The Power of Peers: How to Advocate Effectively on the Individual and Systems Level

Joseph Rogers, Exec. Dir.
National Mental Health Consumers’ Self-Help Clearinghouse
1211 Chestnut St., 11th Floor, Philadelphia, PA 19107
800-553-4539, ext. 3844, 267-507-3844 (direct)
jrogers@mhasp.org

Alternatives 2013 . . . December 4, 2013
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.
Example of Individual Advocacy?

- Does anyone have an example of something he or she needed to advocate around and was able to solve?
- What was the problem?
- Who was able to solve it?
- How did you proceed in order to solve it?
What skills help us to solve problems?
Problem-Solving Skills

- Identify the problem.
- Break the problem into manageable pieces; it’s easier to solve that way.
- Identify who is causing the problem.
- Set a goal.
- Identify who can solve the problem.
- Develop an action plan.
Developing an Action Plan

- Decide what you want to happen.
- Show what the other side has to gain, such as:
  - Avoiding liability in case of harm
  - Saving money by avoiding hospitalization
  - Avoiding bad publicity
Developing an Action Plan (cont’d)

- Decide what you’re willing to accept, but don’t disclose this at the start of the negotiations.
- Ask if there are special procedures for filing grievances or appeals.
How do we develop an action plan?
Developing an Action Plan

- Think through a problem
- Identify important facts.
- Break down the problem to identify who is responsible.
- Is there a violation of law, policy, procedure?
Developing an Action Plan

Step 1. What is the problem?

Fact

Why is this fact important?
Developing an Action Plan

Step 2. What will solve the problem?

- What do I want to happen?
- What would I be willing to accept?
Developing an Action Plan

Step 3. Building a Case

- What documentation do I need?
- Who can help me with my problem?
Developing an Action Plan

Step 4. Initial Strategy

- Who can resolve my problem for me?
- I will call/meet with/write to this person by ____/____/____.
- If my problem is not solved by ____/____/____, then I will follow up with this person.
Developing an Action Plan

Step 5. Appeal Strategy

- How do I appeal this decision?
- I will appeal by phone/in person/in writing by ___/__/__.
What are some face-to-face communication skills?
Do be:

* Brief
* Prepared
* Clear
* Honest
* Accurate

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

- Be argumentative
- Be demanding
- Bluff
- Promise rewards you can’t deliver
- Knock the opposition
Improve your verbal communication:

- Outline what you want to say.
- Practice saying it.
- Have a support person with you.
- Be assertive (but not aggressive): advocate for what you want.
More Verbal Communication Skills:

- Don’t attack or insult.
- Listen actively to the other person.
- Negotiate for what you want.
- Keep records.
- Follow up.
Face-to-Face Communication Skills

- Be on time.
- Sit up straight.
- Don’t fidget.
- Dress and groom neatly.
- Maintain eye contact.

Note: In certain cultures, eye contact is not appropriate. See: [http://tinyurl.com/m3thrku](http://tinyurl.com/m3thrku)
Attracting and Motivating Supporters

For systems advocacy, outreach is essential. There is strength in numbers!
People join a movement one at a time:

- 80 percent of community volunteers began because they were asked by a friend, family member or neighbor.*
- Ask your members to invite others.
- People respond to a personal approach.

*“The Citizen’s Handbook,” Vancouver Citizen’s Committee
Why do you need more members?
Why do you need more members?

- The more different types of people you have in your organization, the more representative it is of your target community. This will ensure greater community support for your organization.
- Members bring skills and experience that they can use to benefit the organization.
- More members mean that you can do more work as an organization.
- The more members you have, the more different ideas and opinions are expressed and discussed, this will lead to better decisions being taken.
- More members? More **POWER!**
You need to find others who:

- are experiencing the same situation or problem that you are.
- agree on the nature of the problem.
- are committed to an effort to change the situation (if that is your purpose).

The group does not need to be large – at least at the beginning.

- A small core group can involve others later.
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.
- If you build it, they will come.
Have a positive attitude:

- Assume people want to get involved, to contribute to the goals of your group.
- Let people know how they can make a difference.
- Giving people responsibility gets them involved.
Engaging Members

- Ask members where their interests lie, and assign them tasks accordingly.
- Express appreciation to volunteers for the time that they give.
Show Appreciation

- Create certificates and hold a ceremony for volunteers.
- Verbally express your appreciation for their hard work often and in front of other people.
- Delegate responsibility to willing group members.
Create newsletters, leaflets, and other outreach materials

- Ask mental health programs and other likely places (libraries, laundromats, grocery stores, bookstores, places of worship) if you can leave stacks of materials.

- Other materials:
  - “Fringed” flyers for bulletin boards
  - Bookmarks with your name and contact info
  - Paper placemats to use in diners

- Highlight information about getting involved.
Facebook, Twitter, and Other Social Media

A good way to reach out to people!
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.

Go to where the people are:

- Meetings of groups with similar interests
- Rallies and demonstrations
- Other places where likely members gather:
  - Drop-in centers
  - Similar programs
Reach the public through the press:

- Letters to the editor
- Op-eds
- Craig’s List
- Newspaper “bulletin boards”
- PSAs
- Public access cable TV
- Social media
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.
How do we begin?

- Achievable goals to build constituency
- Lay groundwork
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?
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.
What are our resources?

- Related past advocacy work.
- Existing alliances.
- Staff and volunteers.
- Information, wisdom and skills.

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

- Alliances?
- Research?
- Media?
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).
When SAMHSA red tape delayed funding, a petition initiative launched by Sandy Goodwick garnered 500 signatures and was sent to HHS. Many people had also written to HHS about the conference.
We helped close Byberry (PSH) and ensure that the dollars followed the patients into the community (1990).
Successful demonstrations:

“Chain-in” at PHA (1985) (left)

Sleepout at State Office Building (1987) led to creation of Homeward Bound and other housing for homeless individuals with mental health conditions (below).
Citizen advocates and family members pitched in to help with successful effort outside Philadelphia Public Housing Authority to protest planned discriminatory policies (’85)
Occupy the APA in Phila., May 5, 2012. (The poster was created by Amy Smith.)

Demonstrations sometimes only educate the public, raise consciousness, create solidarity.
Sit-in at Federal Office Building (Phila. 1988) focused public attention on $25 billion in cuts to low-income housing, which resulted in homelessness.
Bastille Day Rally (1990) created public awareness of prejudice and discrimination.
Make it fun!

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

Saul Alinsky (1909-1972)
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.
“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](http://www.tucollaborative.org)
Google:
- 43,400 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
“Tips for Legislative Advocacy,”
Justice for Immigrants:

Resources:

“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”
http://ahha.org/Lobby.asp