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# Advocacy

The Act of Supporting and Promoting  
Rights and Recovery



**Advocacy Guide**

PAIMI Council Leadership Training Institute  
May, 2004

# The OLRs PAIMI Advisory Council Leadership Training Institute

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"Vision without action is merely dreaming.  
Action without vision is just passing the time of day.  
But combine vision with action and you can change the world."

Nelson Mandela

## Rights Advocacy Recovery

the role of advocacy in realizing your rights and recovery

# Advocacy

is everyone's responsibility!

Advocacy is the act of speaking in support of human concerns or needs.

When people have their own voice, advocacy means making sure they are heard;

when they have difficulty in speaking, it means providing help;

where they have no voice, it means speaking for them.

From: "Making Change: A Place to Start"  
British Columbia, Ministry for Children and Families

"Our lives begin to end  
the day we become silent about the things that matter."

Martin Luther King

# What

is the intent of this guide?

This guide was designed to help you develop an understanding of advocacy and feel comfortable Advocating by responding to the following:

- **What** is Advocacy?
- **Why** is Advocacy necessary?
- **What** do advocates do?
- **Who** can Advocate?
- **What** are the approaches to Advocacy?
- **What** resources are available to help me advocate?
- **Who** are the decision makers?
- **How** do I find the decision makers?
- **What** are the mental health issues?
- **How** do I get started?

# What

## is advocacy?

- **Advocacy:** The act of pleading or arguing in favor of something, such as a cause, idea, or policy; active support.
- **Advocacy:** The process of actively speaking out, writing in favor of, supporting, and/or acting on behalf of oneself, another person, or a cause. Advocacy can be any action to assure the best possible services for or intervention in the service system on behalf of an individual or group.
- **Advocacy:** Any activity done to help a person or group to get something the person or group needs or wants.

# Why

## is advocacy necessary?

- **Advocacy** is necessary on a personal level:
  - to protect your rights and to get the services you need and want.
  - because the current mental health advocacy system in Ohio is weak.
- **Advocacy** is necessary on a state-wide systems level:
  - to promote issues important to the mental health community
  - because grassroots advocacy is one of the most powerful approaches for influencing policymakers or people in positions who make decisions.

# What

## do advocates do?

Advocates inform and educate decision makers about issues that are important to them. The intent of advocacy is: 1) to inform decision makers so they understand your issue and 2) to encourage them to take action and make necessary changes.

### Advocacy occurs on two levels

- **A personal or self advocacy level:**
  - you are speaking up for your rights.
  - you are trying to improve your situation.
  - you are trying to correct a wrong.
  - you are taking responsibility for your own recovery.
  
- **A state-wide systems advocacy level:**
  - you are trying to improve the system.

Both of these advocacy levels are important to assure that change is made and rights are protected.

# How

does advocacy work?

**Advocacy does work!!**

Through advocacy,  
individuals and groups of individuals  
have a voice  
and an impact  
on those who make decisions.

One person  
or a small group of people  
can have an impact on the system!

"Landslides happen when small stones start to move".

David Alton

# Who

## can advocate?

### ■ **Anyone** can be an Advocate

- You, your family, your friends can all be advocates.
- Anyone who has experienced the mental health system in Ohio.
- Anyone who has vision and action.
- Anyone who cares about mental health issues in Ohio.
- Anyone who wants to improve the system.
- Anyone, just anyone, can be an advocate.

### ■ **Everyone** can be an Advocate

All you need is a mission and passion!

# What

makes an advocate effective?

There are several key characteristics needed to be an effective advocate.

## The Best Advocates:

The Best Advocates:

- are motivated and passionate about their issue.

The Best Advocates:

- believe in their message.

The Best Advocates:

- understand their issue - they know both the negative and positive facts.

The Best Advocates:

- speak from their own knowledge or experience.

The Best Advocates:

- identify solutions.

The Best Advocates:

- are respectful and courteous.

The Best Advocates:

- enjoy communicating their message.

The Best Advocates:

- have an organized advocacy plan.

The Best Advocates:

- are also good listeners.

The Best Advocates:

- know when and how to negotiate.

# What

## are approaches to advocacy?

There are many ways to educate and inform decision makers about issues that are important to you.

The PAIMI Leadership Training Institute encourages people to become involved in advocacy activities at their comfort level - either through direct or indirect contact with their policymakers.

### ■ Indirect contact:

- email,
- letter,
- fax,
- post card,
- voice mail,
- text messages.

### ■ Direct contact:

- meet with other advocates and inform them of advocacy issues.
- coordinate advocacy efforts with other groups.
- phone call to decision maker or his/her assistant.
- personal visit to decision maker/assistant.
- provide testimony for legislation.

All these contacts help inform decision makers about your opinions and views.

# Why

## do decision makers need to hear from me?

It is important for decision makers to hear from you because oftentimes they are unaware of the issue. Once they are aware of, and understand the issue you have identified, they can do something about it. Decision makers like to have the opportunity to correct issues that are under their control. If they cannot make the correction because it is out of their control, they may support your issue if it is taken to the legislative arena.

### An Example of Why it is Important to Contact Decision Makers

One of the rights clients in the mental health system have is the posting of Rights and the name of the Client Rights Officer and the number for Ohio Legal Rights Service. A client, in a program, informed the director of the program (a decision maker) that these posting requirements were not met at the facility. After being informed, the decision maker posted the information. Now all clients in the program can read their rights and know who to go to if they have a problem.

One person, through advocacy, can correct a simple problem and have a big impact on many other people.

# How

## do I inform and educate decision makers?

The following guidelines apply to any form of communication with decision makers including personal visits, telephone conversations, emails, letters, text messages, or faxes.

- Introduce yourself as an advocate and tell them you are contacting them about a **specific issue**.
- Include a personal anecdote about how this issue affects you, your family, your job, your school, your leisure time, etc. Personal stories have a big impact - - decision makers can equate your story to a person and not just an issue.
- Include information that shows you know something about, and are familiar with, the issues.
- Explain your views about the specific issue:
  - why the issue is important to you.
  - how the issue affects a number of people.
  - what changes you want and how that may help solve the underlying problem.
- Request a timely response.
- Be certain to leave your personal contact information so the decision maker knows how to contact you.
- Thank them for their time and for considering your position about the issue.

# Who

are Ohio's mental health decision makers?

- Director and Chief Clinical Officer (CCO), Mental Health Provider Agencies.
- Executive director and CCO, County Mental Health Board.
- Board, Provider, and Consumer/Family Associations.
- State Director and CCO of Ohio Department of Mental Health and other key staff.
- Legislators and their staff.
- Governor and his staff.

# Who are and How

## do I find local and state decision makers?

A decision maker is the person who has control over the problem and can assist in finding a solution. As an advocate, you need to contact the person who has the most immediate control. This person may be:

- your case manager.
- your doctor.
- the director of the program.

If you need help finding who can assist with your issue, seek the assistance of the Client Rights Officer/ Client Rights Advocate or Ohio Legal Rights Service. If you feel the person you spoke with is not responding or addressing your issue, you should be prepared to go up the tree of decision makers.

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When a decision maker demonstrates they are correctly following the rules, regulations, and laws which govern their work, then you need to shift your advocacy focus to policymakers.

- on the county level, the policymaker to address your issue may be at the county mental health agency.
- the Client Rights Officer at the county board may be able to address your issue or refer you to the policymaker at the board.

Your issue may be under the control of a state policymaker.

- State Department Directors are responsible for state rules and Members of the Legislature are responsible for state laws that impact Ohio's mental health system.
- contact directors to change rules and legislators to change laws.

# Why

## do legislators need to hear from me?

- Legislators want to hear from their constituents! Your legislators represent you and others in your district, but they cannot do so effectively if they do not know what you want. There is power in your presence and your voice.
- Recently, a state legislator remarked to a community member that he had received "a lot of comment" about an issue. When asked what was "a lot," the legislator replied, "six or seven people called about it."

Fewer than a dozen contacts about a bill may substantially influence a vote on your issue!

# How

## do I find my elected officials?

### To find local elected officials

- Contact your local county board of elections

To find the address/phone number of your county board of elections, go to this web site: [www.state.oh.us/sos/boe.html](http://www.state.oh.us/sos/boe.html). This web site has web pages and email addresses for those county boards of elections that have them.

### To find state elected officials

- Call the Ohio Legislative Commission at 1-800-282-0253

Or

- Search the OLRs Web site at:

[http://olrs.ohio.gov/ASP/olrs\\_FSCHomePage.asp](http://olrs.ohio.gov/ASP/olrs_FSCHomePage.asp)

**Click on**  
**Legislation and Policy.**

**Click on**  
**Contact your Policymakers.**

# What

are the mental health advocacy issues?

At the March 24, 2004 Rights and Recovery Campaign, an advocacy platform was promoted. Statewide systemic issues on this platform included:

- Medicaid Buy-in,
- HB 225, Mental Health Parity,
- SB 192, Custody Bill,
- Ohio's Mental Health Client Advocacy System,
- Olmstead,
- HB 214, Ohio's Family Support Act, and
- Ticket to Work and Work Incentives Improvement Act

In addition to these statewide systemic issues, clients receiving services from Ohio's mental health system also have individual concerns and issues that need addressed.

# What

materials are available to help me advocate?

## It's your Right

A rights video produced specifically for people who are deaf or hard of hearing.

## Your Mental Health Rights

This rights handbook was designed to help consumers of mental health services know their rights.

## Rights and Recovery Web site

The Rights and Recovery web site is housed on the Ohio Legal Rights Service's home page at: <http://olrs.ohio.gov>. The Web site provides information about PAIMI Council activities and other mental health issues.

## Advocacy: A Bridge from Rights to Recovery

This study reviewed programs from a variety of perspectives and made formal recommendations to improve the quality and availability of Mental Health advocacy services for all Ohioans.

## The Platform

A list of systemic issues related to Rights and Recovery.

## Internet Resources

The internet is a valuable tool to help you research mental health issues.

## Let's Get Started

A companion booklet to this Guide to Advocacy.

# How

## do I get started?

Outlined below are some of the basic steps an advocate needs to do prior to making their first contact with a decision maker:

- **Know your rights.**
- **Select a specific issue** - be very narrow in your advocacy approach. Only address 1 issue at a time.
- **Knowledge is Power**- research your issue and know the facts.
- **Simplify facts**-make your issue easy to understand.
- **Develop a tip sheet**- leave the tip sheet with the decision maker.
- **Plan ahead**-try to identify questions people may ask you about your advocacy issue.
- **Share your ideas**-meet with other advocates to share your ideas.
- **Develop an Advocacy Plan:**
  - identify other advocates or groups to assist you.
  - identify who to contact.
  - develop a schedule for contacting the decision maker.
  - develop a plan to follow-up with the decision maker.
  - develop communication plan to update networking partners.

# What

is the *Let's Get Started!* publication?

The *Let's Get Started!* publication is a companion document for this *Advocacy Guide*. *Let's get Started!* identifies a specific advocacy issue and outlines steps for advocates to follow to inform and educate decision makers to affect change.

