


Effective Advocacy

PRESENTATION FOR
SOCIAL ASSISTANCE REVIEW WORKSHOPS



SCHIZOPHRENIA
SOCIETY OF ONTARIO
A REASON TO HOPE - THE WEANS TO CURE

Why Advocate?

- Advocacy is about making your issues heard and working to create change
- Decision-makers - like politicians - often try to determine what the majority of people think before they take action or make a decision
- Effective advocacy helps them understand what matters to people the most, and to the most people
- Individuals like you have the power to drive system change

Advocacy Essentials

Here are the key elements of individual advocacy:

- **Strong Key Messages**
 - A short summary of what matters to you
 - The most important points you want to communicate
- **An Impactful Personal Story**
 - An explanation of how these issues impact you personally
 - Takes the issues out of "policy talk" and makes them real
- **A Clear Ask**
 - A solution that you want to propose
 - One clear thing that this decision-maker can do to help

Key Messages



IF I WAS ON AN ELEVATOR WITH SOMEONE, HOW COULD I EXPLAIN MY CONCERNS TO THEM IN 30 SECONDS OR LESS?

Developing Your Key Messages



- A few short sentences that summarize your concerns
- Ideally, 3 clear statements
- Not meant to describe every single thing that matters to you in detail – just your priority issues or a summary of what matters
- Use simple language and short sentences
- Be consistent with your messages and repeat them often!
- Ensures that the person listening clearly understands your concerns

Examples



- “ODSP income is not enough to afford basic needs”
- “Clawbacks of employment income keeps people from working by leaving them worse off than if they didn’t work”
- “Including a spouse’s income in ODSP calculations keeps people from being independent”
- “Everyone deserves the opportunity to get education and training no matter their level of disability”
- “ODSP rules are confusing and are not made clear to recipients like me”

Your Personal Story

**A DEMONSTRATION OF HOW THESE
ISSUES IMPACT YOU PERSONALLY,
AND WHY THEY ARE IMPORTANT**

Sharing Your Personal Story

- Life stories are complex – the personal story you use for advocacy has to be a simplified version
- Illustrates your key messages – provide examples of how they play out in real life
- Demonstrates how you have been directly impacted
- Can be chronological (in the order your life events have happened) or be broken down into themes/issues
- Your key messages are the thread running through your personal story – they should be repeated often!

Tips on Sharing Your Personal Story

- **Essential elements:**
 - Who you are (name, where you live)
 - Timing and circumstances around your story (how you came onto social assistance)
 - Challenges you faced
 - How you were impacted
- **Don't get bogged down with:**
 - Minute details
 - Unrelated context
- **Keep it clear and simple and you will make an impact!**

Your Asks

**WHAT YOU THINK NEEDS TO BE DONE
TO MAKE THINGS BETTER**

Your Asks

- Effective advocacy does not stop at talking about the issues and problems – it includes a clear solution that will help make things better
- Your asks are the 1-3 things that you want to see happen or changed
- Tips:
 - Be specific and clear
 - Not too broad
 - Relate back to your story if possible
- End your conversation/letter/presentation with these

An Effective Ask


Examples of ineffective asks:

- I want your support
- I want you to improve the social assistance system
- I want you to care about my issues


Examples of effective asks:

- I would like you (my MPP) to write a letter to the Minister of Community and Social Services asking her to raise ODSP rates
- I want you (SAR commissioners) to recommend changing the benefit unit from family to individual
- I want you (Minister) to add my condition to the list for Special Diet coverage

Ways You Can Advocate




Within the Social Assistance Review




- **Ways to share your input:**
 - Fill in the Commission's Workbook and mail it in
 - Write a letter or e-mail to the Commissioners
 - Phone in your feedback
- **Sample structure:**
 - Introduction: who you are, where you live, how long you have been on social assistance
 - Your story: your experience with social assistance, the challenges you have faced (tie everything back to your key messages and repeat them throughout)
 - Conclusion: what you think needs to be changed in social assistance

Other Ways to Advocate




- **Meet with your MPP**
 - Write a letter asking for a meeting and explain what you want to talk about. Don't provide too much detail – save that for the meeting
 - Phone the office, referring to your letter, and ask for an appointment
 - Ask how long the meeting will be and make sure you don't speak for the entire meeting – leave enough time for questions/discussion
 - Share your story, making sure your key messages are clear
 - Have a specific ask for your MPP – what they are in a position to do to help you
 - ✦ E.g. Bring up an issue at Question Period, write a letter to a Minister



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- **Use the media**
 - Write a "Letter to the Editor" of your newspaper. If you read an article that raises your issues, write a letter to the editor that states what you think needs to happen.
 - Contact your local newspaper – tell them you have a story you want to share. Explain why your issue is important and what you think the message is.
- **Work with a local advocacy organization**
 - Join coalitions that are interested in your issues – working together shows that this affects many people, not just you.
 - Contact your local community legal clinic, community health centre or health charity and ask what advocacy they are doing and how you can be involved.


Election Advocacy



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- **At election time (Election: October 6)**
 - Ask a question at an all-candidates debate in your riding
 - ✦ Ask what each of the candidates will do to assist those in poverty and on social assistance, or what each candidate will do to improve social assistance
 - Organize your own all-candidates debate on poverty/social determinants of health/social assistance
 - ✦ Work with individuals and organizations to organize an event to talk about these issues and ask your local candidates to attend and make comments
 - Write to the Party Leaders
 - ✦ Tell them what matters to you and ask them what they would do about it if they were Premier

Discussion



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