

ADVOCACY TOOL KIT

By Maria Dibble

There is nothing more important to the mission and philosophy of Centers for Independent Living (CILs) than advocacy and systems change. Each one of us, as an employee, consumer, volunteer or board member of a center, can and must promote and actively work for the integration and inclusion of people with all disabilities of all ages into every aspect of our communities. Equality, justice, empowerment, dignity, independence, rights, choice, should not just be buzz words, they should be integral components of the policies and issues we propose and/or support.

Advocacy can take many forms, including: a phone call or letter to a legislator; attending or organizing a rally; testifying at a public forum; joining a coalition; participating in a civil disobedience. Usually, in a well organized, long-term advocacy effort, a combination of many or all of these strategies will be used to achieve success.

Not everyone will be comfortable with every tactic, and no one should be pressured or intimidated into engaging in activities which make them feel uneasy. There is more than enough work to go around, and no one action is more or less important than another.

ADVOCACY & TOOLS AND TACTICS

A. Phone Tree

Having a way to share important information at a moment's notice is one of the most essential components of successful advocacy, and the phone tree is a basic but effective mechanism for sharing information. Dozens of advocates can be reached quickly by making 2 or 3 phone calls to individuals who will then call 2 or 3 others. Just about everyone has a phone, and this approach allows consumers and interested others to participate in an advocacy effort without leaving their homes or spending a lot of money. It is also an excellent strategy for getting new members of the community involved, empowering people and recruiting individuals to your cause who are experienced and interested in a more active role.

Appoint a phone tree manager to take responsibility for organizing and managing the phone tree. Volunteers are needed to be the "branches" and "leaves" of the tree.

The manager will construct the phone tree so he or she can make 4 or 5 phone calls to "branch" volunteers who will then call and share the information with 4 or 5 "leaf" volunteers. Leaf volunteers have no responsibility for making calls within the tree structure, they choose only to receive information and act on it.

Whenever someone has important information that must be spread right away, he/she will contact the phone tree manager who will start the phone tree working.

Volunteers can also help by offering free use of a phone to other volunteers, especially when long-distance calling is necessary.

Similar trees can be developed for faxing information or emailing, with these two options having the advantage of reaching many more individuals with one fax or email. Most fax machines and email programs allow the establishment of "groups" which can be comprised of all those interested in a specific issue. When a fax/email is sent to the group, it will automatically include everyone on the list.

B. Phone Campaigns

Now that your phone tree is established, here is one good way to put it to use.

A very effective strategy for getting the attention of lawmakers and other public officials, is to organize and conduct a phone campaign. Here is how it works:

1. Select a date, perhaps two weeks in the future, on which people from around the state will make calls to a specific lawmaker or public official with a specific message.
2. Activate the phone tree, email tree, etc. and get the word out about the date and message. Make the message very brief.
3. Circulate the information to as many groups as possible, and encourage them to send it out to their contacts as well.
4. Send reminders out to people one or two days before the event.
5. This approach is very effective, tying up the phone lines of your target for the entire day. It should not be a tactic that is used frequently against one individual, but should rather be well considered, after several other strategies have been tried. It can, and probably will, annoy the office workers who must take all the calls, but that can't be helped.
6. Similar approaches can be taken by using the mail, such as a postcard campaign where thousands of people send postcards to a lawmaker saying please support bill 1234, etc. This works best if people write a brief personal message on the postcard before mailing it.
7. You can be creative too. Send valentines on Valentine's Day saying "Add \$x to CIL funding to give the budget some heart," and the like.

Example of a Successful Phone Campaign

Consumers, advocates and disability rights organizations were trying to convince NY's Attorney General not to sign onto "the good brief" which supported our issues related to the Garrett ADA Supreme Court case. We couldn't get a commitment or even a response. We chose a day, and people from all over the state bombarded the District Offices of the Attorney General with phone calls asking him to sign on to the brief we favored. By the end of the day, one of the lead advocates got a call from a key aide saying, "What the hell is going on. Our offices have been practically shut down today from all these calls." Not too long after the event, the Attorney General signed onto the brief. We generated hundreds of calls, showing the AG that we have a well established network and that we are a strong and viable constituency.

established network and that we are a strong and viable constituency warranting his attention.

C. Letters to Legislators

Letters to local, state and/or federal officials are an excellent way to voice concerns about policy issues, including budget proposals, pending legislation or regulations, etc. Be assured that these letters are read and recorded as being pro or con on an issue. Individual letters are far more effective than form letters or petitions. Anyone can write a letter. They don't have to be long or complicated, they just need to be clear and direct.

Below are some suggestions for an effective letter:

1. State your most important points first.
2. If possible, refer to pending bills by number (i.e. Assembly bill 1234, Senate bill 5678). If the issue is not a bill yet, try as much as possible to refer to the issue by name (i.e. "Governor's proposed budget", "Medicaid Buy-In Bill").
3. Make it very clear what you support and/or oppose. Do not beat around the bush.
4. Describe exactly how it would affect your life or the lives of people with disabilities if the proposals you agree with or oppose are implemented.
5. If you are specifically effected by the issue, give as much detail as possible. For example: If home care cuts are being proposed in your state, saying things in your letter like, if these cuts are enacted: "I would Not be able to get out of bed in the morning."; "I would not be able to bathe or use the toilet as much as I need to."; "I would develop bed sores and other possible medical problems."; "I would only be able to have one meal a day."; "I would have to quit my job"; "I would end up in a nursing home."; etc.
6. Tell the lawmaker exactly what you want him/her to do. Example: Please support bill number 1234; do not allow the proposed home care cuts to pass; support a 75 million dollar increase in federal funds for CILs; etc.
7. If possible, offer an alternative to what is being proposed, which might achieve similar results but which would be less harmful to you or consumers.
8. Be clear, concise and accurate.

Following are two sample letters to legislators using home care as an issue.

Sample Letter 1

[date]

The Honorable [name]
Address

Dear [Legislator's Name]

I'm writing on behalf of (agency or organization name) to express my grave concern about the Governor's proposed cuts in home care services in the

recently released budget. If the cuts are enacted, many people with disabilities will be forced into nursing homes, will experience significant health problems and will no longer be able to work or live independently.

I'm a person with a disability and a user of home care services, and I strongly oppose these cuts. Without these essential services, I would not be able to bathe, use the toilet, eat a hot meal, or get out of bed to go to work in the morning. Home care services are not a special privilege or a mere convenience, they are crucial components of my ability to live independently and be a contributing member of the community.

The cuts in home care do not make fiscal sense. Home care, on average, is a third of the cost of nursing home care, and allows people with disabilities to be productive members of society, paying taxes, making purchases, etc.

Please oppose these home care cuts. Instead, assist us in promoting and passing legislation to establish Consumer Directed Personal Assistance (CDPA) in our state. CDPA has proven to be extremely cost-effective, saving taxpayers millions of dollars while giving people with disabilities the ability to hire, train and schedule their own attendants. The savings are achieved because of reduced nursing visits, and lower administrative overhead (allowing for a somewhat lower hourly rate.).

I would appreciate the opportunity to discuss these issues with you in person as soon as possible. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me. Thank you very much for your time and attention.

Sincerely,

Sample Letter 2

Date

Address

Dear (name):

I'm writing to ask that you oppose the Governor's proposed cuts in home care, and to urge you to help restore the money.

I have a physical disability and need help to get in and out of bed, bathe, dress, eat, use the toilet, etc. If these cuts go through, my spouse will have to quit his/her job to assist me with these tasks.

Thank you for your assistance.

Sincerely,

D. Building Coalitions

Never doubt the old sayings, "There is power in numbers," and "The squeaky wheel gets the grease." One of the most effective strategies for advocating on a complex issue (especially those that will be more long-term in nature) is the development of a comprehensive coalition. Such a coalition would be issue-

based, and would only remain in tact for as long as the issue is unresolved.

Below are some suggestions on how to form and maintain a coalition:

1. Contact individuals (consumers, family members, etc.), agencies, organizations, etc. in your community which have a stake in disability rights/issues and community-based services, and/or will be affected by or have an interest in the issue.
2. Keep an open mind! Remember that those who may have been your adversaries previously on a different issue, could very well be an ally this time around.
3. Call an organizing meeting to get the coalition off the ground.
4. Develop a brief mission statement for the coalition (one-two paragraphs), as well as letterhead of some kind listing all of the members. This is important since the mission statement will make it easier to recruit new coalition members and the letterhead will show broad-based support for your issues.
5. Develop a policy/position paper for the coalition which: defines the issue concisely; outlines your concerns with the issue; lists alternative proposals/solutions; and lays out your specific demands in detail. Make sure that the information and sources you use are reliable and credible. Supporting budgetary or statistical data are extremely valuable if you can get accurate information.

Sometimes data is not available in the format you need, but a logical extrapolation to attain desired figures is acceptable, as long as you briefly describe how the figures were derived. For example, you know that \$x millions have been spent on home care over the last year, and that x number of people have received x hours of service. From this you can glean average cost per hour, average hours per person, average cost per person, etc.

6. When writing the paper, keep in mind who your audience is (legislators, state or federal agency representatives, etc.) and use terminology/language to which they can relate. For example, if the target is conservative legislators, then emphasize costs, savings, fiscal responsibility, reducing dependence on government dollars, etc. Of course you should also include the quality-of-life, equal rights and other issues near and dear to our hearts, but you might not want to make them your major focus. After all, remember, the reasons legislators or policy-makers support an issue isn't important, only the fact that they will fight for our cause and help us to achieve our goals really matters. If congressman ABC votes for downsizing nursing homes because it saves money, rather than because it frees thousands of people with disabilities from imprisonment in an institution, does it really make a difference? The bill passes, downsizing will happen and both he and people with disabilities benefit from the results.
7. Once the paper is completed, circulate it widely to anyone with even a remote interest in the issue. Set up meetings with key legislators, etc. and discuss the paper in detail. Give them at least two weeks to review the paper before scheduling the meeting.
8. Plan a strategy for getting your ideas adopted into law. Review all options from phone calling campaigns to civil disobedience and develop a schedule of potential events/activities.

of potential events/activities.

9. In developing your strategy, define the points and principles upon which you absolutely cannot compromise (your bottom line). Also discuss the points that you could give up and the areas on which you can negotiate, so that you can be prepared later on down the road. However, always begin your advocacy efforts asking for the ideal, the compromising should not happen until you are truly sure the opposition will not bend on their position.

EXAMPLE OF A SUCCESSFUL COALITION

About ten years ago, New York's Governor proposed very significant cuts to home care, which would have been extremely detrimental to people with disabilities. The Association representing the majority of CILs in the state, took the following steps to fight the cuts and to implement some much needed reforms:

1. We contacted consumers, family members/friends, etc.; disability rights organizations; CILs; organizations representing disabled veterans; agencies serving children and senior citizens; unions representing home care workers; home care providers; etc. and invited them to a meeting.
2. We laid out the Governor's proposal, our concerns and our goals for the coalition.
3. We obtained a commitment from attending members to either support or actively participate in the coalition (the goal being to get as many names on our letterhead as possible to show a very broad base of support for our agenda).
4. We chose the name "Long Term Care Action Coalition" (LTCAC), and developed a mission statement and statement of principles to be used in publicizing our group and recruiting new members. (Both statements can be found at the end of this section on Coalition Building.) We also decided to call the "continuum of home care services" "Personal Assistance Services" (PAS) to better reflect our position on the issues.
5. Over the course of several months, we researched different PAS models across the country, gathered data on the cost of various programs in NY, selected and/or modified the models which best fit our philosophy, and wrote/amended/finalized our position paper.
6. We then circulated our paper to all pertinent legislators and government officials, including: Governor's key staff; Chairs and members of the Senate and Assembly Committees on health, Social Services; Aging; Finance; etc.; Department of Health; Department of Social Services; Division of the Budget; etc.
7. We arranged meetings with key legislators and began a two-year effort to fight cuts while educating them about our issues and proposals and implementing reforms.
8. The Governor's office requested a meeting with us to follow-up on our paper and to get our input on other PAS related policies.
9. Our paper was very well received by everyone. We heard comments regularly to the effect that "I may not agree with everything in this paper, but it shows an extensive effort to outline the issues and to present reasonable

alternatives to the current system.” Statements like this demonstrated to us that we had established strong credibility with legislators, and that they would not lightly ignore our concerns.

10. We managed to stave off cuts in the first year, and by the end of the second year were successful in passing legislation to establish a permanent Consumer Directed Personal Assistance Program in the state. Additionally, Since then, no governor has proposed any home care cuts which would have a detrimental effect on consumers.
11. There were times when our efforts seemed fruitless, like we’d never get the legislation introduced or adopted, but it was then that we would implement phone and letter writing campaigns, conduct rallies, hold press conferences, etc.
12. One of the most memorable events, and a turning point in our advocacy efforts, was a day when we held a press conference on our concerns. Almost no media showed up, and those that did told us that the Governor was holding a press conference which conflicted with ours. About 30 of us decided to take our issues to the Governor. We waited outside the room until his press conference was over and then told one of his staff that we wanted to speak with the Governor. Meanwhile, we were surrounded by the media, who were eager to hear our concerns.

To our surprise, the Governor came out to talk with us. One of our members, a significantly disabled person who used a service dog and who was an outstanding advocate, went up to the Governor and handed him a ring of keys, saying, “You might as well take these, because if your cuts go through, I won’t need them. They are the keys to my apartment, office, and van, but without home care I won’t need those things because I’ll be in a nursing home. It was a very powerful moment, capturing the imagination of the media, and making the Governor speechless (a state he seldom experienced). The next day, the Governor rescinded his proposal to cut Home Care and later in the session CDPA was past and signed into law by the Governor.

MISSION STATEMENT

The Long Term Care Action Coalition (LTCAC) is comprised of advocates from around the state including representatives of senior citizens, children, independent living centers, people with AIDS, people with Alzheimer’s, and more. We provide a means by which the people most affected by long-term care--the people who use it--can bring about state-of-the-art Personal Assistance Services (PAS) that meet the needs of New Yorkers of all ages with all disabilities and chronic diseases (including cognitive impairments and limitations). To that end we research and recommend ideas for regulatory reform, innovative service models, and public education strategies.

Statement of Principles

The Long Term Care Action Coalition asserts that the following principles are essential to a comprehensive consumer-responsive and -controlled personal assistance services program.

1. PAS is necessary for society as a whole, because it enables senior citizens, children, and people with disabilities and chronic diseases (including cognitive impairments and limitations) to lead productive lives in the community and avoid dependence on welfare and institutional programs.

community, and avoid dependence on welfare and institutional programs.
PAS is a right, not a privilege.

2. As the Americans with Disabilities Act asserts, no individual should be forced into or kept in an institution due to lack of resources, high costs, substandard or nonexistent services or arbitrary eligibility limits.
3. All PAS users should have the right to appeal service decisions.
4. PAS will serve people of all ages, from infancy on, when the person's functional and/or cognitive limitation(s) necessitate the services.
5. PAS services will be provided in any setting deemed appropriate by consumers to facilitate participation in all aspects of community life.
6. PAS users, or their chosen representatives where applicable, will be advised of and educated about the entire continuum of PAS services available so that they can make informed choices and be active partners in the provision of services.
7. PAS users, or their chosen representatives where applicable, will be able to select from a variety of PAS models which together offer a choice of various degrees of user control.
8. All information about PAS services, options and procedures, as well as consumers' rights and responsibilities, will be available in accessible formats and appropriate languages.

E. Meeting with Public Officials

People with disabilities and their families don't have the money that big lobbies (like nursing homes, the state employees' union, hospitals, etc.) do. But we do have our stories and our "people power". One of the best ways to use this is to meet with our public officials. Here are some tips:

1. Identify officials with the power to do what you want (end institutionalization, preserve community services, etc.). They may be federal senators or representatives, state senators or assembly persons, the Governor, or people who run the state budget office or state agencies. Check with your state legislature to see if they have a directory of representatives. The directory will probably include telephone, fax, email and address information, along with who chairs or sits on which committees. This information is usually also available online.
2. Set up a meeting with the official or an aide. Often, the aides do the work anyway and are therefore more knowledgeable, so don't be discouraged if you can't see the legislator. Aides are usually very good about conveying information to the representative.
3. Plan your presentation and bring supporting documentation/data (brochures, policy/position statements, etc.). Do not assume they know who you are, who you represent or what the impact of the issue is on you or the people you represent. Most legislators will give you only about fifteen minutes, so be concise but informative.
4. Know the facts. Nothing makes a worse impression on officials than

inaccurate information. If the official asks you a question and you don't know the answer, it is best to be honest and say as much, (it simply isn't possible to anticipate their questions or know every related fact and figure). However, make note of the question and tell them you'll get back to them with an answer. Follow-through is critical to develop and/or maintain credibility, so be sure that you'll be able to keep any promises you make.

5. If you are part of a large group or coalition, be sure all of you are delivering the same message. Then split up the list of officials who need to hear from you. It is best to have people visit the officials who represent the area where they live. But if no one in your group lives in a district represented by a key official you need to see--say the chair of the legislative committee that controls education funding--then you should send someone else knowledgeable about the issue.

It is best to have at least two people attend the meeting, more if possible. Inform the appointment secretary of the number of participants so that they will have adequate space. It would be best to have people affected by the issue under discussion actively participate in the meeting, to tell their personal stories and how the issue will affect their lives. Also, send your most experienced and knowledgeable advocates to the meetings with key legislative chairpersons or others in leadership positions, since these are the people who will probably have the most impact on policies/legislation.

6. Remember, these people work for you. You vote them in (or out of office) and pay their salaries. Most of them know that, and will listen to you. They need to see, in person, the people affected by their decisions, and to know what effects their decisions have on people's lives.

F. Public Forums

Public forums are an effective way to focus attention on an issue, especially if media are present. Here are some tips:

1. The location must be physically accessible to people with disabilities.
2. Sign language interpreters must be provided for Deaf attendees. Even if no Deaf people sign up to testify, interpreters must be present if the event is open to the public.
3. All materials distributed at the forum should be available in a variety of alternative formats (including cassette tape, large print, computer diskette and Braille).
4. Hold the forum in the evening, or start late in the afternoon and run into the evening, so parents and working people can attend.
5. Invite pertinent officials to participate in the forum, by sitting on a panel to observe and listen to people's concerns. Panelist can be given three to five minutes to describe their positions on the issue under discussion, but do not allow them to make lengthy speeches or pander to the media.
6. Sponsorship by a coalition, rather than a single group, is most effective. Representatives of the member groups should hold several planning sessions before the forum.

7. Select a moderator who will keep things moving. This should be a person

7. Select a moderator who will keep things moving. This should be a person with a disability experienced in public speaking if possible.
8. Because the media usually come at the beginning of the forum, you should select spokespersons who agree to be interviewed, and begin with effective speakers who can address different aspects of the topic.
9. Make every effort to pack the room. A small room that is full is better than a large one that isn't; even better is a large room full of people who want to be heard. A coalition can help here. If several groups and agencies are involved, they will get people there. Also very important: Plan the forum with lots of advance notice--at least a month ahead. People have busy schedules, and for many people with disabilities, arranging transportation and attendants to get to a meeting is difficult and takes time.
10. Have sign-up sheets for speakers and for mailing lists for future activities. This is also a good time to get petition signatures (although remember, petitions aren't nearly as effective as individual, personalized letters).
11. Limit testimony to three to five minutes, and make sure the time limit is enforced.
12. Ask those who testify to also provide their comments in writing, on tape or in another format that is easy for them. Not all will be able to do this, but you will get at least a few.
13. Summarize each person's speech, and assemble written materials people submit, petitions, and any press clippings that result. You might also videotape the event (edit it down to a half-hour or so) and send the info to all pertinent local, state or federal officials.

G. RALLIES AND PUBLIC DEMONSTRATIONS

Another very effective tool in your advocacy arsenal is rallies/demonstrations. These are a way to get the attention of public officials and the media. Below are some suggested tips for a successful event:

1. Logistics: Make sure that you have materials in accessible formats; sign language interpreters for the event; a good Public address system; parking for event participants; volunteers to distribute literature to passersby.
2. Arrange the event with two-three weeks notice if at all possible, and distribute an announcement to as many people and agencies as you can. Make sure to include: date, time, location, parking info, and theme of event.
3. Hold the event in as public a location as possible, where you will be seen by officials as well as members of the public.
4. Obtain a permit to hold the rally from the appropriate entities (this could be the local police, city hall, etc.) depending on where the event is to be held.
5. Come up with a theme for the rally and be creative! For example, in fighting home care cuts in NY, advocates set up a mock hospital emergency room, with IV drip, gurney, blood pressure cuff, etc. We had people with disabilities transfer onto the gurney to be examined, because the lack of home care was causing many health problems for consumers. Rally participants carried signs that read "I need home care" and "I need home care" and "I need home care".

signs indicating the various problems people with disabilities would experience if the cuts went through (examples: “bed sores”, “poor nutrition”, “bladder infections”, etc.). It was held in our legislative office building, (by coincidence very near the first aide station).

During the rally a nurse came over and started helping with the action by taking people’s blood pressure. This was not planned, but made a great visual for the cameras! Additionally, we had exceeded the time for our permit and a police officer came to chase us away. When he heard what the rally was about, he said, “My mother uses home care. This isn’t good.” He then turned around and walked away. We also held a rally on the Capitol steps protesting cuts in state CIL funding. We used the theme of “keys” and had posters cut in the shapes of keys in bright florescent colors. The slogans on the signs were: “IL, Key to Independence”; “IL, Key to Jobs”; “IL, Key to Deinstitutionalization”; etc. We hung the keys on a string across the top of the steps, and they could be seen from a very long way off. The media loved it.

6. Send out press releases two or three days before the event, and then call the media to remind them on the day of the demonstration. Contact radio, television, cable access stations, newspapers, etc.
7. Have an MC for the event that can keep people shouting slogans and the crowd loud and energetic. It should also be a person who can adlib at a moment’s notice, since there is almost always a speaker who either doesn’t show, or who is late, etc.
8. If the event is sponsored by a coalition, make sure that different members have an opportunity to speak. You may also want key legislators to speak on the issue. As a rule, it is best to invite representatives from both parties to speak, even if one side is not a supporter. They will most likely not accept your invitation, or they will come and be forced to confront a crowd of constituents who oppose their positions, either way doing no harm to your cause.
9. Limit speeches to two or three minutes or you’ll lose the press, and try to keep the entire event to 30-45 minutes.
10. Schedule your most prominent or important speakers first, since the media is more likely to be there at the beginning rather than the end of the event.
11. Make sure that there are lots of posters and visual displays, (the media loves this).
12. Bring press packets containing the press release, supporting documentation, brochures, etc. related to your issue and position.

H. CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE ACTIONS

Civil disobedience is different than a rally, since it is usually an illegal assembly intended to get the attention of the media and officials by attracting the police, disturbing the operation of an office or area, and creating enough of a disruption to possibly get arrested. It is not a tactic for everyone, but for those who are willing to participate, it can be a very empowering and energizing experience.

Such activities as sit-ins (occupying an office and refusing to leave until you get some demand(s) met); creating a human chain across a road or key passageway in a building; etc. are examples of civil disobedience actions. Below are a few tips:

1. Decide who the target of your action will be (specific legislator, governor, etc.) depending on the issue. If no individual is the target, then decide on the best way to create enough of a public display to attract the police and the media. Remember, however, that civil disobedience should be peaceful, and that no violence should be encouraged or tolerated.
2. Decide on the type of action, where it should take place and how many people you need. A civil disobedience does not require a large crowd, in fact, many are successful with fewer than a dozen participants.
3. Make sure that participants know the risks of possible arrests, fines, or even spending a night in jail. While police tend to hesitate to arrest people with disabilities using wheelchairs, guide/service dogs, respirators, etc. you should not count on this.
4. Have an attorney and bail money arranged for before the event, lessening the chance of jail time.
5. Advise participants to bring along food and their medications (especially if they need to eat at certain times, etc.). It is recommended that medication be carried in its original bottle or package, or the police may seize the medicine as an illegal drug. Don't carry things like aspirin or other over the counter medication in unlabeled containers, since these too can be used as an excuse to charge the person with possession of an illegal drug. Of course, in the end, the charge would not stick, but it is just one method that can be used to hassle and frustrate participants.
6. In addition to the action participants, have a team of supporters who do not intend to be arrested in order to run errands, contact lawyers, alert media, etc. This logistical support is crucial!
7. The simpler the event/action, the easier it will be to pull-off. Examples: Gay rights activists virtually shut down the Division of Budget in NY, by getting two dozen people to stand in the hall blowing very loud whistles. Not only did they not get arrested, but they got all of their demands for that day met. Another idea could be to have people fill all of the elevators and ride up and down for the day, not allowing anyone else to use them. (This would be very effective in a Legislative building with many floors, on a day when meetings, public hearings and the like are taking place.) Most recently, ADAPT activists blocked the entrance and chained themselves to the door of the Governor's office, until the press secretary agreed to meet with them at a date within the next two weeks. They too did not get arrested, and the Governor's aide said he would arrange for the appointment if they would move out of the doorway. When activists agreed and began to withdraw, one aide tried to slam the door in their faces. One participant jammed his footplates in the door and activists expressed their anger at the aide's failure to keep his word. Finally, they began to negotiate in earnest. Eventually, their demands were met and the meeting did take place.

I. INFILTRATION

One of the most overlooked advocacy strategies is "infiltration" - getting people

One of the most overlooked advocacy strategies is infiltration, getting people with disabilities appointed to committees, boards, commissions, and the like. This doesn't necessarily need to be a staff person from a center. In fact, consumers can and do make excellent representatives, bringing the concerns of "the people" rather than your agency to the table. By the very presence of a disabled person at the meetings, people will become more aware of the need to be accessible, to offer materials in alternate formats, etc. Additionally, the disability perspective will be considered in all policy decisions, furthering our mission in a myriad of different venues.

We also need to be a highly visible presence at public hearings, legislative sessions (at all levels), and other meetings open to the public.

J. THE POWER OF THE WRITTEN WORD

People tend to seriously underestimate the power of the written word in their advocacy efforts, (not press coverage) but rather editorials and articles in your newsletters or in other publications. The difference is that with these types of documents, you can control what is said and how.

No one likes bad publicity of any kind, and government agencies and officials are especially susceptible to this approach.

Years ago, my center was getting many complaints from consumers about our local VR Office, including: violations of confidentiality; lack of respect for consumer's choices; six to nine months delays in approvals for services; etc. I approached the VR office manager to discuss these and other issues, and he refused to cooperate or respond to us. I followed this with a long, rather scathing editorial in our agency newsletter describing the problems we and our consumers were experiencing.

Shortly after the newsletter's publication, I received a call from a VR official from the central office in Albany. (In my editorial I actually said kind things about the central office staff because a new commissioner had just been appointed) and she proceeded to scream at me (literally at the top of her lungs) about my editorial. I was stunned, not because of her attitude, so much as her lack of foresight in letting me know how effective our editorial had been. She demanded a meeting with me and my board president (not knowing that my president was one of the people who had complained about her confidentiality being violated) and I readily agreed. In the end, the local office staff mutinied, (contacting central office and reporting even more problems than I'd outlined in my editorial). Significant changes occurred over the next year, services dramatically improved, a more cooperative attitude was evident with the local office management (we'd never had problems with the counselors and those consumers referred by my center were assured of more quality service in a more timely manner. Additionally, once we succeeded we printed a very positive editorial congratulating them for the changes. The editorial is reprinted on the following pages for your information.

Note: The change to pitch (7) and font (1) must be converted manually.EDITORIAL PRIVATE

Note: The change to pitch (9) and font (1) must be converted manually.Is The Apple Rotten?

Note: The change to pitch (6) and font (1) must be converted manually.Fall

Note: The change to pitch (10) and font (1) must be converted manually.
SOUTHERN TIER INDEPENDENCE CENTER
Binghamton, NY
(607) 7242111 Voice or TTY

Did you ever have an apple that was all red and shiny, but then you cut into it and found it rotten? With some disappointment, you can toss the apple in the garbage and forget about it. Such an analogy can be drawn about the New York State Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR), but the solution is, unfortunately, not quite as simple.

As a result of numerous complaints over several years, the recently appointed Commissioner of Education, Thomas Sobol, ordered a statewide survey of OVR employees, disability activists, consumers and service providers. The results of the survey were revealed in May. They indicated that almost half of OVR's own employees felt the agency was ineffective, and that over two thirds of other service providers and advocates agreed with that assessment. Significantly, though there were no questions about management on the survey, 52% of surveys returned included comments criticizing OVR management.

We applaud Commissioner Sobol's integrity and forthrightness in initiating this survey, as well as his decisive response to its results.

On June 16, Sobol announced major OVR changes. He demoted the Deputy Commissioner in charge of OVR, Richard Switzer, and Switzer's assistant Betty Hedgeman, and sent them elsewhere in the Education Department. Lawrence Gloeckler was appointed Deputy Commissioner. All services will be reviewed, and the Office will be reorganized, according to Sobol. "We will put our house in order," he said.

In June, in my capacity as Chairperson of the Association of Independent Living Centers in New York (AILCNY), I had the pleasure of meeting with Mr. Gloeckler and other OVR management staff. I was pleased at their apparent willingness to hold open discussions, hear our concerns and work toward some substantive changes and improvements in the system. Mr. Gloeckler has a tremendous task ahead of him, and we wish him the best of luck.

We are sad to say, however, that when problems exist at an organization's top, the bad attitudes and habits often filter down to the bottom of the barrel. This is, unfortunately, the situation which has existed in our area for a long time. The problems with our local OVR office are very serious. Most of them directly affect services to consumers. OVR is notorious for taking anywhere from four months to a year to provide services to consumers. They regularly send people seeking jobs to sheltered workshops rather than competitive employment. Most unbelievably, they often deny services to people who are obviously eligible (thus involving consumers in long appeals procedures, further delaying their services).

In the last few years, STIC has been very fortunate in getting several budget increases, including the very large one we got for the fiscal year just ended. As is our policy, most of those funds went to hire new staff. Each time we had an opening (nine last year alone), we sent job announcements to OVR. We hoped to get some qualified people with disabilities referred for the positions. As unbelievable as it may seem, we did not receive one referral from OVR for any of these jobs. I must note that none of the jobs required extensive education or

of these jobs. I must note that none of the jobs required extensive education or work experience, and that, in an effort to ensure a response, we sent announcements to the manager and at least three other counselors. I find it very difficult to Note: The change to pitch (9) and font (1) must be converted manually. accept that they didn't have anyone to recommend. OVR, aren't you an agency "specializing in employment programs for people with disabilities"? If so, what were the placement counselors doing when we sent over our job descriptions?

Moreover, OVR, as the major state agency providing employment services to people with disabilities, often refers people to STIC for employment assistance. Most recently, they sent a consumer to one of our staff for help in starting a business, when OVR regulations specifically indicate OVR should deliver such services.

The local office seems to be addicted to paperwork and "assessments," as most of their time is spent in these activities. One "Note: The change to pitch (20) and font (1) must be converted manually. Note: The change to pitch (9) and font (1) must be converted manually. assessment" tool they use is called the World of Work Inventory (WOWI). This aptitude test is used to determine career interests and abilities. The form states, "Having this information will help you make good decisions about which job or career to select, what academic choices to make, or how to enhance the career you have already chosen. A consumer came into our center recently with a copy of her assessment results. The test was full of contradictions and misleading statements; it sounded more like a "Saturday Night Live" skit than an assessment of someone's potential. For example, one section said this person wouldn't be interested in mining and processing and should therefore avoid such jobs. Then, in another section, the test recommends mining as one of the careers the person should investigate. The most appalling aspect, after the absurdity of the test itself, is that it is evidently sent to Arizona for processing and analysis. I'd like to know how much tax money is spent on this travesty. In an era when funding is tight (STIC has had to fight for money in each of the last three years), how can OVR waste money this way?

This Spring OVR, which jointly administers our Title VII, Part A program with us (the program that helps many of you to obtain much needed home modifications and adaptive equipment), delayed delivery of Title VII Part A services for seven weeks. Why? They wanted more documentation more forms, more assessments, without much concern for what such requirements would do to the program. In fact, their demands would have cost us more money and used up valuable staff time for no gain or benefit. To make it Note: The change to pitch (9) and font (1) must be converted manually. worse, instead of discussing this with us, they went over our heads to Albany. In addition to being unprofessional, this act demonstrates a complete unwillingness to keep communication channels open between our agencies.

I'd like to emphasize here that it is our view that the problems with our local office lie primarily with management, and with the regulatory process. Most of our experiences with individual counselors are positive. They try their best, under difficult circumstances and in an uncomfortable environment, to provide good services to their clients. As in many state agencies, I imagine staff burnout and disillusionment with the system are common. Nevertheless, most counselors give their jobs their best efforts. They should in fact be congratulated for surviving what sometimes appears to be a war zone.

Yes, I would say OVR has a long way to go before it can consider its house in

order and we need to make sure that when changes are made they address all the issues, not just those on the surface. We must ensure that the whole apple is good, not just the shiny, appealing skin. This almost means starting from scratch. The core is what's causing the rest of the apple to rot. Can we extract it before it's too late, so OVR can grow to be a program benefiting people with disabilities instead of obstructing them? I sincerely hope so. As always, I am willing to do anything I can to make the system work.

Again, Mr. Gloeckler, I wish you luck. Your responsiveness, thoroughness, and demonstrated preference for action shows you are equal to the task.

K. Media

One of the best tools in grassroots organizing is media outreach. Media hints:

1. Media is a business; they need to fill their space and sell advertising. They need us as much as we need them.
2. You can't control a story's final version, but you can help to get the story you want by distributing press releases with several quotes stating your concerns, or expressing opposition/support for the issue, etc.
3. Radio stations are often shorthanded, with only one person both to cover and read the news. Therefore, the press release may be their only way to give your issue an airing.
4. You can overuse media. Save your media opportunities for only the most important campaigns/issues.
5. Each form of media is different. Use print media, TV, and radio appropriately. Newspapers and television like visual prompts, things that will make a good photo opportunity.
6. Build relationships with reporters, editors, and TV and radio talk show hosts. If a reporter does an especially good job on a story, uses the correct terminology, presents the issue fairly, portrays people with disabilities in a positive light, etc. send them a thank you note and compliment the story/article. This approach goes a very long way in cultivating friends in the media.
7. Keep current data on names, addresses, phone/fax numbers, and program schedules for all local media. This information should be available at a moment's notice.
8. Know the difference between a news story and a feature story. Feature stories are great for educating the community on an issue (such as the effectiveness of self-directed personal assistance services or educational inclusion) in a non-crisis situation. You should generate such stories as often as possible. A news story is "hard news" about breaking events, such as attempts by the Governor or legislators to cut programs, or events you create such as rallies, demonstrations, and public forums.

L. Generating Feature Stories

1. Newspaper: Sunday editions tend to have more space and interest in

1. Newspaper: Sunday editions tend to have more space and interest in feature stories than weekday editions. Preferably, use a reporter who has worked well with you before. Otherwise, contact the editor for the local section of your paper, or a feature columnist to describe your idea and ask for an article.
2. Radio: Most radio stations have public affairs programs addressing issues of local or statewide interest in the area. They are often struggling to find new topics for their shows and will be eager to interview you for their programs. While most of these programs air in off hours, they reach a surprising number of people and should not be overlooked as part of your overall advocacy strategy.
3. TV: Many TV stations also have public interest interview shows. They air at off hours, but they may give you 15 minutes or even half an hour to explain your issues. Local TV news may also have regular features where they highlight a local organization, a specific issue, etc. This would be most common in smaller towns.
4. To generate a feature story, develop the subject. Decide what your message is. Select a spokesperson and a situation to build your story on. If the story is about inclusion, find a student who is integrated in regular classes and is willing to be filmed there. Feature stories are about people. Find people who are willing to be public.

M. Generating a News Story

The best way to get media attention is a press release. A press release is a 1-page document giving the Who, What, Why, Where and When of the event, and a contact name and phone number. There are two kinds of press releases. Each has advantages and disadvantages:

If you want to speak directly to a reporter, put only a hint of information in the press release, just enough to tease his/her interest. The reporter will have to call you for details. But, if it's a busy news day, the reporter may not have time to call you, and without more information, you won't get coverage. This approach is best to use when holding a press conference. However, press conferences take a lot of time for reporters and TV camera people. If your conference happens to compete for attention with one set up by an elected official or other newsmaker, or with a breaking news event, you will probably be on the losing end. Therefore, limit the number of press conferences you hold, and try to have a topic which is controversial, or an event which features a prominent spokesperson.

To get consistent media attention, put details and some short, provocative quotes in the release. This way, reporters can write a story even if they don't have time to contact you (though they may call with questions anyway, and TV or radio, if they cover the story, will need to get you on tape). Also, smaller weekly papers that don't have a lot of reporters will be more likely to run the story (sometimes they print your release verbatim) and you'll get wider coverage using your exact words.

For any major event, it is suggested that you send out a press advisory at least one week in advance via fax, email and regular mail. It should be brief, just giving enough info to get them interested and the event on their calendars. Two or three days later, the advisories should be hand-delivered to the

various media outlets. This only works in situations (such as events at your state capitol) where the media have a pressroom for their use. All the major papers and radio/tv stations are usually represented.

Press releases should be faxed, e-mailed and hand delivered the night before or morning of the event, depending on the timing of the activities. It should include explanations of the issue and several quotes. If a reporter attends the press conference and/or the rally/action, then they can use the release to build upon their story. If the reporter is not present, they can at least use the quotes to provide basic coverage of the event.

When possible, put these materials out to the statewide network so that they can replicate the process in their local media markets.

If there are editors or reporters you know and trust, send the release to them by name. However, they may not always be working on the day you need coverage, so also send releases to "The News Editor" and even to the general address of the media outlet. Paper gets lost at media offices. The more copies you send, the more likely it is that the right person will see one.

Remember! There is no such thing as "off the record." Say only what you'll feel comfortable seeing and hearing in the news. Try to make quotes short, meaningful, and striking.

Finally, never promise what you can't deliver, and be sure what you say is accurate. Reporters hate responding to a "juicy" press release to find nothing much going on, or being made to look bad by publishing information that turns out to be wrong.

If you follow these rules, you'll gain a reputation for being knowledgeable, authoritative, and easy to work with, and the media will come to you for quotes or background on every disability story they cover.

Sample MEDIA PRESS KIT

PRESS ADVISORY

October 5, 2000

For more information contact: (name, phone, address)

MEDICAID BUY-IN PRESS CONFERENCE AND RALLY

The Coalition for a Medicaid Buy-In in New York State is holding a Press Conference on Thursday, October 12, 2000, at 12:30 PM, in the LCA Room of the Legislative Office Building in Albany, New York.

Coalition members will give an update about the current status of a Medicaid Buy-In Program for New Yorkers with disabilities. This will include a summary of

States that have adopted a Medicaid Buy-In Program to date, as well as review of initial enrollment data from these States, which challenge the validity of cost projections developed by the New York State Department Of Budget. Coalition members will also speak about an effort to seek support for a Medicaid Buy-In Program from the business community, which will continue through the end of this year. Finally, an update will be given about the progress made to register and turnout an additional 124,000 New Yorkers with disabilities at the polls on Election Day. This effort is part of the non-partisan VOTE! 2000 Campaign sponsored by the National Organization on Disability.

A Medicaid Buy In Rally will take place immediately after the Press Conference at 1:30 PM before the front steps of the New York State Capitol.

Governor Pataki, members of the New York State Legislature and U.S. Senate candidates Rick Lazio and Hillary Clinton have been invited to attend and demonstrate their support. Members of the statewide disability community are looking for bipartisan leadership to step forward and enact a Medicaid Buy-In Program in a special session before Election Day. In the event of inclement weather, the rally will be held in the “well” of the Legislative Office Building.

Governor Pataki and the New State Legislature did not enact a Medicaid Buy-In program for New Yorkers with disabilities before the end of the last legislative session. Subsequently, this issue emerged as one of the top items of “unfinished business” to be addressed by the State. A Medicaid Buy-In program will allow a person with a disability to maintain their Medicaid health care coverage while they work. As proposed, participants earning below \$26,000 per year will make no premium payment to encourage entry into the job market. Individuals earning above this amount will make premium payments based on their annual income. Overall, it will help to eliminate health care coverage as a major barrier for the employment of individuals with disabilities who have needs beyond most employer-sponsored health care plans. In addition, many disabled individuals are excluded from entry into such plans due to “preexisting conditions.”

The “Coalition for a Medicaid Buy-In in New York State” includes representatives from a broad range of statewide networks, advocacy and consumer organizations serving thousands of New Yorkers with disabilities. Coalition members include: New York Association of Psychiatric Rehabilitation Services, Housing Works, Corporation for Supported Housing, New York State Rehabilitation Association, Association for Community Living, Coalition of Voluntary Mental Health Agencies, New York Works Exchange, Mental Health Association in New York State, Mental Health Empowerment Project, New York State Council for Behavioral Health Care, National Alliance for the Mentally Ill-New York State, New York State Traumatic Brain Injury Association, Eastern Paralyzed Veterans Association, United Cerebral Palsy Association of New York State, Gay Men’s Health Crisis, New York State Association of Agencies, Self Advocacy Association of New York State, Association of Independent Living Centers in New York State, Coalition On Independent Living, and the New York State Independent Living Council.

PRESS RELEASE

October 12, 2000

For more information contact: (name, address, phone)

ADVOCATES RALLY FOR MEDICAID BUY-IN BEFORE ELECTION DAY 2000

URGE GOVERNOR PATAKI TO FULFILL PUBLIC PROMISE TO ENACT LANDMARK PROGRAM

“We return to Albany again to persuade the Senate and Governor to enact a Medicaid Buy-In program for New Yorkers with disabilities before Election Day 2000,” remarked (name, affiliation) “We are urging Governor Pataki to follow up on the public promise made yesterday to move and approve this vital bill, which will provide health care benefits to disabled individuals while they work.”

The Assembly passed the Work and Wellness Act by a vote of 143 to 0 in June 2000. Several key Republican Senators cosponsored their version of the bill, but failed to take action before the end of the legislative session because of the Governor’s initial concern over out-year cost projections. However, the initial enrollment data from five states that recently adopted a Medicaid Buy-In program challenge the excessive cost estimates provided by the Department Of Budget. “The enrollment information proves what we knew, the vast majority of individuals looking to participate in a buy-in program are already Medicaid eligible,” noted (name, affiliation). “They do not represent any additional cost to New York’s taxpayers. Some individuals will actually reduce the cost by making premium payments for their Medicaid.”

Members of the “Coalition for a Medicaid Buy-In in New York” also announced the start of a grassroots effort to seek business support for the program, which will continue through the end of this year. (Name affiliation) commented, “In the Binghamton area, we have obtained support from four businesses so far, including Time-Warner.” Advocates will forward copies of business support petitions to the Governor’s Office.

Coalition members announced progress in their attempt to register and turnout an additional 124,000 New Yorkers with disabilities at the polls on Election Day. This effort is part of the non-partisan VOTE! 2000 Campaign sponsored by the National Organization on Disability. “We know that our collective networks will reach out to over 148,000 persons with disabilities by November 7th,” said (name, affiliation). . “This includes individuals from the mental health, developmental disability, Traumatic Brain Injury, HIV/AIDS, and physical disability communities.”

New Yorkers with disabilities will rally in support of a Medicaid Buy-In program before the front steps of the Capitol at 1:30 PM following the press conference. The coalition members have invited the Governor, members of the Legislature, and U.S. Senate candidates Rick Lazio and Hillary Clinton. In the event of inclement weather, the Rally will be held in the “well” of the LOB.

The “Coalition for a Medicaid Buy-In in New York State” includes representatives from a broad range of statewide networks, advocacy, and consumer organizations serving thousands of New Yorkers with disabilities. Coalition members include: New York Association of Psychiatric Rehabilitation Services, Housing Works, Corporation for Supported Housing, New York State Rehabilitation Association, Association for Community Living, Coalition of Voluntary Mental Health Agencies, New York Works Exchange, Mental Health Association in New York State, Mental Health Empowerment Project, New York State Council for Behavioral Health Care, National Alliance for the Mentally Ill – New York State, New York State Traumatic Brain Injury Association, Eastern Paralyzed Veterans Association, United Cerebral Palsy Association of New York State, Gay Men’s Health Crisis, New York State Association of Agencies, Self Advocacy Association of New York State, Association of Independent Living Centers in New

MEDICAID BUY-IN PRESS CONFERENCE

October 12, 2000
contact:

For more information

Time: Place:

Agenda

1. Welcome/Review of Agenda.
(Name, affiliation)
2. Medicaid Buy-In Update.
(Name, affiliation)
3. Update on Other States.
(Name, affiliation)
4. Business Community Support.
(Name, affiliation)
5. VOTE! 2000 Campaign Update.
(Name, affiliation)
6. Questions and Answers.

The "Coalition for a Medicaid Buy-In in New York State" includes representatives from a broad range of statewide networks, advocacy, and consumer organizations serving thousands of New Yorkers with disabilities. Coalition members include: New York Association of Psychiatric Rehabilitation Services, Housing Works, Corporation for Supported Housing, New York State Rehabilitation Association, Association for Community Living, Coalition of Voluntary Mental Health Agencies, New York Works Exchange, Mental Health Association in New York State, Mental Health Empowerment Project, New York State Council for Behavioral Health Care, National Alliance for the Mentally Ill – New York State, New York State Traumatic Brain Injury Association, Eastern Paralyzed Veterans Association, United Cerebral Palsy Association of New York State, Gay Men's Health Crisis, New York State Association of Agencies, Self Advocacy Association of New York State, Association of Independent Living Centers in New York, Coalition On Independent Living, and the New York State Independent Living Council.

N. Writing to Newspapers

Most newspapers print short letters to the editor on current issues. Some also occasionally give space for longer, editorial-type opinion articles. Usually, letters to the editor are for general readers and others who are not part of any agency or organization. Newspapers tend to print longer editorials only from people involved in an organized, identifiable group. Here are a few other things to keep in mind:

to keep in mind:

1. Call first to find out the paper's policy and requirements for letters to the editor and/or editorials, and follow them exactly.
2. Keep your letter as brief and to the point as you can. Letters to the editor should address, at most, two related points.
3. Don't assume that the readers already know about the issue you are discussing. State clearly what the issue is, where it stands now, and how it affects your life and/or the lives of people with disabilities.
4. Urge readers to take action--even if it is only to change their minds about the issue.
5. When writing from your organization, make sure to give the phone number and/or information on where readers can learn more about the letter's topic.

O. RAMIFICATIONS OF ADVOCACY

The more successful your advocacy efforts, the higher the possibility that an agency, official, etc. will attempt retribution. This can take many forms: threatening your funding; complaining about your center to legislators or other high officials; program and/or fiscal audits; etc. In the situation related to the editorial in our agency newsletter about VR services, I received a letter less than a year later saying that we were going to be audited by the State Education Department (SED). VR is under SED and the centers are under VR. Additionally, a friend of mine in SED had alerted me that the SED reviewers were instructed to "find something". I also learned that the reviewers were calling other state agency representatives and asking questions about my character and credibility (and they were quite frustrated to hear only good things about both).

Unable to discredit me, they proceeded with the review, violating several of the principles in their own protocol, interviewing my staff and asking questions like, "Do you like your Executive Directive (ED)?" "Is your ED supportive of staff?" "Does your ED have a good reputation in the community?", etc. Of course my staff told me about this, and of course the SED reviewers denied it. To make a very long sixty-minutes-like episode short, the Preliminary Draft Audit Report was full of lies (all easily refuted by facts and documentation). Included were statements like, "The ED is totally blind and should not be allowed to sign checks." "The center achieved only 50% of their goals and they should be made to pay the money back" (The actual figure was 94% plus dozens of goals which were not in our contract). "The center misappropriated funds causing them to be over-reimbursed.", etc. It was further along in the report, in much smaller print that there was an explanation. In actuality, our accountant had discovered the over-payment and I had reported it to SED several months before I was told about the audit. I requested instructions on the best method for paying the money back, offering four different scenarios. SED never responded to my letter. The over-payment occurred because we lost some data due to a computer virus, a fact that was eventually mentioned in the audit report, several pages after the accusations.

I responded to this travesty by hiring an attorney and challenging the report, something that shocked the reviewers and SED officials alike. They expected me to back down, after all, they controlled my purse-strings and thought fear of

losing funds would shut me up. Of course, had their character check been more comprehensive, they would have realized that I'd never let such an injustice go unchallenged. In fact, after a year or so of negotiating and several rewrites of the report, I won every single point, and all of the falsehoods were removed from the final version. Additionally, our attorney only charged us for half of his time, because as he put it, "This was so much fun I'd feel guilty charging you the full amount."

Do not be fooled by my strong language and bravado here into thinking I wasn't scared, and that I wasn't very nervous about the audit. But I could not, for the sake of my employees, our consumers and my own sense of self-worth and credibility, let such falsehoods stand. I fought and won, and I've never been challenged in such a way again. Quite the contrary, they respect me, and they know I won't back down if I believe I'm right.

What can be learned from this rather lengthy scenario?

1. The overwhelming number of times, no one attempts retribution, though they may threaten it.
2. If someone does threaten you with loss of funding, etc. welcome them to take their best shot, it's not the response they'll expect.
3. It is okay to be scared of retribution, it just isn't okay to let that fear govern our actions or responses.
4. When we act from a position of strength and empowerment, it is the opposition which usually backs down.
5. State agencies and government officials usually don't expect to be challenged on their rules, regulations and edicts. When they are challenged, they are usually surprised and unsure how to respond.
6. Strong-arm tactics (threats and the like) can only work if we let them!
7. The squeaky wheel does indeed get the grease.
8. Be squeaky clean. Give opponents nothing that they can use against you.
9. Once you've successfully survived the "retribution" chances are that officials will think twice about using similar tactics against your agency again.
10. This experience was not fun, it was very time consuming and it was somewhat costly. However, I learned a lot, and I gained substantial credibility and eventual respect from my adversaries. My center now has a very good working relationship with the VR agency, and we share many mutual goals and principles.

P. SUMMARY

There are as many different styles of advocacy as there are people, and there are innumerable tactics and strategies that groups can develop to successfully promote and achieve their issues and goals. Below is a list of the major factors which must be considered in your efforts:

1. If possible, do not begin an advocacy effort/strategy from a confrontational

1. If possible, do not begin an advocacy effort/strategy from a confrontational position unless the situation warrants it and nothing else will be effective.
2. If an issue is volatile, take enough time to consider strategies and ramifications of actions. (Cooling off period.)
3. Be credible. Make sure you have the facts. Do your research before approaching public officials, businesses/agencies, etc.
4. Know the right people to talk to about specific issues.
5. Know all sides of the issue, not just the side that you support. Find out where the opposition is "coming from." Understand their reasons and positions as well as who else may share them.
6. Identify common ground with the opposition, then use your shared beliefs/values/needs as the basis for your proposals if possible. This can be very effective, since the opposition will have a much harder time arguing against your points.
7. Identify other stakeholders, people with whom you can make common cause to build coalitions when appropriate.
8. Ask for the moon and accept the stars. (Ask for the ideal solution but have a compromise position in mind. Know what you're willing to give up and on what points you absolutely cannot compromise.)
9. Try to resolve problems at the lowest level but don't hesitate to contact a higher authority if the problem is not resolved. (Go through the chain of command.)
10. Put the issues in writing and keep a copy. This should include your expectations about when you want a response and what steps you will take if you don't get one.
11. Always follow through on your timeline (especially if you make threats or promises.)
12. Keep records (names, dates, etc). of who you talk to, when you spoke, and the content of the discussion. It does not have to be lengthy.
13. Always attend important meetings with another person (witness).
14. Remember, "The pen is mightier than the sword". Write letters to the editor of local newspapers, editorials in your agency newsletters and in any other publication where you can largely control the content of the article. This strategy is extremely effective, but can also create some volatile situations, so it should be used only when other things have been tried first.
15. When you get desired results, write thank you letters or give other appropriate recognition.
16. Be systematic and well organized. The more organized you are the better your chance of success.
17. Never forget the power of advocacy through infiltration. When you join boards/committees, etc., your issues become part of the group agenda, not merely "your" issues. It also serves to heighten awareness about

access/accommodations, and keeps disability issues always out in the open.

18. When all else fails, never forget the power of the media. This should be used sparingly (usually as a last resort) and should be well considered. This strategy can backfire because we never really know how the media will present the issue. It can, however, also achieve great results.
19. Cultivate reporters. Make an effort to congratulate or thank them for good stories that present people with disabilities and/or related issues in a positive light (even if the story had nothing to do with your agency/program).