

Consumer and Family Advocacy for Behavioral Health Services

Capital Area Behavioral Health Collaborative

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The Purposes of Community Advocacy

Why do we need to take on the role of Advocates in our Communities?

- To use the Right of Free Speech that we are guaranteed under our U.S. Constitution
- To make others aware of an issue about which they might be blind or in denial
- To lift an issue that is important to us or our family member to greater levels of awareness
- To “get something done” in helping to address a problem of which we are aware
- To gain additional support and services for our loved one

Some “Tools” of Advocacy

- Large “P” Political Activism
- Small “P” Activism in Agencies
- Serving on Governing Boards
- Serving on Advisory Boards
- Creating Relationships with Legislative Staff
- Starting Local Support Groups
- Volunteering with Local Service Providers
- Holding or Attending Awareness Raising Events

Large “P” Political Activism

- Register to Vote and then VOTE!
- Help Consumers to register and vote
- Get to know your Legislators and Staff
- Visit often: in good times AND bad
- Assure they know what matters to you
- Support candidacy of those who do the right thing when you can

Small “P” Activism

- Discover when your County Commissioners Meet and attend a Meeting
- Learn who serves on your County MH/IDS Advisory Board and develop a relationship with one or more of them and serve on that Board
- Learn about local efforts of Recovery programs
- Find out when your local NAMI Chapter meets and attend
- Make acquaintance with a member of the local print media, preferably the Op-Ed Editor.

Serve on Governing and Advisory Boards

- Find out which of your local providers has a locally based governing Board of Directors or Advisory Board and attend a fundraising event for the organization.
- At the event discover how to apply to serve on the Board of Directors or Advisory Board.
- Once you discover who is on your local MH/IDS Advisory Board, let them know of your interest in joining as well.

Creating Relationships with Legislative Staff

- Visit your local Legislator's District Offices and speak with staff.
- Share your particular interests in publicly funded services
- Let them know about the difficulties you have in living with your illness(es) or supporting your loved one in hers/his
- Be specific about the “costs” involved including: financial strain, emotional times, inability to enjoy life as others do.
- Offer support to the Legislator's projects of interest whenever possible
- Make a small donation to a re-election campaign, if you can

Support Groups

- Find out if there is a local support group for others in your circumstances and attend—at least more than two meetings!!
- If there is no existing group, try to find another person with similar interest and begin the process of starting one.
- Don't be bashful about asking for public funding to begin the process, if needed.
- ALWAYS include advocacy as one of the expressed goals of the Support Group.

Volunteering with Local Providers

Any free time can be an opportunity for you to offer volunteer work at a local provider of services.

The potential benefits:

- Get to “know” the provider from the inside
- Learn more about the services that are offered that you might need now or in the future
- Show yourself as a supporter of the provider and their overall mission
- This will gain almost instant respect from the provider which can be useful in case of the need to file a complaint.

Holding/Attending Awareness Raising Events

The sad reality is that one of the primary struggles still faced by Mental Illness in our communities remains to be

STIGMA

So long as stigma prevails or remains, the climb to success will be longer, harder, and less likely to be achieved.

Holding local events to showcase those who have successfully overcome mental illness is the best way to confront, and eventually, eliminate stigma.

Essential Learning

- Legislators share that as few as 2 calls or 18 contacts can sway their votes!!
- Unless you are part of a paid lobbying effort, it is unlikely that the advocacy you want and need will be done by anyone but you.
- Your advocacy is, “pound for pound” more valuable and effective than paid lobbying because you can relate it at the most personal of levels.
- Persons on Recovery, their families and friends are the lynchpin to effective advocacy.

Steps of the State Budget Process

- August, Department Secretaries seek budget input on new initiatives from their Offices and Bureaus
- November, Information is shared with the Administration's Budget Office for compiling a Budget presentation.
- First Tuesday in February, Governor makes Budget Address to Joint Legislature, March for a newly elected Governor
- February, March, and April; House and Senate hold Appropriations Committee Hearings for Departments—Human Services, Drug and Alcohol, and Health.
- May and June, Legislators meet in Caucuses to debate the issues and present a budget to the Governor before July 1

Important Web Addresses

- State General Assembly to find your legislator's office and phone contact:

<http://www.legis.state.pa.us/index.cfm>

- United States Congress:

<https://www.congress.gov/members>

- Penn Live Central PA reporting of Budget progress:

<http://www.pennlive.com/pennsylvania-budget/>

The Quote to Guide our Advocacy

“In a democracy, people always get the government they deserve.” Alexis de Toqueville:

QUESTIONS??

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