

# ADVOCACY TOOLS & STRATEGIES

*Adapted from handout developed by Nancy Gardener, TASA Project, Kansas Center for Human Development, University of Kansas. Reprinted with permission 4/20/82. Section I is based on an article by Doug Biklen which appears in Exceptional Children, 1976, 42, (6), pages 303-313.*

## **I. Advocacy Techniques and Methods**

### 1. Letter Writing:

Letter writing can include many effective tools - carbon copies to attorneys, public letters, leaflets, letters to editors, skywriting, newsletters, letter bulletins, letters of complaint, letters to create a mood, and open letters.

### 2. Education:

Workshops, teach-ins, consciousness raising groups, consumer meetings, speakers bureaus, speeches, posters and newspapers fall into the category of education. Workshops or teach-ins help to build skills among consumer groups. A workshop or teach-in is a good way to bring together different groups; workshops also highlight community needs. When hundreds of people attend a workshop on legal rights, for example, the community at large will realize that legal rights are an issue to be reckoned with.

### 3. Legal Advocacy:

Law has been a favorite strategy of nearly every social change movement in America. It is an indispensable tool for advocates. Legal advocacy includes law suits, legal memoranda, legal rights booklets for lay citizens, civil rights statements, legal representation in fair hearings and other negotiations, and legal advice.

### 4. Communications:

In addition to newsletters and town meetings, organizers must use a variety of communication networks and media. Among them are booklets, pamphlets, seminars, workshops, slide shows, movies, resource guides, press conferences, television debates, radio shows, exposes, phone campaigns, advertisements, public announcements, press releases and posters. Communications are the heart of any advocacy effort. In order to change policies and practices, one must first change attitudes. Communications help to educate the community. They serve as the symbol that advocacy is alive and will influence the future.

#### 5. Symbolic Acts:

Symbolic acts are an effective way to give a policy, practice, or issue the exposure it deserves. The refusal of an award, for example, can focus attention on the event and the issue. Because it appears shocking or unusual, the symbolic act is talked about long after the action has occurred. Yet, for the same reason, the symbolic act must be chosen with utmost caution.

#### 6. Negotiations:

In every type of organizing effort there will be times when confrontation is not needed-- when negotiations such as fair hearings, meetings with bureaucracies, individual negotiations, and contract bargaining can achieve the same concessions. Negotiation should always be a first step in a series of actions, if only to find out where the policy makers stand.

#### 7. Demonstrations:

These are forms of public expression or "community presence" that have been used by the women's suffrage movement, the civil rights movement, and other human rights struggles. Formats for demonstrations include marches, vigils, sit-ins, phone-ins, overloading administrative systems, jam-ins, sing-ins, leafleting, and picketing.

Demonstrations publicize issues and, perhaps more importantly, serve as an easy, successful, short-term action that often has the added effect of creating a sense of group purpose and accomplishment. Demands can take the form of a bill of rights, a list of grievances, consumer needs, and contracts. Aside from winning concessions, demands serve as effective community education tools. People often do not expect traditionally powerless groups to make demands.

#### 8. Boycotts:

Boycotts (strikes, noncooperation, slow compliance, stalling, refusal to pay for services, and work-ins) are a familiar organizing tactic used by some groups. However, a boycott may victimize the consumer by keeping them out of needed services.

But despite this warning, a brief boycott can serve a lobbying purpose. The purpose of

lobbying is, obviously, to change laws and policies so that they more closely reflect one's interests. While lobbying has often been regarded as the key strategy for change, legislative or policy change must always be accompanied by change at the local day to day level where people actually live their lives. There is no single track solution to advocacy.

#### 9. Model Programs:

Group homes, vocational training, information and referral, may be considered as model programs. The creation of an alternative social institution often forces existing institutions to change. However, if there is a need for new service agencies in the community, these should be organized separately from advocacy programs so as not to confuse advocacy with providing direct services. Again, the advocate monitors human services but does not provide them.

#### 10. Fact Finding Forums:

These include citizen investigation panels, team meetings, community polls, seminars by expert panels, and television question and answer programs. Any citizen can give testimony (usually five to ten minutes worth) before legislative panels, town councils, and county legislatures. If these formats do not adequately meet the advocate's objectives, however, alternative forums may be arranged.

#### 11. Demystifying:

This is the final strategy on the list. It is one of the most important. Professionals can empower their allies, consumers of services, by translating research findings, diagnosing terms, testing procedures, and all other elements of education and service into everyday language. Too often, pseudo scientific jargon becomes a method for professionals to intimidate and control consumers rather than to assist communication and development. For professionals seeking a role in advocacy, demystifying the profession may be a most valuable contribution.

## II. Internal Advocacy

An internal advocate is one who is supported by (including paid by) the system which he/she is trying to change. It is the contention of the internal advocate that the system needs reform and renewal and this can be accomplished most successfully from inside the system. Internal advocacy is committed to the identification of individuals whose rights and needs are not being met by the system in which the advocate is employed. Thus, the advocate's work involves attempting to change the system to be more responsive to the individual's need.

### Strengths

### Weaknesses

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Negotiation rather than confrontation</li> <li>2. Knowledge of the system and its organization.</li> <li>3. Knowledge of resources available.</li> <li>4. Easier access to information.</li> <li>5. Relative stable financial support.</li> <li>6. Familiarity and established working relationship with administration.</li> </ol> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Conflict-of-interest possible.</li> <li>2. Can result in compromising the client's best interests.</li> <li>3. (Advocate risks; loss of job, loss of promotion, decrease of salary)</li> <li>4. Defensiveness about criticism of organization</li> <li>5. Self-monitoring reduces accountability.</li> </ol> |
|---|--|

### III. External Advocacy

External advocates are supported by non-system resources and are not accountable to persons within the system. External advocates tend to be viewed as adversaries of the system. They tend to view the system and all of its parts as contributing to the problems and failures to meet individual clients' needs. If a particular insensitive system is encountered, the external advocate may favor dismantling the entire system or may resort to extreme measures in order to implement change (i.e., threat of court intervention, exposure through media, pressure from public & political groups).

#### Strengths

1. Independence from the system and resulting absence of vested interest.
2. Less likely to be co-opted.
3. Can bring pressure to bear when needed.
4. Separates the monitor from the monitored.

#### Weaknesses

1. Limited access to services, clients, etc.
2. At times, must rely on information from secondary sources.
3. Financial instability.
4. May have to compromise for sake of publications.
5. Temporary and sporadic leadership.
6. May become preoccupied with the fight and lose touch with the original goal.

[Previous](#) | [Next](#)