

ADVOCACY

The Alliance developed the first Peer Advocacy Training in New York State. The training continues to receive national attention and attendance. The Alliance has helped train over 900 people at these institutes. Many of the people now work in peer support and advocacy and help train others in this field. The Alliance developed a 200-page manual to accompany its advocacy training that is still used throughout New York State and nationally. From The Alliance Peer Advocacy Training Manual:

I sit on a man's back choking him and making him carry me, and yet assure myself and others that I am sorry for him and wish to lighten his load by all possible means – except by getting off his back. - Leo Tolstoy

WHAT IS AN ADVOCATE?

As an advocate, you are representing someone else's interests. The client is the person who should define his/her interests – within the bounds of the law and mutual propriety – not the advocate. Your job is to get for your client as much as you can of what your client wants and is legally entitled to. While in an advocate role you appear to be in charge, but this should never result in you setting the goals for the client.

TWELVE PRINCIPLES OF ADVOCACY [Syracuse University Center on Human Policy]

1. Know your case well and document your facts.
2. Know the opposing case and the possible arguments and strategies. (Roll play this.)
3. Operate from a sound base of support.
4. Know your resources and your allies.
5. Intervene at a high enough level to get the job done.
6. Take a positive approach; reinforce. Assume the agency really wants to help the people involved in its services.
7. Demonstrate to the system how it is interfering with its own goals.
8. If there has to be an overt battle, only do so after completion of steps 1 to 7.
9. If you have to battle, don't pussyfoot. Know how far you have to go and take it to the limit.
10. Strengthen the recipient group. **Self-advocacy is the most powerful form of advocacy.**
11. Be aware of the vulnerability of the people involved in services. Let them know the risks involved. Beware of exploitation.
12. Before you begin, know the risks and weigh them against possible gains.

COMMUNITY ORGANIZATION

[taken in part from *Au Contraire, 1983* - Advocacy Today: Changing Strategies]

It is through the fostering of coalitions of all kinds of advocates that further change and improvement in the mental health system can be achieved and progress sustained.

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