Advocacy and Rights: History and Practice

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DCRC Conference . . . May 10, 2013
The act of pleading or arguing in favor of something, such as a cause, idea, or policy.

Finding your voice: From the Latin *ad* (to) and *vocare* (to call, to vocalize for, or to give evidence)
Three kinds of advocacy:

◆ Self-advocacy
◆ Individual advocacy
◆ Systems advocacy
Similar tactics for all three:

- Decide what you want.
- Get the facts.
- Plan your strategy
- Gather your support.
- Be firm and persistent.
- Maintain your credibility.
Do be:

- Brief
- Prepared
- Clear
- Honest
- Accurate

- Persuasive
- Timely
- Persistent
- Grateful
DON'T:

- Be argumentative
- Be demanding
- Bluff
- Promise rewards
- Knock the opposition
C/S/X Advocacy Movement Grew out of Struggle for Rights and Empowerment

International Conference on Human Rights and Against Psychiatric Oppression, Vermont, 1985
• Control
• Choice
• Self-determination
• Empowerment
• Recovery

“We want as full as possible control over our own lives. Is that too much to ask?”

Howie the Harp (1953-1995)
Movement Roots Are in General Self-Help Movement (AA, etc.)

“It is important to go beyond self-help and mutual support to systems advocacy.”

Frank Riessman
1924-2004
Alternatives 2013 Is Threatened

The Alternatives conferences are organized by and for people with psychiatric histories. (Above: closing ceremony of Alternatives ’85, the first Alternatives conference, which 450 attended.)
Alternatives Facebook Petition

This is what we’re dealing with.
Problem-Solving Skills

- Identify the problem.
- Break the problem into manageable pieces.
- Identify who is causing the problem.
- Set a goal.
- Identify who can solve the problem.
- Develop an action plan.
Civil disobedience outside Philadelphia Public Housing Authority to protest announcement of discriminatory policies (’85)

Project SHARE founded 1984

Organized self-help and advocacy groups

MHASP staffers protest PHA admissions policies. Depicted left to right are Susan Rogers, Alicia Christian, Glenda Fine, and Mark Davis.
Demonstrations May Be Successful:

- “Chain-in” at Philadelphia Housing Authority (1985)
- Sleepout at State Office Building (1987)

Demonstrations sometimes only raise consciousness, create solidarity:

- Arrests at Federal Office Building (1988)
Make it fun!

“A good tactic is one that your people enjoy.”

Saul Alinsky (1909-1972)
Bastille Day rally at Alternatives ‘90 to combat discrimination and prejudice, organized by National Mental Health Consumers’ Self-Help Clearinghouse
Mental patients rally in search of a fair chance and fewer labels

By Steve Twedt  
The Pittsburgh Press

Twenty-five years after being diagnosed as having paranoid schizophrenia, Nelson Hawthorne believes his biggest roadblock to a normal life is society, not sickness.

Carrying a sign that read "Label jars, ok. people," the 48-year-old Norristown, Montgomery County, resident and about 40 other current or former mental patients and friends rallied at Market Square yesterday to protest discrimination against people who have undergone psychiatric treatment.

"The mental health system produces an artificial dependence and we're not allowed to be productive citizens," he said.

Hawthorne last held a job five years ago and, while he still qualifies for work occasionally, "one of the questions on the application is always, 'Have you been hospitalized for psychiatric treatment?' They don't say anything. They can't really say anything. You just never get an interview."

Stacey Pope, 31, of Jacksonville, Fla., said she lost her retail sales job when she was hospitalized for five days. She was diagnosed as severely depressed three years ago, but doctors now think she is schizophrenic.

"When you're going through it, you just feel hopeless," she said. The rally was part of Alternatives '90, a five-day national conference concluding today at Duquesne University.

The rally was organized by people who have had psychiatric problems.

About 1,000 people attended.

The group hopes to fight the stigma of mental illness, to improve the quality of life for the mentally ill and to develop alternatives to the mental health system.

Madeleine Massi, 39, a rape counselor from Big Spring, Texas, who has been both a patient and a staff development coordinator at a state hospital, said, "Society needs to see the mentally ill not as weirdos, not as freaks, but as people with needs, like someone who has heart problems or kidney problems. It's just affecting us in a different area."

During the past 13 years, she said, mental hospital aides who have no perception of what a schizophrenic is, or what a psychotic is, or how to communicate with that person. So they have to work on the physical."

At the same time, she added, mental patients have their own responsibility for removing the stigma they face by not using their illness to manipulate others or to shirk difficult tasks.

Mental health professionals and mental health patients, or consumers, have to meet halfway, she said.

"The professionals want complete control and the consumers want complete control. There's got to be some compromise."

Yesterday was designated National Mental Patients' Rights Day and the conference theme, "Together Tearing Down the Walls," was designed with yesterday's celebration of Bastille Day in mind. Bastille Day is the French holiday marking the anniversary of the 1789 freeing of prisoners - some of whom were mentally ill - from the Bastille prison.

Erin Newland, front of Connecticut, and John Fijalek of Maine took part in mental health rally.

Bastille Day Rally Rally, 1990
“Loony Bin Rally”

- Lemonade from lemons: MHASP Rally for supported housing (2008) – Wire service called it “loony bin rally,” which resulted in an apology and lots of publicity.

MHASP Rally for Supported Housing, Philadelphia, 2008

See “Rallying for Better Housing” in Behavioral Healthcare at link below.

http://www.behavioral.net/ME2/dirmod.asp?sid=&nm=&type=Publishing&mod=Publications%3A%3AArticle&mid=64D490AC6A7D4FE1AEB453627F1A4A32& tier=4&id=75F935BFAF764678AA0C135BD5E44683

Photo by Nathan Hulfish
How Are Changes Made?

- Who has power?
- How would those in power benefit by the change?
  - Create positive incentives that make the change attractive to those in power.
To Motivate Activists:

- Make it easy for people to get involved.
- Create a sense of purpose.
- Define clear and specific goals:
  - ... that are achievable in a reasonable time period.
  - ... whose achievement will improve people’s lives.
- Give people responsibility.
Create an Advocacy Plan

- Determine your goal(s).
- Frame your goal(s) in positive terms.
- Research what it will take to achieve your goal(s).
Prioritize Goals

- Start with the goal that has the greatest potential for achievement:
  - Success will bind the group.
  - Success will create motivation for continued efforts.
  - Stick with it.
Gather Information

- Who has authority to make needed changes?
- What laws, rules and policies are in place that affect the situation?
- What rights and complaint procedures exist?
- What facts support the need for change?
Knowledge Is Power

- Learn as much as you can about the government/non-government organization or agency you’re trying to change.
- Attend meetings, public hearings and conferences.
- Acquaint yourself with staff.
**Strategy Development**

- What do the powers-that-be need to hear?
  - Tailor message to audience.

  **Two components:**
  * Appeal to what is right.
  * Appeal to audience’s self-interest.
Whom do they need to hear it from?

- Experts
- Authentic voices

Debbie Plotnick at PA House hearing, October 2007

Legislative visit with PA State Senator Bob Mensch, August 2010
How can we get them to hear it?

- Phone calls
- Letters
- Meetings
- Direct action

Regional Rally for Recovery Rights, organized by MHASP at Philadelphia’s City Hall, May 11, 2006. Funding for peer support was one of many issues on the agenda.
Sleep-out in front of PA State Office Building (1987) led to $4.5 million from the state for housing programs for homeless people with psychiatric disabilities.
Sit-in at Federal Office Building (Phila. 1988) focused public attention on $25 billion in cuts to low-income housing, which resulted in homelessness.
What are our resources?

- Related past advocacy work.
- Existing alliances.
- Staff and volunteers.
- Information and acumen.

Staff and volunteers of 100,000 Homes Campaign, Philadelphia
What are the gaps?

- Alliances
- Research
- Media
Effective Online Networking

- Gather e-mail addresses.
- Establish broadcast e-mail lists:
  - Send action alerts.
  - Inform your membership.
- Establish discussion lists.
- Create a website.
Facebook and Other Social Media

70 percent of journalists use social networks to assist in reporting:

According to the Center for American Progress, a progressive think tank, Twitter can help you promote your cause.

How do we begin?

- Achievable goals to build constituency
- Lay groundwork
How can we tell if it’s working?

- Evaluate what we’ve done.
- Make mid-course strategy corrections.
Be Ready to Negotiate

- Study the offer.
- Don’t accept an initially offered solution too quickly.
  - It may be designed to appease rather than create real change.
- Be ready to suggest an alternative.

“You cannot risk being trapped by the enemy in his sudden agreement with your demand and saying, “You’re right—we don’t know what to do about this issue. Now you tell us.”

—Saul Alinsky
Consider accepting the offer on a trial basis.

- Establish criteria to assess success.
- Establish a time frame for reviewing outcomes.
“Is this America?”

Mrs. Fannie Lou Hamer (1917-1977) testifying before the Credentials Committee at the 1964 Democratic National Convention

“We didn’t come all this way for no two seats when all of us is tired.”
We helped close Byberry (PSH) and ensure that the dollars followed the patients into the community (1990).
“I am only one. But still I am one. I cannot do everything. But still I can do something. And because I cannot do everything, I will not refuse to do the something that I can do.”

-Helen Keller (1880-1968)
Resources:

- Temple University Collaborative on Community Inclusion: http://www.tucollaborative.org
Resources:

- Google:
  - 48,300 websites for “advocacy tips” in a quarter of a second
  - Not all of the sites will be useful, but many will. (See slides at the end of this presentation for some useful sites.)

- Public library

“Advocacy Tools and Guidelines,” CARE:
http://www.care.org/getinvolved/advocacy/tools.asp

“A Guide to Disability Rights Laws,” U.S. Department of Justice:
http://www.usdoj.gov/crt/ada/cguide.htm
“Ten Reasons to Lobby for Your Cause,” Independent Sector: