

Types of Advocacy

Case Advocacy:

Intervening to address an individual child or family's problem. By being aware of and documenting service-delivery problems, providers can share important information and collect examples that help identify policy issues.

Strategies

- Research the rules or eligibility requirements of a particular program or policy.
- Document the problem, its history, and whether others have had similar difficulties.
- Meet with local agency staff and/or affected family to discuss a problem.
- File an appeal if services are denied.

Example

Tonya, a caseworker, has been working with the Ferguson family for several years. During a routine meeting she noticed that Ms. Ferguson brought along her youngest son, four-year-old Zachary. Ms. Ferguson explained that Zachary was with her, and not at preschool, because his child-care subsidy lapsed recently when his eligibility information was not received in time. In Tonya's experience, Ms. Ferguson was incredibly diligent and thorough in regards to eligibility paperwork. Knowing how important it was for Zachary to have consistent learning experiences at his age, Tonya called the family's child-care caseworker and learned that Ms. Ferguson's paperwork had been received but the information hadn't been communicated to Ms. Ferguson or the preschool director. The child-care caseworker called the preschool director to reinstate the subsidy for Zachary. He went back to preschool the next day.

Administrative Advocacy:

Creating new policies, revising guidelines, and resolving program problems through activities directed at administrative and governmental agencies with authority and discretion to change rules and regulations. Many decisions are made informally, so interacting with the managing entity—rather than working through the legislature— can be the most effective way to make a positive change.

Strategies

- Develop ongoing relationships with advocates and agency staff to influence decision making.
- Participate in forums where decisions are made.
- Provide reliable information about the impact of policy decisions in your community, agency, or program to build your credibility.

Example

Suzette, the local director of a home-visitation program, is frustrated because the state agency that provides her funding has told her that the program must use the approved developmental screening instrument. She and her staff have found that another comparable instrument that includes a more parent-focused process is extremely useful in helping to engage parents in conversations about their child's development. Suzette's staff has been using both screenings to satisfy the funder's requirement as well as have the desired outcome with families. During a site review, Suzette and her department liaison discuss the issue in-depth, and Suzette shows the liaison evidence of improved parent outcomes that they believe are linked to their preferred screening tool. After the site review, Suzette sends a follow-up e-mail to her liaison and his supervisor, asking them to reconsider their policy. After more investigation, the department amends its rule to allow programs greater flexibility in choosing from among a list of approved screening tools so that programs decide which tool better fits their local needs.

Legislative Advocacy:

Working with elected officials to educate them about policies or programs and to inform them of the impact of the program in their home district. Advocates can educate decision-makers and suggest policies that would benefit their community. Legislative advocacy activities can also include lobbying on specific bills or requested funding levels.

Strategies

- Communicate with legislators and staff through letters, e-mails, phone calls, or personal visits.
- Testify before relevant legislative committees.
- Work with legislators to compel agency administrators to adopt your proposal.
- Meet with staff of the governor's office and the legislature to draw attention to your issue.
- Invite legislators to visit your program and see how policies affect people in your community.

Example

Mary was experiencing severe postpartum depression. She had health insurance and access to great prenatal care, yet none of her doctors ever asked her about how she was feeling. Within weeks of having her baby, she was admitted to a psychiatric unit in the local hospital for treatment for postpartum depression. After recovering, Mary wanted to help other women living through the same ordeal. She called her state senator, and together they drafted legislation that would require doctors to screen women for postpartum depression and to provide expectant mothers and their families with information about perinatal mood disorders. Mary testified for a legislative committee and lobbied legislators in Springfield. Over the next several months, Mary and other advocates worked to pass the bill.

Media Advocacy:

Using media to increase public awareness and influence broader public debate about early childhood issues. Keeping your issue in the news creates public recognition and support, thereby increasing its practical and political importance.

Strategies

- Express your point of view through letters to the editor and call-in opportunities.
- Contact local reporters when your organization has news to share (i.e. increase/decrease in state funding or human-interest story about a family).
- Contact local radio and television stations about appearing on local talk shows or public-affairs programs to share your expertise.
- Meet with the editorial board of newspapers.
- Identify families or other impacted organizations and ask them to write letters or make calls as well.
- Share pertinent local media coverage with elected officials from your community.

Example

Anne, the director of a home visitation program at the county health department, reads a story in her local newspaper about the number of children under age one who enter the child welfare system because of abuse or neglect. Anne writes a letter to the editor, detailing community resources available through her agency to help coach new parents through the exhausting, overwhelming, and exhilarating first weeks and months of their child's life. Anne includes outcomes evidence from her program and national statistics on how home-visitation programs reduce the incidence of child abuse and neglect.