

## **Topic #4 – Advocacy on the Move: Strategies**

This topic area includes information about:

- Linking Research to Advocacy
- Planning Advocacy Campaigns
- Working with the Media

## 1. Linking Research to Advocacy

In *Changing Child Care: Five Decades of Child Care Advocacy and Policy in Canada* (Edited by Susan Prentice, Fernwood Publishing, 2001 - [www.childcareadvocacy.ca/resources/publications.html](http://www.childcareadvocacy.ca/resources/publications.html)) we learn that child care advocacy has been a part of Canadian life for over fifty years.

Over the last two decades, research has continued to provide us with plenty of well documented evidence about the:

- life long importance of the early years
- benefits of high quality child care for children, families, and communities
- value of affordable, universal, inclusive child care as one component of an anti-poverty strategy
- contribution of women to the economy
- benefits of social inclusion
- importance of healthy work environments and strategies for sustaining a healthy workforce
- value of “family friendly policies” and much more.

This research has been an integral part of child care advocacy. Child care advocates have used the learnings to make the case for child care both to the public and to the elected representatives at all levels of government.

Based on its values, beliefs and political commitments, a government determines the priorities for its social policies. Governments actualize their commitment to develop social policy by:

- ✓ developing policy initiatives;
- ✓ passing legislation;
- ✓ developing programs and services; and
- ✓ providing and sustaining adequate funding for service delivery.

Where the political will exists, governments also use research findings and community experiences as a rationale for developing effective social policy. In contrast, Canada’s legacy today sadly shows “there is not a deficit of research. There is a lack of action.”

(*Commission on Early Learning and Child Care for the City of Toronto*, C Coffey and Hon N McCain, May 2002, Page 10 )

Advocates utilize a range of approaches to strengthen the case for public policy and funding – from the telling of personal stories which highlight how policy affects us, to informing people about relevant research findings. Many web sites feature both summary and full research reports on the evidence of the economic, social and health benefits of inclusive, affordable, high quality child care. For up to date information, check out various web sites listed under the **Resources/Links** at [www.childcareadvocacy.ca/resources/links.html](http://www.childcareadvocacy.ca/resources/links.html) and at [www.childcareadvocacy.ca/parent\\_voices](http://www.childcareadvocacy.ca/parent_voices).

When our child care advocacy efforts are 100 % successful, we will see the closing of the gap between:

- what we as Canadians know, and
- the policy and budgetary choices our governments make.

## 2. Planning Advocacy Campaigns

“Changing public opinion and public policy is not easy. It’s messy. It’s time consuming. It’s energy-draining. And it is critically important.”

(Bob Wyatt, March 2003 - [www.childcareadvocacy.ca/parent\\_voices/content/EN/pdf/bwyatt\\_speech.pdf](http://www.childcareadvocacy.ca/parent_voices/content/EN/pdf/bwyatt_speech.pdf))

At the beginning of the Parent Voices project, an extensive literature review and internet search was completed – books, articles, advocacy tools and web sites which detail advocacy strategies and activities, community development and collaborative approaches. You can review this at [www.childcareadvocacy.ca/parent\\_voices/downloads/LIT\\_REPORT.pdf](http://www.childcareadvocacy.ca/parent_voices/downloads/LIT_REPORT.pdf).

We have learned on a first hand basis that campaigns are most successful when we work together with our “**natural allies**” – those who speak up for children, child care, women and social justice.

Building effective campaigns and mobilizing participation takes planning, coordination, cooperation, collaboration and financial and human resources. In reading *Changing Child Care: Five Decades of Child Care Policy and Advocacy in Canada* we can learn important lessons from the child care advocacy movement over five decades.

### Tools

The internet is key to staying connected, sharing information, efficiently building support and carrying out effective campaigns. Online advocacy describes:

*An advocacy group trying to achieve its mission today without the Internet is like a carpenter trying to build a house without a hammer. The Internet is an essential tool for advocacy-driven organizations because it enables near real-time mobilization of activists with high efficiency and impact.*

[[www.onphilanthropy.com/internet/if2002-11-22a.html](http://www.onphilanthropy.com/internet/if2002-11-22a.html)]

Campaigns are successful when they provide opportunities for:

- ✓ highlighting child care issues and keeping child care on the public and policy agenda
- ✓ influencing the public and elected representatives at all levels.

On their web site, the UN Platform for Action Committee in Manitoba (UNPAC) explains :

*Advocacy is a set of deliberate actions in support of a cause. ...Advocacy is usually a long-term process; some advocates wait years and even decades before they see change. Advocacy isn't always successful – sometimes the problems get a lot worse before they get better – but sustained advocacy on a particular issue often leads to significant changes...Besides bringing about important change, advocacy also enables citizens to feel that they have a voice. Advocacy empowers people, educates them. Advocacy is not only our responsibility, as citizens, it is our right.*

[<http://unpac.ca/economy/who.html>]

UNPAC has developed an 8-step checklist to effective advocacy.

[Note: These original 8 steps were developed by Human Rights Network Uganda (HURINET) – *Human Rights Advocacy in Uganda: A Toolkit for Human Rights Promoters*. (2000). They have been adapted in *Knowing your welfare rights and responsibilities: a plain language advocacy guide*, revised edition by Janet Smith. The Social Planning Council of Brandon also contributed.]

In this checklist, once a problem has been identified and analyzed, it is then time to strategize (agree on goals; identify others to work with; develop realistic time-frames). Mobilizing support for a campaign is the fourth step on the checklist and “marks the transition from idea to action”. Mobilizing requires:

- reaching out to clarify individual and organizational roles and responsibilities,
- identifying individuals who will take responsibility for leadership and various tasks, and
- sorting out any financial resources required.

Every advocacy initiative is an opportunity to reach out to new people and encourage involvement in a range of ways. We have learned that once individuals are more knowledgeable about the issues, and people feel connected to others sharing similar concerns and solutions, they are usually more confident to contact their elected representatives – through telephone calls, face to face meetings, and/or individual letters.

People who have the power to bring about change – our elected representatives at all levels of government – need to hear about the issues and key messages of all campaigns, the people/organizations involved and the advocacy goals.

It is always important to evaluate – to judge the successes, not only in terms of the long range goals and any legislated and significant funding improvements, but also in terms of increasing public knowledge of the issues. It is also important to reflect upon the efforts of the people involved in the campaign. Were new people involved? Were new leadership skills achieved? Would we do anything differently next time? Are more people willing to take an active part in future advocacy efforts? It’s also a time to celebrate accomplishments!

The final step on the UNPAC checklist reminds us to document the advocacy efforts so that participants and others have the opportunity to learn from the experiences and so that we leave historical background for the advocates in future years.

### 3. Working with the Media

Working with the media – TV, radio and print – and getting successful coverage will contribute to:

- keeping child care in the news ,
- building public awareness and public education, and
- gaining support for the child care advocacy key messages.

#### **Journalists say they are looking for news and stories of interest - Making Child Care News “NEWSWORTHY”**

Some media experts tell us that people need to see or hear a media message at least three separate times before they recall having seen or heard the message.

Keeping child care in the news is an effective way to build public awareness. Your group may benefit from:

- **Getting to know the reporters** that cover advocacy stories about children and families, human interest stories and government policies.
- **Sharing new and important information.** Offer information to the reporters – help to keep them up to date and provide them with background information. Proof read all written materials you submit.
- **Keeping the media informed.** Offer responses to current events that impact on children/families and child care, e.g. how are changes in government funding affecting families? How are families impacted by good news announcements?
- **Hosting events.** The media sometimes like to cover events that provide good visuals to their stories. Invite them to cover an advocacy event.

#### **Developing a media strategy**

The media takes your group’s messages and tells the story through their eyes. Their “story” may not reflect exactly what you thought you had said, what you wanted them to say, but it can be a successful way of highlighting issues and key messages.

#### **Getting organized**

- Prepare a media contact list – use the library and/or internet for preparing a list of mainstream and alternative media (e.g., newspapers – daily, community, college/university; local magazines, radio and television stations).
- Find out where to send a press release or announcement and know the deadlines for sending in your material.

## Designating media contact persons from the group

- Journalists like to contact one or two people – it’s less confusing and faster. Contact persons must be available at all times to respond quickly to requests for quotes and interviews, share names of people who are willing to be interviewed or people knowledgeable about certain topics.
- The less work a reporter has to do on your story, the easier it is for them. Prepare relevant information or background material and have it handy.

## Preparing to work with the media

In getting information to the media, it is helpful to clearly explain your announcement. Speak to key points about who is involved, the subject matter, the date/time, the place and the purpose.

Always remember – **nothing is ever “off the record.”** Listen, get the facts straight, and think before you speak – don’t blurt out something. Remember they may not write it down, but they might still quote you.

Points to remember when speaking with the media:

- get the reporter’s name and contact information;
- if you get a message, return media calls – reporters work to tight deadlines;
- clarify the purpose and format of an interview before you agree to be interviewed;
- speak concisely and clearly and remember that anything you say can always appear in print, on radio and on tv;
- speak to the most important points at the beginning of the interview and use personal examples to illustrate key issues;
- speak to a few key messages and stick with the simple facts, avoid using abbreviations and jargon;
- speak to what you know best;
- rephrase misleading or confusing questions and then give a reply;
- always remind reporters to include the information about the organization/group you are speaking for; and
- invite reporters to call you back when they want to check their facts.

**If you are getting ready for a TV interview,** use the advice of Maggie Bedrosian. For example:

- *Be Fast.* Viewers are accustomed to succinct messages; keep your comments short and clear. Limit each answer to 45 seconds
- *Involve Your Audience or Interviewer.* Communicate the impact your topic has on their lives.
- *Be Elementary in Your Explanations.* Focus on someone and target your answers to a person who may not have your background. Avoid jargon.
- *Editors Will Be Selective* in choosing which portion of the interview they will use. State your main point or two concisely.

(July 1987 issue of Child Care Information Exchange)

**If you are getting ready for a telephone interview:**

- have everything you need in front of you.

**If you are getting ready for a radio interview:**

- check out what the format will be – questions/answers? “Call-ins” from listeners? How much time will you have?
- bring any helpful resources to have the facts at your fingertips

**Making it in the news – What does the media cover?**

Many activists will tell you that it depends on what else is happening on the day or that week (“a slow news time” may increase your chances of getting coverage). Typically, one might expect the media to cover:

- Local, regional and federal government announcements/initiatives and responses from community organizations/individuals;
- recently published research/polls (if the results have some public interest);
- public events and activist gatherings (e.g., prominent speakers, a rally/march/demonstration).

Some groups successfully receive attention via the media by:

- Writing and submitting opinion articles.
- Writing and submitting letters to the editor (in response to news to raise particular issues and to promote a point of view ).
- Speaking as guests on talk shows and news programs featuring issues.
- Calling in to participate in talk shows on radio and TV.



- Writing and submitting Public Service Announcements (PSA's) – a free way of announcing events.
- Writing and distributing press releases and organizing and hosting a press conference before a public event, or to comment on government announcements/actions.

Keep your message simple and speak/write in plain English - in other words avoid the use of jargon!

### **Aiming to get the best possible media coverage?**

- ✓ avoid weekends
- ✓ know the various deadlines (for hourly news on radio, for main news broadcasts, for press to print)
- ✓ create an event with media in mind - make the event easy to photograph. TV stations and newspapers are always looking for good photo opportunities. Remember to avoid conflicts as they are considered newsworthy events and will grab the attention away from the real issues.
- ✓ learn from your experiences and the experiences of others.

*The article in the ... was definitely good exposure, except they misquoted me over and over again, which was embarrassing! I did get to write a retraction, though (this week's letter of the week).*

*I was also interviewed on the radio about daycare, for their broadcast on International Women's Day. The interview mostly covered our involvement in the ...campaign. I have no idea how knowledge of what we were doing spread so far a field, but I am really happy the campaign is generating interest.*

A special note of appreciation: Thank you to Clare Bessell, Sheri Hincks, and Sharon Gregson (Parent Voices representatives to the Network) and to Mary-Anne Bedard. All gave valuable volunteer time to review and discuss this Resource Kit draft and share their personal experiences (the challenges and the successes) in working with the media.