



# INTRODUCTION TO ADVOCACY



# WHY ADVOCATE?

- Were it not for advocacy, the people we serve would still be in institutions like Willowbrook
- The squeaky wheel gets the oil
- It works, especially when large numbers advocate together

# WHAT IS ADVOCACY?

- A relationship that benefits both sides
- An ongoing dialogue
- Your opportunity to explain to government officials what is needed and why it's important
- A chance for individuals and families to speak for themselves
- An advocate is someone who speaks for another or defends a cause
  - It is not an adversary
  - It is a supporter
  - It is assertive, not aggressive

# WHO SHOULD ADVOCATE?

- Government relations professionals – good
- Direct support professionals – better
- People with disabilities and their families - best

# TYPES OF ADVOCACY

- Voting
- Issue advocacy
- Budget advocacy
- Program visits
- Rallies/press events/Legislative Breakfasts
- Briefings
- Hearing testimony
- District office visits
- Chance encounters

# THE BASICS

- Make sure you're talking to the right part of government
- Make sure you're talking to the right person
- Make sure you know what you're asking for
  - Talking points
  - They can't act unless you give them an action to do
  - Be SPECIFIC – give a bill number, if you can
- Be prepared – know what tools work for you (lists, cards, etc.)
- Acquire knowledge – understanding the past helps us fight for the future
- Identify problems and propose solutions
- Build working relationships – stand on common ground
- Communicate effectively, be an optimistic negotiator, and listen – strive for win/win

# THE HIERARCHY OF CONTACTS

- Personal visit, face-to-face
- Handwritten letter
- Typed snail-mail
- Telephone call
- Email

# THE ELEVATOR PITCH

- Be prepared to make your whole pitch during a single elevator ride
  - Who are you?
  - What is your mission?
  - What do you want?
  - How can they help you?
  - Why should they help you?



# THE ELEVATOR PITCH IN WRITING

- Leave them with a simple, easily digestible, clear, concise document that tells them everything in your elevator pitch
  - Avoid jargon, acronyms, and unnecessary details
  - One page is almost always enough

# KEY THINGS TO AVOID

- Overwhelming them with too many issues
- Form letters
- Jargon
- Inconsistency
- Lying or exaggerating
- Negativity – being a sore loser
- Don't try to impress them – keep it simple
- Don't fight your cause at the expense of another
- Don't expect to know everything
- Don't have unrealistic requests
- Don't forget to end on a positive note

## KEY THINGS TO REMEMBER

- You're the expert – don't be shy
- They're the government official – don't be rude
- They're called "public servants" for a reason – they work for you
- It's NEVER a one-shot deal – follow up!
- Paraphrase and summarize
- Be aware of your body language – be open, not guarded
- Bring your personal story, but leave your "baggage" at home

## MORE KEY THINGS TO REMEMBER

- Why are services essential? Show the bigger picture
- Help parents balance their passion with their emotions
- Best way to help someone is to ask
- Whenever possible, form a diverse group of constituents to provide a comprehensive picture
- Be prepared, but don't over-rehearse
- Prepare a “leave behind” packet of information
- Try to make an appointment instead of dropping in (and be on time!)
- Stay on topic
- Answer legislator's questions
- Try to ascertain their position – build bridges
- Get to know your elected officials and—mostly—get them to know you!