

family

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Abstract

A very brief article, mostly in point form but which encapsulates important concepts and includes major strategies. Very informative and pragmatic and therefore might be useful for group work. **Keywords: Community Development**

SOME USEFUL TIPS ON LOBBYING

When talking with politicians, bureaucrats or service providers, parents will often have to do some very strong lobbying to have their point of view heard and acted upon. The following tips might be of help in making your voice as strong as possible.

- You have a right to say how you feel about a situation. Your thoughts are not insignificant. Don't feel guilty about putting forward your opinion.
- Never feel you need to apologise for asking a politician or bureaucrat or a service worker to do the job that they are paid to do.
 - * put pressure on politicians to represent the interests of people with disabilities as it is part of their role as your and their elected representative.
 - * stop begging for what your son or daughter is entitled to by law or by right. Don't be afraid to challenge the legitimacy of decisions which take your daughter or son out of regular life.
 - * put pressure on workers to do the job they are employed to do. You do not need to be grateful to them.
 - * don't be afraid to complain to superiors. policy makers, funders politicians. Unless they hear about issues they are often not aware of what is happening in real life.
- Don't accept being told you must be patient. They will tell you that there isn't any money, or that they are really doing things well or that they need more time to determine the need. Only impatience and persistence will move bureaucracies into action.
 - * ask for changes to policy, funding, services as there will never be any changes, money or services unless people demand them. This is how priorities are determined!
 - * don't keep whispering to one another about the situation. Make sure those people with power to make decisions hear you clearly so tell them loudly and often.
- Consider the amount of time you are prepared to give to them carefully. Your time is valuable too.
 - * be miserly with your time. The easiest way to burn out is to try to join them and do their job for them. Beware of the natural law of bureaucracies: the more time you give, the more time they will take and it still may not turn out anything like what you could have anticipated.
 - * don't get caught in their agendas. You do not need to see it all from their point of view. This can really weaken your advocacy effort.
 - * don't become fodder for their organisation. Remember you are not being paid for this and they are.

- Believe that your cause is just and that there is a good chance that your issues will be heard and resolved. Persistence and determination can deliver changes, but be prepared to be there for the long haul.
- Gather support around you. Strength can be in numbers.
 - * always take someone with you; a friend, a relative, a neighbour, an advocate, who is willing to support you on issues and who will act as a scribe for the meeting.
 - * on difficult issues, develop a circle of support around you; people who can help you with strategies and who will support you emotionally when times get tough. They will also celebrate the good times with you as well.
 - * join with people with like minds who are also on about the same things. Keep them informed and use mass action to gain political support.
 - * consider using the law if it applies to your situation, eg the Anti-discrimination or Disability Discrimination Acts or the Disability Services Acts.
- Always be prepared for meetings.
 - * set an agenda of what you want to talk about before you go.
 - * be very clear about what your main message is and keep repeating it in your conversation.
 - * work out what you want to achieve from the meeting and be quite up front about it.
 - * be clear about the difference between a compromise and a sellout before you go. What is the bottom line that is acceptable to you.
 - * discuss your tactics. Consider the peashooter versus the cannon approach and keep your discussion firm and polite on the issues rather than angry and personal.
 - * anticipate answers and develop counter-arguments. Always have answers ready for the usual bureaucratic replies:
 - . we don't have the resources.
 - . there's nothing wrong with how things are.
 - . we need to set up a committee to look further into this issue.
 - . perhaps we should research the needs.
 - . trust us.
 - . I can't do anything about this as it's not my job.
 - . people are happy where they are.
 - . the staff couldn't cope with the change.
 - . other parents don't want this.
- Send a copy of the notes you take and any outcomes from the meeting to the politician, bureaucrat or service provider and keep your records together for possible further use.

Lobbying is never easy, but it is an essential part of advocacy. GOOD LUCK!