Together, We Can Move Mountains

Parents as Leaders in Improving Systems for Children & Families
Public Policy Advocacy for Social Change

“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed [people] can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.”

Margaret Mead
Systems Change: An Everyday Activity

• Provide training & TA to parents & professionals
  – Best practices & resources
  – Public policy advocacy
  – Opportunities to let your voice be heard

• Collect, analyze, & share data

• Represent the parent voice in policy
What is Advocacy?

- Speaking, writing, or acting in support of a cause
- Using a variety of organized tactics to achieve a public policy goal
- Demanding a change to benefit the lives of many
Social Justice Advocacy

- Challenging power
- Assuming risks
- Telling stories
- Involving those affected
- Offering alternatives
- Principles vs. compromise
- Balancing the scales of justice and equity
- Holding ourselves accountable
How Change Happens

“Power concedes nothing without a demand. It never has and it never will.”

-Frederick Douglas
Stages of Change

- Denial of the need for change
- Resistance to change
- Exploration of the change

- Managing the change
- Collaboration
- Compromise
- Maintaining momentum
Why do parents get involved?

• We believe
  – The issue is important to us and our family
  – We have something to contribute
  – We will be listened to and our contributions respected
  – Our participation will make a difference
Key Leadership Qualities

- Challenge the process
- Inspire shared vision
- Enable others to act
- Model the way
- Encourage the heart
Leadership Development

• Individual advocacy

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• Peer advocacy

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• Public policy advocacy
Opportunities to Participate

• Tell/share their story
  – In person
  – In writing
  – To an advocate or family organization
Leaders Know Themselves

• Who am I?
• What am I doing here
• What are my:
  – Goals, purposes
  – Expectations
  – Motivations?
• What strengths & challenges do I bring?
• How can I best use my leadership skills?
• How can I make space for others?
Advocacy Leadership Knowledge

- Laws & regulations
- How institutions work
- Key decision-makers
- Formal & informal decision-making
- Facts; current status
- Barriers & solutions
- Qualities of effective systems
- Existing resources
Advocacy Leadership Skills

- Empathy
- Listening
- Written & oral communication
- Critical reading & thinking
- Collaboration
- Consensus-building
- Problem-solving
- Conflict resolution
- Strategic planning
- Growing leadership
Key Leadership Qualities

- Effective communicators
- Good listeners
- Develop team spirit & cohesiveness
- Understanding & aware
- Recognize accomplishments of others
- Open to constructive criticism
- Encourage & motivate
Key Leadership Qualities

- Facilitate resolution of disputes
- Delegate & build others’ capacity
- Accept responsibility, take initiative
- Offer help, information
- Ask for help
- Make things happen, but don’t have to be the center of attention
Focus for Advocacy

- The Legislature
- The Executive
- Regulatory Agencies
- The Judiciary
How Policies are Made

• Legislature/laws:
  - Introduced
  - Referred to committee
  - Considered by committee
  - Hearing/public comment
  - Reported out with amendments/changes
  - Passed by one house
  - Referred to next house
  - Passed by 2\textsuperscript{nd} house
  - Goes to Governor
How Policies Are Made

• Executive/Governor:
  
  - Signs into law as is
  - Conditionally veto (return for specific changes)
  - Veto (overridden by supermajority of both houses)
  - Pocket veto
How Policies Are Made

• Regulations:
  - Draft regulations based on law
  - Publish in Federal or State Register
  - Public comment/public hearing
  - Respond to comments
  - Make revisions
  - Publish in Register
  - Go into effect
  - Implemented by agency
Reaching Policymakers

• Call * Write * Visit
  - Brief and to the point
  - Stick to one subject
  - Identify yourself
  - How will you & others be affected?
  - Be clear about what you want
  - Be accurate & specific
  - Be polite & positive
  - Offer your help
  - Follow up!
Reaching the Grassroots

• Call * Write * Visit
  – Letter sent to a legislator can be a letter to the editor
  – Message on a legislator’s message machine can be called in to radio talk show
  – Testimony at hearing can be presented at church, PTA, community group meeting
Types of Advocacy Writing

• Op-Ed piece
• Letter to editor
• Press advisory/release
• Letter to policymaker
• Letter of complaint
• Public testimony
• Investigative report
• Letters to inform & mobilize others
• Activity notices
Testifying – In advance

- Monitor Federal and State Register
- Mobilize authentic & expert voices
- Mobilize diverse constituencies
- Call to request time
- Find out how much time and how many copies to bring
- Let them know if you need interpretation
Writing Testimony

- Be brief & concise
- Written is longer than oral
- Have a purpose
- Identify yourself
- State position, reasoning, and request
- Personalize
- Use your own words
- Be substantive & give examples
- Single space for them, double space for you
- Make extra copies
- Practice presentation & rehearse questions!
Presenting Testimony

• Dress properly
• Arrive early
• Be prepared to shorten testimony
• Relax
• Speak slowly & clearly
• Avoid monotone
• Look up, make eye contact
• No disparaging remarks
• Thank them for the opportunity
Calling a Legislative office

• Jot down speaking points in advance; if asking for a meeting, know who will be coming with you
• Ask to speak to the legislator or relevant aide
• Note your legislative district
• Give bill # & name or topic
Calling a Legislative office

• Explain why the issue is important to you & the families you serve
• Ask for a meeting
• If not possible, ask for the legislator’s support
• Write notes on your conversation
• Follow up! (In writing!)
Preparing for Visits

• Decide who you will visit. Read up on them.
• Establish agenda & goals; prepare content & delivery tailored to the legislator/policymaker.
• Collect stories from those who can’t attend.
• Contact the legislative office nearest you for an appointment.
Scheduling a Meeting

• During Recess, call the District office of the Member. For US Senators & Representatives, you can find information at www.House.gov or www.Senate.gov

• Ask to schedule a meeting with the member
Scheduling a Meeting

• Be sure to inform the scheduler who will be attending the meeting. Members love to meet with kids!

• If the Member is booked, ask to speak with the relevant legislative assistant/aide
Scheduling a Meeting

• Remember, you can also schedule meetings with the Member and his/her staff even when they are in session.

• You can schedule a meeting with the Member on weekends or with their DC staff via conference call.
Preparing for Legislative Visits

- Learn as much as you can about the member.
- Establish agenda & goals; prepare content & delivery tailored to the legislator.
- Collect stories from those who can’t attend.
- Bring business cards and information to leave behind.
Preparing for Legislative Visits

- Determine group composition. Pull together your small team of key allies. Bring children if possible.
- If possible, include someone who has visited a legislator before.
- Practice helps: if you have time, role play beforehand.
Preparing for Legislative Visits

• Be prepared, but don’t feel that everyone has to be an expert! You are there to tell your story and the story of other families; those experiences are powerful!
Meeting with Elected Officials

- Speak up
- Emphasize key points
- Establish eye contact
- Use visual aids
- Be brief
- Don’t be afraid
- Don’t lie if you don’t know. Offer to find out.
- Be yourself
During the Legislative Visit

- Don’t get intimidated or frustrated.
- Be on time, and don’t stay too long.
- Build a relationship.
- Follow up!
The Bottom Line

• Remember, it’s all about relationships!
• So, win or lose, keep in touch with those elected officials, administrators, and other policy-makers. Let them know you are still around!
Making Change

• Committed Leadership
• Maintaining a strong communication, clear decision-making, & specific responsibilities

I will make the difference!
Making Change

• Quality information:
  - Document problems and solutions
  - Develop accurate “map” of systems – how they work, who’s important, relationships
    • Formal
    • Informal
  - Know how other groups have solved problems
Making Change

• Effective strategies:
  – Ongoing:
    • Planning
    • Implementation
    • Evaluation
    • Revision of plan

• Persistent focus on key systems & central issues

• Understand specific changes needed
Making Change

• Multiple levels
• Multiple tactics
  – Negotiations
  – Demonstrations
  – Filing complaints
  – Using the media
  – Testifying
  – Writing, calling, visiting potential allies & policymakers
• Continue direct pressure
• Persistence!
Making Change

• Bring about changes
• Monitor implementation to make sure improvements take place
Democracy is not a spectator sport!

- Empowering families to participate in advocacy for our children, our community, the larger society, is its own victory, regardless of the specific outcome of any particular effort.