

Standing Up for Kids

Case Advocacy for Children
and Youth

Strategies and Techniques

Prepared for the Office of the Children's Advocate

by Margot Herbert M. S. W., R. S. W.

1996

Foreword

This guide is intended to help parents, social workers, volunteers, teachers, nurses, friends and family of children become more effective advocates. As a reference guide, it can be used by anyone interested in improving their approach to advocacy. It is also expected that various sections of the material can form the basis for workshops, seminars and information sessions.

The guide is considered to be a work in progress. Please distribute it to others who share our interest in children and encourage them to apply it in their own creative way.

As experience is gained and shared by advocates, the guide can be improved. We want to hear of your experiences with it and your suggestions for improving it. There is a feedback form at the end of the document for this purpose. Please take the time to share your experiences with us as you apply this information to the situations that concern you.

Office of the Children's Advocate
Province of Alberta

Preface

This guide to advocacy strategies and techniques has been prepared in agreement with the Office of the Children's Advocate, and is meant to be used as an introduction to individual or case advocacy for beginning professionals in the human services, volunteer helpers, and any others who are seeking systematic and effective ways to “stand up for children”. While the guide could be viewed as a standalone document, it could also become part of a training program based on the needs of a particular agency or organization as well as the different life experience which people bring to the advocacy task.

The guide represents a compilation of ideas from the author’s own years as a social worker; from the many social work colleagues, lawyers, psychologists, other professionals and caring citizens whose advocacy efforts I have observed over the years, and from the writings of many wise and experienced advocates, who are acknowledged in the reference list which accompanies the guide. Some of the best ideas have come from some real live advocates I know, many of whom are part of the OCA program. My thanks to all of the above.

Margot Herbert M. S. W., R. S. W.

June 30, 1996



Table of Contents

	Page
Preface	ii
Table of Content	iii
Introduction	1
The Office of the Children's Advocate	3
So what is advocacy?	4
Some different kinds of advocacy	4
Case advocacy:	4
Class advocacy:	4
External advocacy	6
Internal advocacy	6
Some barriers to effective services for children	7
Some basic building blocks on which successful advocates base their activities	8
Advocates need to know about and understand	10
1. The developmental needs of children and youth	10
2. The special situation of children who are part of the child welfare system	10
3. The importance of cultural sensitivity	10
4. The systems that serve children	11
What gives me the right to be an advocate?	12
So ... how do I <i>Do</i> Advocacy?	14
Some things to think about as you begin	16

Some general strategies	17
Personal style	18
Gathering good information	21
Listening and writing	22
The focus of advocacy activities	23
Collaboration	25
Assertive advocacy	26
The professional advocate and the volunteer	28
A final word	30
Bibliography	31
Standing Up for Kids	34

Introduction

Advocacy for children began many years ago when public spirited citizens, who had worked to establish needed services for disadvantaged children realized that the organizations they had “invented” had become too large, too complex, and too impersonal to really serve the needs of these children. In a very real sense, the earliest child advocates were those whose task was to continually remind child-serving agencies why they had been established in the first place.

Child advocacy is based on the idea that all children have specific rights and entitlements, and that sometimes they need to be given support to assure that they can access all of the services to which they are entitled. This is the value held by all those who are part of the OCA program, and it is the basis for all of our advocacy activities. There are others who may be called advocates, who function in very different ways (for example, thinking that they are acting in the ‘best interests’ of a young person or child without spending any time talking with that person) because they do not hold the value base which guides our activities.

For most children, parents are pretty good natural advocates, although living with biological parents is not an absolute *guarantee* that a child has an effective advocate. Children who are in the care of child welfare systems have often lost any possibility of having a natural advocate. Society has a very special and important role with these young people for whom “the state” is often not a very caring or attentive parent. These are the children you will meet through the OCA program.

Note to the Reader.

1. Throughout this Guide you will find references to the “***focus***” of advocacy activities. This refers to the system which is ***on the receiving end*** of advocacy activities. (For example, if an advocate is trying to find a way for a young person to remain in school, the principal of the school, the school itself or the Board of Education might be the ***focus*** of advocacy activities). ***Any*** of the systems with which children or youth interact may become the ***focus*** of an advocate’s efforts to make that system more responsive or relevant to the needs of a particular child.
2. The terms “***young person***”, “***child***” and “***youth***” have been used interchangeably, as have the words “***he***” and “***she***”.

The Office of the Children's Advocate

The Office of the Children's Advocate (OCA) in Alberta was created as part of the Child Welfare Act (1989). The major goals of the OCA are:

- ◆ to provide advocacy for children who are part of the child welfare system, so that the rights, interests and viewpoints of each child are considered when decisions are made about their lives.

- ◆ to identify issues and to provide information to government departments and the public about current services for children, based on the Advocates' experiences with individual children in the system.

The OCA is concerned with:

- ◆ **Rights:** Entitlements of children and youth which exist in law, and are enforceable.
- ◆ **Interests:** The factors which need to be considered in making decisions for children and youth. (Many of these factors are identified in Section 2 of the Child Welfare Act).
- ◆ **Viewpoints:** The opinions, needs, wants or wishes expressed by a child or young person in relation to his or her own situation.

The OCA is different from the Child Welfare system, and the work of the Children's Advocates is different from that of child welfare workers. There are other people in social services, schools, health facilities, etc. who advocate for individual children (including most child welfare workers) but there is no one who has the unique role of the Children's Advocate. The Advocate does not deliver services to a child, and has no decision making power, but tries to influence those whose role it is to make decisions on behalf of children and youth. The Advocate supports young people, and helps them to be involved in decisions which affect their lives. The focus of the Advocate is always on the child or young person.

So what *is* advocacy?

Advocacy may be viewed simply as speaking on behalf of another person or assisting that person to speak for himself. Child advocacy is generally understood to mean action on behalf of children in relation to those services and institutions that impinge on their lives.

Some different kinds of advocacy

Case advocacy:

Individual (case) advocacy is intervention on behalf of another person, to assist that person to obtain a service or resource to which he or she is entitled. Most of the day-to-day work done by the Office of the Children's Advocate is case advocacy, involving work with individual children and youth.

➤ An example of case advocacy:

A young person living in a foster home wants to move in with her grandmother, who lives near the school she attends. The advocate makes it possible for the young person to present her case to the social worker (who is opposed to the plan) in an understandable way.

Class advocacy:

Class advocacy is intervention on behalf of a group of people who share a common need and who require assistance in order to obtain services or resources to which they are entitled.

➤ Examples of class advocacy are:

A group of parents in a neighbourhood lobbies city council to install a traffic light at a busy intersection near an elementary school.

A provincial foster parent association writes to the Minister of Children's Services to request an increase in money for school supplies for children in their care.

Case advocacy often *leads* to class advocacy, as particular issues or problems reoccur time after time, and it becomes obvious that a particular problem is affecting more than one child or youth.

➤ An example of *case to class* advocacy:

A social worker is having great difficulty finding an appropriate placement for Trevor, a child with medical problems. She learns that others in her office are having a similar problem, and when the supervisor attends a regional meeting, she learns that this is a common problem in other offices as well. The group of supervisors document the problem for the decision-makers in Head Office. Appropriate steps are taken to locate additional placements, not just for Trevor, but for *all the Trevors* in the system.

The Office of the Children's Advocate, for example, deals with case advocacy on a day-to-day basis, but also takes responsibility for collecting the issues that come to their attention and advocating for better access to services for *groups* of children they have worked with.

These two ways of doing advocacy often deal with similar problems and issues. It may be helpful to think of *case* advocacy as an example of a larger (class) issue, and of *class* advocacy as dealing with *a collection of case advocacy issues*.

Another way to think about advocacy...

External advocacy

Many advocates work from *outside* the system on which they are focusing their advocacy activities. This would describe concerned citizens, families or volunteers, who think that a particular person or group of people are not being served well by a particular system. This advocacy may involve public strategies, such as letter writing campaigns, “sit-ins” outside an official’s office, or media coverage of various kinds. The advantage of external advocacy is that those who are advocating do not have a formal relationship with the organization responsible for delivering the service. The external advocate is rarely accused of having “divided loyalties” or of being reluctant to “bite the hand that feeds him”.

Internal advocacy

Some advocates (like the OCA) work from *inside* the system, and are part of the range of professional services offered by the organization. *When the advocacy program is internal it is particularly important that there be an “arms length” relationship to the service delivery part of the system.* The Children’s Advocate, for example, reports directly to the Minister of Children’s Services rather than going through the regular bureaucratic reporting channels. The major advantage of being an internal advocate is familiarity with the system and the people who work there, so it is relatively easy to focus on the right part of the system or the right person in relation to a particular issue. A limitation, in the minds of some, is the danger of the advocate being reluctant to speak out publicly against the system that also pays *his* salary!

Some barriers to effective services for children

In general...

- ◆ Society as a whole does not have a strong commitment to the welfare of children and families. Too many laws and policies are made without the best interests of children and families in mind.
- ◆ In tough economic times the services most needed by vulnerable citizens are often underfunded or non-existent.
- ◆ It is difficult for large and complex bureaucracies to accommodate the individual circumstances of each child. Organizations that have become very large and complicated may actually **hinder** rather than **help** people to access services they need and resources to which they are entitled.
- ◆ What is best for an individual child may not be considered best for the organization.
- ◆ Sometimes there is pressure within the system to “look the other way”.

Read On ... Advocacy IS a Possible Task!!

Some basic building blocks on which successful advocates base their activities

- ◆ An advocate **must** be able to view the world through the eyes of a young person.
- ◆ Advocacy for children is a frankly partisan activity. *As an advocate you are always on the side of the child.*
- ◆ Case advocacy is *individualized* intervention for an individual person. Each advocacy action must be tailored to the individual situation of the child or young person. Situations that seem similar may in fact require very different strategies because of the particular needs or characteristics of the young person. Advocacy is never a “rubber stamp” sort of activity!
- ◆ Good advocacy always “starts where the client is”. It is essential to understand the **young person’s** definition of the problem, and not to impose your own preconceived interpretation of the issue at hand.
- ◆ Understanding the **developmental needs** of children and youth is absolutely essential. For example, children have a very different sense of time than adults do, so a delay of one week in making an important decision can seem like six months to a child.
- ◆ Successful advocacy for a young person is always based on the relationship between that young person and the advocate. When no real *relationship* exists, the advocacy effort will probably fail.
- ◆ When you are dealing with an issue, you need to really believe that the issue is important. It must *matter* to you that the young person’s goals are being met.
- ◆ Having said that, never assume that because you are sure that your goal is absolutely right everyone else will agree with you. **They won’t!** (Sometimes advocacy is a lonely business).
- ◆ Your advocacy efforts should always be guided by the young person with whom you are working. As an advocate, the cause you are championing is not yours. (You must never find yourself a solitary person marching toward the revolution).

- ◆ Good advocates work toward empowering young people to become good **advocates for themselves**. Many young people are thoughtful and articulate. *It is the young person's voice that needs to be heard, not yours!*
- ◆ The successful advocate is aware that in her enthusiasm about helping she may foster a lot of dependency in the young person.
- ◆ Keep in mind that by definition, there is a power differential involved in all advocacy situations. The fact is that children and youth in care are **always** in a less powerful position than those who are making decisions about their lives.
- ◆ When a child is not being well served by an organization, it may not be due to incompetence or negligence on the part of the organization or a particular person in it (although it may be). Often children 'fall between the cracks' because of the **lack of good clear communication** among various people in the service network.
- ◆ Use whatever knowledge or influence you may have to collaborate with other people who are concerned about this particular young person, or about the particular issue at hand.

Remember ... The young person must always be a full participant in this venture.

Advocates need to know about and understand:

1. The developmental needs of children and youth

We all know that children and young people, like adults, come in all shapes, sizes, and colours, and that they bring with them an endless variety of life experiences. In spite of all the differences, however, all children have in common the need to have a variety of physical and emotional needs met as they proceed through childhood, adolescence and early adulthood. It is essential to understand these needs, and to realize that some behaviour which is negative or hard to understand represents the young person's attempt to have these needs met.

2. The special situation of children who are part of the child welfare system

For children and young people who are part of the child welfare system, the struggle toward independence and the need for emotional security takes on special significance. Many of these children have experienced rejection and disappointments, they may be alienated from their biological parents, and may feel abandoned and angry. For these children it is often difficult to remain motivated to go to school, to keep a job, or to believe that the future holds much promise. Many of these children have great difficulty trusting an adult world that they have experienced as pretty uncaring. Most of these children in care are without the "natural advocates" that most children have - their parents.

3. The importance of cultural sensitivity

Canada is a multicultural society and those who work with children and youth need always to keep in mind the influences on a child's ideas and situation of

the **cultural background** from whence he came. Many children in the child welfare system are from Aboriginal, Metis, and First Nations families, and those who are in contact with those children have a special responsibility to learn about and respect the cultural and lifestyle issues which affect the way these children and their families deal with the systems with which they come in contact.

4. The systems that serve children

In order to be an effective advocate for a child who is part of the Child Welfare system, it is essential to learn something about that system, in spite of the fact that it is large and complex and often not easy to understand. There are a variety of ways in which a child can become part of the system, and once in the system, there are a number of things to which the child is **entitled**. Children in care have **rights!!** This is an important concept, because many advocacy activities are about helping children or young people get the services to which they are entitled, but for some reason have not been able to obtain.

In addition to the *Social Service* system, most children and youth have ongoing contact with the *Education* and *Health* systems, so it is important to know something about how these systems function as well. All children have a **right** to education and to health care, and the advocate may well be called upon when a young person is being denied these rights because he cannot easily access these systems. The **Justice system** is all too familiar to some young people who may badly need someone to help them to negotiate the complexities of that system's many rules. In addition, there may be a whole range of other agencies and organizations with which a young person is in touch.

What gives me the right to be an advocate?

For all advocates, and especially for volunteers, the question arises, “What gives me the right to be an advocate?” Fast on the heels of that question comes another, “How will I be accepted by all those other high-powered people in this child's life?” The professional advocate has the ‘clout’ of his position in the system, which gives him some degree of credibility, but what about others, such as volunteers, who do not bring that sort of obvious credential to the process? There will be professional people in all systems who will only want to connect with professional colleagues, and others who may assume that volunteers do not have appropriate training for this advocacy job. There are some important answers for those questions.

The volunteer advocate’s “right” to be an advocate comes from:

1. The *advocate’s commitment* to the rights of children.
2. *The legitimacy of the cause.* Making life better for a child or helping a young person access services he needs are perfectly acceptable and legitimate activities for everyone in society. No one would argue that vulnerable children sometimes need help and support. Those who choose to be volunteer advocates are simply *acting* on those beliefs.
3. *The legal and moral rights of the child.* Remember that advocacy is about rights and entitlements. Having provided in law for those rights and entitlements, society must then support those who are actively involved in seeing that children are **actually receiving** the services to which they are entitled.
4. In a particular case, the advocate’s mandate comes as well from his *commitment to a particular child or young person, and that young person’s willingness to work with him.*

For those who are volunteering their services as part of the OCA program, the *sanction* (permission) to act as advocates for children who are part of the child welfare system comes from the *legal* sanction of the OCA. That is why it is important for the volunteer advocate's work to always fit with the sanction, values and ethical stance of the OCA program.

So ... how do I *Do* Advocacy?

Most advocates use a “problem solving” approach to advocacy. Briefly, this process involves these steps:

- ◆ Spend time with the young person, in order to collect accurate information, and to begin forming a meaningful and mutually trusting relationship.
- ◆ Contact other sources of needed information (always with the permission of the young person.)
- ◆ With the youth, try to clarify the issues at hand, prioritizing if necessary.
- ◆ Decide what needs to happen, and who should be involved.
- ◆ Decide on the advocacy strategies you think will be most appropriate for this child and this situation.
- ◆ Proceed with whatever advocacy activities you have planned.
- ◆ When you complete a task, **evaluate** that advocacy effort. Did you and the child or young person achieve your goals? What have you learned from this experience that will help you the next time that you are dealing with a similar issue?

Remember that at any point in the process new information may necessitate a change in your plans. Of course the actual job is never as orderly or linear as this, but checking back against this outline will help you to cover all the bases.

In the pages that follow you will find many advocacy strategies and techniques. You will find some more effective and easier to use than others.

Your choice of strategies will depend on such things as:

- ◆ the age and stage of the young person you are dealing with
- ◆ the type of issue he is dealing with
- ◆ the nature of the young person's past and current life situation
- ◆ your knowledge of the system that is to be the focus of your advocacy activities
- ◆ your own personal advocacy style

Your activities may include things like:

- ◆ spending time with the young person to get to know her and to begin to understand her "view of the world"
- ◆ attending a meeting or case conference with the young person
- ◆ writing a letter (or helping the young person to write one)
- ◆ making telephone calls to other persons who may be able to help
- ◆ meeting with appropriate people to clarify the young person's point of view

These are basic and very important activities, and for some young persons, additional strategies may not be required. Sometimes "soft" advocacy activities which simply enhance someone's quality of life is what is needed, rather than more vigorous or legalistic approaches. Don't be tempted to "practice" more complex techniques when they are not needed.

***Remember that your support of this young person
is an advocacy skill in itself.***

Some things to think about as you begin...

- ◆ Ask yourself, what is it that I would like to achieve on behalf of this young person? What does the young person want to achieve? Realistically, what can we achieve?
- ◆ Learn who your allies are. For example, there may be people in the service delivery system who have the same concerns that you do, and who will welcome your “external” efforts to help this young person. Your activities may serve to reinforce what they have been trying to achieve from within the system.
- ◆ Members of the young person’s extended family, friends, current or former foster parents, for example, may be potential sources of support for your advocacy efforts.
- ◆ Bite off “chewable” pieces. Don’t set yourself (and a youth) up for disappointment and failure by taking on too much. “Burn out” in the human services has a lot to do with failure to value the small steps forward that vulnerable people can be helped to take.

Some general strategies

- ◆ Every single thing in a young person's life that is not absolutely perfect does not warrant a major advocacy effort. Some advocacy groups have developed "decision rules" for the selection of issues that merit advocacy activities. Of course the most important thing to consider is the young person's feeling about the importance of the issue. *If he considers it a major a problem, it is.* However, when there are several issues at hand, you and the young person may need to prioritize.
- ◆ In planning your advocacy steps (who you are going to call, write to, make an appointment with, etc.) be methodical. Plan your strategies and be logical about who you approach and what you ask for.
- ◆ Have your story straight, be respectful and proceed diplomatically.
- ◆ Always make sure that the young person is aware of what is being said and done on her behalf.
- ◆ Be specific in stating your case, and help the young person to be specific. Wanting a better life for a young person is certainly a good objective, but as an advocate you must be much more definitive.
- ◆ Remember that you are trying to do something *on behalf of* the child not *for* the child.
- ◆ Use an advocacy method that is most appropriate to **the context of the situation you are dealing with.** If, for example, a young person in a group home is finding the rules restrictive, you will need to understand such things as the history of this young person with these group home operators, the general nature of this particular

young person's life situation, your knowledge of these particular group home operators.

Being aware of the context will maximize the probability of a successful advocacy effort.

Personal style

Style is **the way** individuals do advocacy activities. The same activities may be done quite differently by different people. The point is that people are different from one another and what each brings to the advocacy effort is an element of **personal style**. It is important to know yourself and to be aware of your own personal style. Ask yourself, "What are the qualities that will make me an effective advocate?"

What are some of the qualities and attributes of an effective advocate?

- ◆ Has a good sense of self, and place in the world.
- ◆ Has good interpersonal skills.
- ◆ Has a sense of humour!!!
- ◆ Is self-aware. People sometimes become advocates because they *enjoy conflict*, and actually want to escalate the battle against the system. Others are terrified of any sort of confrontation and will **avoid a disagreement** at all costs. *Neither of these is a good basis for advocacy*. A good advocate knows his own strengths and weaknesses, and learns to work around them.
- ◆ Has a tendency toward being accepting and tolerant of different people and unfamiliar situations, rather than being judgmental and critical.

- ◆ Has the ability to think through a complex issue without “drowning” in the detail, even though advocacy situations are sometimes very involved.
- ◆ Is well organized and methodical - a good manager of personal time.
- ◆ Has the ability to work independently.
- ◆ Is willing to cope with occasional criticism and to take the risk of not always being liked.
- ◆ Has good emotional supports away from “the office”.
- ◆ Is patient. Sometimes change comes *very* slowly.
- ◆ Is persistent. It is absolutely vital to be willing to “hang in”.
- ◆ Is sensitive to all of the people you are dealing with (even the ones you don’t much like!)
- ◆ Is flexible and can accommodate to change in plans and to incorporate new information.
- ◆ Has imagination. Sometimes you have to get a little creative when the usual channels are blocked, or when the obvious solution doesn’t work.
- ◆ Has tolerance for the mysterious nature of the decision making process in some big bureaucracies and awareness that other people may have hidden agendas.
- ◆ Has the ability to manage his own stress. Often the young person will be stressed, and the advocate can avoid reinforcing that stress by being calm and collected.

- ◆ Knows that one's own enthusiasm about advocacy for a young person is not as important as ensuring that the young person is being helped to make *his own* decisions and is gaining the strength and skills to become his own good advocate.

A good advocate does NOT:

- ◆ See every problem as a personal crusade. Good advocates don't see themselves as "child savers" or any other kind of heroes!
- ◆ Always assume that the system is deliberately discriminating against a young person.

This may seem like a pretty imposing list, however, most people who truly believe that children have rights, and are willing to commit time, thought and energy to a young person, can acquire good advocacy skills. Advocacy is a rational process which can be learned, and used as a way of helping.

Gathering good information

One of the most important advocacy steps is gathering good information. Here are some tips.

- ◆ Advocacy is rarely effective when the advocate does not have all the facts. Collect thorough and accurate information. **Know what you are talking about!**
- ◆ Be sure that you and the young person are on the same wave length. **This is a joint venture!**
- ◆ The young person for whom you are advocating **must be your primary source of information.** If you need to contact others, you must always have the young person's permission to do so.
- ◆ Don't become a rebel Without a cause! Make sure that you are dealing with a real issue, rather than a misunderstanding. If you rush into an advocacy action before checking things out, you may end up looking foolish (and losing credibility).
- ◆ Effective advocacy involves knowledge and understanding of how "the systems" work. Most young persons are connected with educational, social/recreational and health systems. For children in care, there is a complex and multi-layered social services system as well.
- ◆ Within most systems, some things are not legally possible. Don't find yourself advocating for a solution that is illegal! Rule that possibility out and try to find another route or another solution.

Listening and writing

Good advocates are champion listeners.

- ◆ The ability to listen well is one very basic and essential advocacy skill. Many people have to **learn** to listen. Effective listening means “turning off” the other agenda going on in your head, not interrupting, and avoiding distractions. In short, effective listening means giving the person who is speaking your **full** attention.
- ◆ Listening well is the basis of effective interviewing. The successful advocate interviews with advocacy in mind. This means using the interview as an opportunity to form a relationship but also asking the kind of questions that will reveal the role of “system” problems in the situation which is presented to you.

Writing skills are also important in advocacy work.

- ◆ Know the relative merits of letters, memos, etc. Think carefully about who would be the best recipient of your letter, and to whom it should be copied.
- ◆ It may take a phone call or two, but it is important to know the **official position** of the person to whom you are directing your correspondence. Also, spell that person’s name correctly (many people are sensitive about these things, and there’s no point in having that person questioning your competence before you even get in to his office!)
- ◆ Always keep copies of letters you send or receive.
- ◆ Keep good records. Document phone calls, meetings, etc., and include dates, times, and the **names** of the people you spoke with.

The focus of advocacy activities

One of the important initial tasks of an advocate is to learn as much as possible about the systems that will be the focus of the advocacy activities. (see Definition page 3).

- ◆ You may encounter people who have had very negative experiences with a particular system, and will want you to join in condemning that system and everyone in it. Remember that as an advocate you need to work with the system that has the resources, so you need to avoid being identified too strongly as anti-system or pro-system. There will be times when an advocate will oppose the bureaucracy and times when he will support it. At other times, he will simply rise above it. The decision is always based on the best way to obtain a positive outcome for the child.
- ◆ Try to understand why particular decisions were made, or why particular policies are in place, that seem to be working against children and youth. (When you are trying to bend rules, it is useful to know how these rules came to be in the first place.)
- ◆ Know the strengths and weaknesses of the system you are advocating in, and take this into account when deciding what tactics might get that system to change a position on an issue.
- ◆ Try to find out what the “vested interests” are in the organization and try to avoid unwittingly stepping on someone’s toes. If you can anticipate where the resistance or opposition will be, sometimes you can work around that.
- ◆ You may find yourself dealing with someone who you really do not like much. It’s important to separate the problem from the people. Distinguish subjective

impressions from objective facts. This person who you find rather offensive may be the key to a positive outcome!

- ◆ Be prepared to consider alternative courses of action. When the bureaucracy doesn't seem willing to respond wholeheartedly to your request, be prepared to present alternatives. Have a back-up plan in case your original strategy doesn't work.
- ◆ Appeal to people's conscience, values and professional ethics.
- ◆ Sometimes it is effective to point out the negative consequences of continuing a certain policy or practice, or of not responding to the request at hand.
- ◆ Good advocates bring to the process a mix of head and heart. The heart is good and necessary, but when you are dealing with a bureaucracy, you must persuade by logical argument. Show that you genuinely care, but be organized and logical.
- ◆ Advocates often work with people who are not universally popular within the system. For example, if a young person is considered "difficult" it is possible that the advocate will be viewed in the same light. Consider the example of a young person who is very disruptive in the classroom. The school may welcome your help in the beginning thinking that you will support them. They may not be so thrilled to see you when they realize that you are sticking to the child's perspective!
- ◆ If there is a time when several advocates are collaborating to address a particular issue, try to choose someone with credibility to coordinate the effort. Nothing is so damaging to a cause as a leader who is vulnerable to criticism, based on past history and negative reputation (whether deserved or not!). So if one of you has been locked in a nasty dispute with an agency over a different issue, that is probably not the best person to lead this advocacy effort when the same agency is the focus of the advocacy activities.

Collaboration

Many people, when they think of advocacy, think of an activity that is *adversarial*. It is true that advocacy often needs to be vigorous and sometimes it is adversarial. The fact is, though, that a major advocacy tool is *collaboration*. In advocacy work, collaboration means attempting to gain the interest and support of the system you are focused on by presenting the issue at hand as a joint problem, and suggesting ways in which the advocate, the child and the system can work together to solve that problem. In other words, it means trying to work **with** the system (at least in the beginning of your advocacy activity) and it's a good "mind set" to have when you start out.

Some points about collaboration a key concept in successful advocacy.

- ◆ Try to find some common ground, so that whenever possible you can turn a situation into win-win. (No one likes to lose.)
- ◆ Be solution-focused. It's not helpful to just criticize and complain, and wait for the system to respond. Once you have clearly identified the problem, try to be part of the solution.
- ◆ Do not always assume that you'll get a negative response from the system. Sometimes you can "prepare for the worst by expecting the best".
- ◆ It is pointless to "compete" for ownership of issues, or to argue over whose role it is to do a particular task. There is plenty of work to go around, and the young people we are advocating for are the ones who suffer if we don't find effective ways to work together.
- ◆ Sometimes it is necessary to **negotiate** regarding roles. Different people have different styles of communicating with one another, and different methods of

problem solving. People also have different beliefs, values and expectations, different ideas about how people should behave and even about how people should be helped when in need. When we **compete** instead of **collaborating**, real teamwork is impossible and opportunities for advocacy can be lost forever.

Assertive advocacy

Sometimes your best efforts at collaboration and persuasion will not produce the desired outcome, and you will decide that a more assertive stance may be more effective. Just as you must tailor your strategy to the situation of an individual child or young person, you must also judge how assertive or confrontational you need to be.

Some things to keep in mind if you are thinking about “turning up the heat”...

- ◆ There are advocates who *always* resort to adversarial or coercive tactics. An advocate who operates on this “conflict model” often does not achieve meaningful change and usually compromises his ability to work with that system in the future.
- ◆ Don’t rush in to an assertive advocacy action unless you are sure that the situation is serious enough to warrant such action.
- ◆ Be as sure as possible that other solutions are not available. Don’t use an earth mover if a spade will do. Use the strategy that lawyers sometimes refer to as “least contest”. In other words, do the least that is required to get the needed result. Don’t create a large amount of conflict if a small amount will bring the response you are seeking.

- ◆ Effective advocates are willing to move into adversarial or coercive actions when the situation warrants it, even with the knowledge that their actions may effect their relationship with colleagues. (They are usually good at “mopping up” afterwards!)
- ◆ If the advocacy actions are done well (based in careful consideration of the particular situation at hand and often with timely consultation) the risks are often not as great as we perceive them to be.
- ◆ This is the time when you will be glad that you have kept careful notes about who you’ve talked to, when that conversation took place, and what the response was. For example, you’ll get a lot more attention if you are able to say,

“On January 15, 1996, a person in your office named Mary Jones told me that extra money for school supplies was not available to children under 12 years.”

rather than,

“Sometime last winter someone in your office told me that there was no extra help available for these kids.”

The professional advocate and the volunteer

Within the human services there is renewed interest in finding ways to use “natural” helping relationships. The reasons for this interest are varied, and have to do at least in part with the proliferation of demands on human service systems, and the difficulty of professional helpers in meeting these demands. Although some may question the practicality of this development, many experienced professionals, with their broad view of human problems, are enthusiastically encouraging the addition of “natural helpers” or volunteers as complementary to their own professional activities. Indeed the professional advocate may become the essential trainer and supporter for these volunteers. We must remind ourselves, however, that human services *began* with informal advocacy, when the systems that provided those services were smaller and less complex. Advocacy has become *formalized* and professional in response to the increasing complexity of the system, and it would be naive to think that well meaning volunteers will magically be able to negotiate the multi-layered systems that continue to challenge even the most seasoned professional. That said, the creative partnering of professionals and volunteers has advantages for all concerned.

The most successful partnering between professionals and volunteers in the human services seems to happen when:

1. there is a common belief that volunteers have something special to contribute and are not viewed as substitute professionals.
2. the professional staff believes that children will benefit from the inclusion of a volunteer component in the program.
3. volunteers are carefully recruited for specific programs.

4. appropriate training and orientation is available.
5. expectations and tasks are clearly described and understood.
6. there is a clear understanding about confidentiality.
7. careful criteria are developed for case selection, in order to minimize the possibility of an inappropriate match between a child or young person and a volunteer.
8. volunteers are asked for a reasonable commitment of time.
9. the *real* costs of volunteering (childcare, transportation, etc.) are recognized.
10. back-up for volunteers is ongoing and available.

When these things are in place, it is likely that:

- ◆ the young person's life will be enriched
- ◆ the volunteer will have a fulfilling experience
- ◆ the professional advocate will have formed a genuinely helpful partnership
- ◆ the program as a whole will have made some important informal links into the community.

A final word

No matter how much time or effort you are prepared to invest in being an advocate, you are not going to revolutionize the entire human service system and make that service system completely responsive to all the needs of all children. What you may be able to do however, is help an unhappy child or young person to obtain a better living arrangement, to visit his grandmother, to continue attending school, to access needed health care, or simply to feel valued and important in the eyes of another person. If you can achieve *any one* of these things, you have been a successful advocate.

Bibliography

Austin, M., Skelding, A.H. and Smith, P.L. (1977). *Delivering Human Services. An Introductory Programmed Text*. Harper and Row. New York.

Bateman, Neil (1995). *Advocacy Skills: A Handbook for Human Service Professionals*. Ashgate Publishing Limited. Brookfield, Vermont.

Bedics, Bonnie and Goltermann, Glen (1981). *Child Advocacy: An Outreach Approach to Rural Children. Human Services in the Rural Environment*. 6(3/4).

Biklen, Douglas (1976). *Advocacy Comes of Age*. *Exceptional Children*. 42(5). Feb.

Bonovitch, Robert CV., &- Norman Woronoff. (1972) *Advocacy in Michigan: Making Systems Work for People*. *Public Welfare*. Spring. 37-43.

Burke, Edmund M. (1968). *Citizen Participation Strategies*. *Journal of the American Institute of Planners* 34 (5). 287-294.

Cahill, Brian F., (1986) *Training Volunteers as Child Advocates*. *Child Welfare*. 65 (6), 545-553.

Claxton, Linda M. (1981) *Advocacy: An Application to Children*. *Social Work in Education*. 3, 4, 43-51.

Cnaan, Ram. (1990). *The Use of Volunteers by Governmental Social Services in Israel*. *Journal of Sociology and Social Welfare*. 17 (3). 150-173.

Collins, Alice H. and Pancoast, Diane L. (1976). *Natural Helping Networks. A Strategy for Prevention*. National Association of Social Workers. Washington, DC.

Dalton, Anne R. (1992). *Advocates for Change*. *The Journal of Volunteer Administration*. Spring. 10-17.

Dane, Elizabeth (1985) *Professional and Lay Advocacy in the Education of Handicapped Children*. *Social Work*. November-December.

Epstein, Irwin (1981). *Advocates on Advocacy: An Exploratory Study*. *Social Work Research and Abstracts* 17 (2). 5-12.

Ezell, Mark(1994). *Advocacy Practice of Social Workers*. *Families in Society*. January 36-46.

Fernandez, Happy Craven (1980). *The Child Advocacy Handbook*. The Pilgrim Press. New York

Friedman, R. Duchnowski, A. and Henderson, E. (1989). *Advocacy On Behalf of Children With Serious Emotional Problems*. Charles C. Thomas. Springfield, Illinois.

Gil de Gigaja, Mona (1991). *Stand Up, Speak Out And Make a Difference With E.A.S.E.* (Effective Advocacy Steps for Everyone).

Graycar, Adam (1983). *Informal, Voluntary and Statutory Services: The Complex Relationship*. British Journal of Social Work 13 (4). 379-393.

Hegar, Rebecca L. (1989) *Empowerment-based Practice with Children*. Social Service Review. September.

Herbert, Margot. (1988) *The Advocacy Role of the Children's Guardian*. Unpublished paper.

Herbert, Margot and Mould, John (1992) *The Advocacy Role in Public Child Welfare*. Child Welfare 71(2)

Herbert, Margot and Levin, Ron (1996). *The Advocacy Role in Hospital Social Work*. Social Work in Health Care 22(3)

Jabs, Caroline and Lippman, Ellen (1982). *Youth Participation in Youth Advocacy. A Practical Guide for Developing Programs*. National Commission on Resources for Youth. Washington. DC

Kaye, Lenard W. and Albert, Raymond (1990) *The Technology of Social Planning and Program Development. An Advocacy Training Model for Professional Social Workers*. Journal of Teaching in Social Work. 4 (1), 101-112.

Litwak, E., Shiroy, E., Zimmerman, L. and Bernstein, J. (1970). *Community Participation in Bureaucratic Organizations: Principles and Strategies*. Interchange 1 (4). 44-60.

Lurie, A., Pinsky, S., Rock, B., Tuzman, L. (1989). *The Training and Supervision of Social Work Students for Effective Advocacy Practice: A Macro System Perspective*. The Clinical Supervisor, 7 (2/3).

McGowan, B. (1987). *Advocacy*, in Encyclopedia of Social Work. National Association of Social Workers. Silver Spring, Md.

McMahon, Thomas J. (1993) *On the Concept of Child Advocacy: A Review of Theory and Methodology*. School Psychology Review 22 (4), 744-755.

Manser, Gordon and Cass, Rosemary Higgins.(1976). *Voluntarism at the Crossroads*. Family Service Association of America. New York

- Melton, Gary B. (1983). *Child Advocacy: Psychological Issues and Interventions* . Plenum Press. New York
- Olsen, M. Rolf (1984). *Integrating Formal and Informal Social Care – The Utilization of Social Support Networks*. British Journal of Social Work. 16 (Supplement). 15-22.
- Paul, J.L., Neufeld, J. R. and Pelosi, J.W. (Eds). 1977. *Child Advocacy Within the System*. Syracuse University Press. Syracuse.
- Roman, Brenda (1996) Personal Communication. Volunteer Services. Children's Aid Society of Metropolitan Toronto. Toronto, Ontario.
- Schwartz, Florence S. (1984) *Voluntarism and Social Work Practice*. University Press of America, New York.
- Shields, Craig V. (1995). *Strategies. A Practice Guide for Dealing With Professionals and Human Service Systems*. Human Services press. Richmond Hill, Ontario.
- Soler, Mark (1992). *Advancing Child Advocacy: A Blueprint for the 90's*. Children's Legal Rights. 13 (2). 2-7.
- Sosin, M. and Caulum, S. (1983) *Advocacy: A Conceptualization for Social Work Practice*. *Social Work*. 28(1) pp. 12-17
- Timms, Elizabeth (1983). *On The Relevance of Informal Social Networks to Social Work Intervention*. British Journal of Social Work. 13(4). 405-415.
- Taylor, Eleanor D. (1987) *From Issue to Action: An Advocacy Program Model*. Family and Children's Service. Lancaster, PA.
- Weber. George H. and McCall, George J. (1978). *Social Scientists as Advocates. Views from the Applied Disciplines*. Sage Publications. Beverly Hills.
- Weissrna, Harold, Epstein, Irwin and Savage, Andrea (1983). *Agency-Based Social Work: Neglected Aspects of Clinical Practice*. Temple University Press. Philadelphia.
- Whittaker, James K (1986). *Integrating Formal and Informal Social Care: A Conceptual Framework* . British Journal of Social Work, 16. 39-62.
- Whittaker, James K and Gabarino, James, Eds. (1983). *Social Support Networks*. Aldine Publishing Company, New York.
- Wilson, Marlene (1979). *The Effective Management of Volunteer Programs*. Johnson Publishing Company. Boulder, Colo.

Standing Up for Kids

1. How has this guide been helpful to you?

2. What is missing or not helpful to you?

3. What experience and techniques would you add to this guide?

(Optional)

4. What is your name: _____
address: _____

telephone #: (_____)_____

5. Return this form to: Children's Advocate Phone: 780-427-8934
Hilltop House 1-800-661-3446
9910 - 103 Street Fax: 780-427-5509
Edmonton AB T5K OX8