalf of the sincerely perceived interests of a disadvantaged person or group to promote, protect and defend their welfare and justice by:

- being on their side and no-one else's
- being primarily concerned with their fundamental needs
- remaining loyal and accountable to them in a way which is emphatic and vigorous and which is, or is likely to be, costly to the advocate or advocacy group

International Definitions

- **Advocacy** is an action directed at changing the policies, positions or programs of any type of institution.
- **Advocacy** is pleading for, defending or recommending an idea before other people.
- **Advocacy** is speaking up, drawing a community's attention to an important issue, and directing decision makers toward a solution.
- **Advocacy** is working with other people and organisations to make a difference.
- **Advocacy** is putting a problem on the agenda, providing a solution to that problem and building support for acting on both the problem and the solution.
- **Advocacy** can aim to change an organisation internally or to alter an entire system.
- **Advocacy** is the process of people participating in decision-making processes which affect their lives.

Types of Advocacy

A number of different types of advocacy exist. Here we will refer to five types of advocacy:

- Individual Advocacy
- Citizen Advocacy
- Systems Advocacy
- Parent Advocacy
- Self Advocacy

Sometimes only two types of advocacy are talked about, individual and systems. Self advocacy and citizen advocacy are often regarded as individual advocacy. Parent advocacy is often regarded as either individual or systems.

1. Individual Advocacy

Here the advocate concentrates their efforts on one or two people only. There are two common forms of individual advocacy:

a. Informal Advocacy

Parents, brothers and sisters, relatives, friends who take on advocacy roles are all examples of informal individual advocacy.

Many different people, with a range of relationships to people with disability, have spoken out and persistently advocated for those who are vulnerable. What often goes unrecognised and unseen, are the efforts of individual people who may struggle with the injustices with little or no support. Such individual efforts have been termed informal advocacy. These individual advocacy efforts can and do last many years, often in significant isolation.

These solo efforts can isolate individual advocates from their communities by the very nature of their efforts, particularly where the issue is controversial or perceived as detrimental to the wider system/environment in which the issue is placed. For example, a parent's efforts to seek enrolment of a child with disability in a regular school in a local community may stir enmities, conflicting interests and test established friendships.

These advocacy efforts by individual people for valued lives need to be supported, nurtured and protected. Individual people may want to be connected to others doing advocacy; to share the effort, to seek support, or to develop a collective response.

Individual advocates are encouraged to link with advocacy groups for information resources and further contacts.

b. Community based organisations

Another form of individual advocacy is community based organisations that pay staff to advocate for individuals.

2. Citizen Advocacy

Citizen advocacy is a community based movement that aims to recognise, promote and defend the rights, well being and interests of people with intellectual and/or multiple disabilities. It does so by finding and supporting caring, responsible citizens who make long-term voluntary commitment to make a positive difference in the life of a person who may be lonely, face difficult challenges, or be in “at risk” situations.

Each Citizen Advocacy relationship is unique. The citizen advocate may for example, offer his or her protégé friendship, new experiences and opportunities, spokespersonship and protection from abuse.

The Citizen Advocacy office carefully matches protégés and citizen advocates to ensure there is a good match between the interests and needs of the protégé and the abilities, resources and commitment of the citizen advocate. Citizen advocates are orientated, assisted to gain further knowledge and resources, supported and recruited by the Citizen Advocacy office.

3. Systems Advocacy

This form of advocacy is primarily concerned with influencing and changing the system (legislation, policy and practices) in ways that will benefit people with a disability as a group within society. Systems advocates will encourage changes to the law, government and service policies and community attitudes. Usually systems advocacy do not do individual advocacy. To do so can cause conflict around the use of resources, focus and purpose.

4. Parent Advocacy

Parent advocacy is concerned with advocating on issues that affect the person with a disability and their family. The focus is on the needs of the person with a disability, not the parents or family.

However, some parent advocacy focuses on the needs of parents first. Whilst parents have substantial needs for support and resources, when we talk about parent advocacy we mean advocacy by parent groups for people with a disability.

5. Self Advocacy

Self advocacy is undertaken by person or group who share the same characteristics or interests on behalf of the same person or group. The difficulty with this form of advocacy is that sometimes those undertaking advocacy and speaking up for themselves are likely to be further exposed and be more vulnerable to abuse, discrimination and ridicule as a result of speaking up for themselves.

How do you change people's minds through advocacy?

Advocacy strategy and action can be broken down into four basic strategies that combine to make a successful long term advocacy campaign.

1. To Educate
2. To Reduce Emotional Distance
3. Garnering Power
4. Applying Pressure

1. To Educate

You are the expert in this field. You are the person with the lived experience, you can educate politicians, Ministers, people in the community about the reality of the particular issue you are lobbying about. You are also establishing your credibility and expertise which is a vital ingredient for long-term relationships with local members etc. Education is a twofold task:

a. Facts and figures

Know what you are talking about. Have the current data, facts and figures, available. Know what is being done by the various levels of government, state, federal and local councils. Find out what is going on overseas. Has this issue been tackled successfully internationally? If so get the facts and give them to whomever you are talking with, this may offer the person a simple and already workable solution.

b. Personal Stories

There is nothing more potent than personal stories. Using personal stories effectively to highlight a systemic issue is the key to a successful campaign. Personal stories should be used to show where and how the particular advocacy issue you are advocating for impacts on the daily lives of people.

Stories must be kept simple and to the point. Stories are illustrations of an issue and need to be relevant to the issue. This is particularly important when a group of families may be making representation.

2. To Reduce Emotional Distance

People who are in power can make decisions more easily that negatively impact on people if the emotional distance is great.

What do we mean by “emotional distance”? Emotional distance is how closely connected through experience, status, gender, race etc a person feels to another person. For instance, a middle aged man, white, middle class, that went to a private school is less inclined to make legislation, or write policy that will negatively impact on someone who he feels is the same as himself. The emotional distance is small.

On the other hand, the same middle aged man, white, middle class, that went to a private school, may find it much easier to legislate or write policy that impacts negatively on a single mother of different race with children with disability who live in a lower socio-economic region. The emotional distance is great and the single mother is seen as the “other”.

Reducing emotional distance depends on your starting point – obvious isn’t it? It just means that you tailor your advocacy “pitch” and presentation to your audience. In essence you are “selling” your message.

If you are meeting with a Minister, then you would keep your message tight. You would have prepared and know exactly what you wanted to talk about. You have your stories figured out, and you will have the supporting facts and figures to back up your message. Dress should be as corporate as your wardrobe will allow. The Indian dhoti worked for Mahatma Ghandi , but that was only after he had been successful in a number of previous campaigns.

3. Garnering Power

Power influences.

Adding power to your advocacy efforts can be achieved in a number of ways.

1. Having the numbers. Making sure that you have lots of people that know about your advocacy efforts that you can call supporters. These people can be called on to attend meetings, rallies etc.
2. Transfer of power by proximity. This can be achieved in various ways. Endeavour Foundation is a powerful organisation in Queensland and New South Wales. That power is transferred to you as an advocate. Other people of power can be sought to give support for your advocacy issue. Their power, by being part of your advocacy initiative, will be transferred to your efforts.

People in positions of power are also influenced by power. If you can state the number of supporters you have or the people associated with your advocacy then, you will have more power and therefore more influence.

4. Applying Pressure

Sometimes just having won the argument is not enough. Most politicians would agree the moral argument has been won that people with disability should experience the same life chances as other people in the community, but this doesn't mean that they are compelled to do anything about it.

Even with all your persuasive advocacy efforts, sometimes the minds of politicians may need just a little bit more pressure to actually move them to take action.

This can be done by applying pressure through the media and rallying support from public opinion.

a. Media

As Advocacy Champions the more local media coverage you can get the better.

Local stories about what is happening to people locally are very powerful. Below is an example of a local story from the Toowoomba Chronicle about Elsie a long term resident of the psychiatric hospital Baillie Henderson. After this article many people in the local community took interest in the group, and the local Greek Women's club invited Elsie to their weekly meeting. Elsie still attends every week without support.

When speaking with media

Helping people connect

ELSIE hasn't seen her mother for the past four years due to her inability to travel.

Recently this became a reality through the wonderful support of Baillie Henderson staff, Michelle (niece) and her Auntie Elsie made the trip to Brisbane to enjoy a family reunion luncheon.

"This was truly a special occasion for everyone. Elsie and her Mum hope to be reunited more regularly," Michelle said.

Over lunch Michelle recounts how Elsie and her brother were born in Cyprus in the 1940s.

As a toddler, Elsie became ill with meningitis. Given the limited health support available, her parents migrated to Australia and settled in Brisbane. The family's difficulties were compounded by their social isolation as non-English speakers in a new country.

Elsie had acquired brain damage from her illness and even though she regained her health she was intellectually impaired.

In the 1950s, Elsie's high support needs couldn't be managed in her own home so she became a ward of the Queensland Health Service and was admitted to the Challenor centre in Ipswich.

Since moving to Baillie Hender-

THROUGH MYEYES

with Jason Kehl
kehly@bigpond.com



son Hospital more than 40 years ago, her brother Nicholas and his wife raised a family and through their visits ensured their children knew their aunt. Michelle, his daughter, has been a regular visitor to her aunt.

Michelle learned that there were many other people like Elsie, who were intellectually impaired, living in health care facilities. Many of these people receive few visitors and few opportunities to participate in the community.

The Coming Out group aims to assist the individuals concerned and the service to enable them to connect with a broad range of people and services within and beyond Baillie Henderson Hospital.

This group meets monthly at SPRED on the corner of Jellicoe and Hume Streets in Toowoomba.

For further information, please email Melinda at melinda@qai.org.au or call Michelle on 0423 548464.



■ Elsie (left) and her mother are reunited at a family reunion after four years.

Picture: SUPPLIED

b. Public Opinion

What is public opinion and why is it important to the systemic advocate?

Public opinion is what people think. Public opinion becomes powerful when what the majority of the people think differs from what the government is doing. Public opinion will often express its dissatisfaction with government in a number of ways. For instance, public rallies, changing voting patterns to vote a government out etc.

What does this mean for a systemic advocate?

If your activities can educate public opinion to reflect the changes you would like to achieve then your goals may be achieved by the action of a collective public opinion.

Public opinion is particularly powerful in the American context, for instance. Public opinion was attributed to leading to the US intervention in the internal conflict of the former Yugoslavia. In contrast, at the time when the internal conflict rose in Rwanda which led to the massacre of 800,000 people, the only news fed to the American public was the OJ Simpson murder. Public opinion about the atrocities in Rwanda was subdued by the OJ Simpson trial, US led international intervention did not take place until the news presented the story of what was happening in Rwanda.

Workbook

✓ **Data and Research**

Data and research are essential tools for giving the advocate the credibility when making their assertions and for finding existing solutions. In addition, good data itself can be the most persuasive argument.

What data can be used to best support your arguments?

✓ **Identifying Advocacy Audiences**

Once the issue and goals are selected, advocacy efforts must be directed to the people with decision-making power and, ideally, to the people who influence the decision makers such as staff, advisors, bureaucrats, the media and the public.

What are the names of the decision makers who can make your goal a reality?

Who and what influences these decision makers?

✓ **Developing and Delivering advocacy Messages**

Different audiences respond to different messages. For example, a politician may become motivated when she knows how many people in her district care about the problem. A Minister of a government department may take action when he is presented with detailed data on the prevalence of the problem.

What messages will get the selected audience to act on your behalf?

✓ **Building Coalitions**

Often, the power of advocacy is found in the numbers of people who support your goal. Especially in democratic countries, involving large numbers of people representing diverse interests can provide safety for advocacy as well as build political support. Even within an organisation, internal coalition building, such as involving people from different departments in developing a new program, can help build consensus for action.

Who else can you invite to join your cause?

Who else could be an ally?

✓ **Making Persuasive Presentations.**

Opportunities to influence key audiences are often limited. A politician may grant you one meeting to discuss your issue, or a minister may have only five minutes at a conference to speak with you. Careful and thorough preparation of convincing arguments and presentation style can turn these brief opportunities into successful advocacy.

If you have one chance to reach the decision maker, what do you want to say and how will you say it?

✓ **Evaluating Advocacy Efforts**

Being an effective advocate require continuous feedback and evaluations of your efforts.

How do you know if you have succeeded in reaching your advocacy objective?

How can your advocacy strategies be improved?