

ICDS ADVOCACY TOOL KIT

Advocacy is the act of arguing on behalf of a particular issue, idea or person. As this new legislative season is close at hand, we are asking for your help to advocate for persons with developmental disabilities (DD).

2011 Legislative Goals

1) Elimination of the DD waiting list:

- ✓ Today approximately 4100 children and adults statewide are waiting for DD services.
- ✓ 650 of those waiting for services are from Johnson County.
- ✓ The HCBS DD waiver has been under funded for more than a decade.

2) Increase the reimbursement rates paid to community DD providers:

- ✓ Provider agencies are significantly understaffed due to the inability to hire qualified staff willing to work for low wages.
- ✓ High turnover and staff shortages occur due to low wages of direct care staff.
- ✓ Wages must increase to reduce the stigmatization of direct-care jobs as low-wage, no advancement jobs.
- ✓ In order to serve the significant number of new folks from the waiting list, sizeable wage increases must be funded to attract, train and retain qualified staff.
- ✓ The State pays its own direct care workers (those who work in the State's two DD institutions) a **starting** wage of \$12.35 per hour. The **average** wage of community provider staff in Kansas is \$8.83 per hour.

3) Restore funding eliminated by the harmful cuts made to the DD system during the aftermath of the 2010 budget:

- ✓ Eliminated funding of Temporary Respite Care.
- ✓ Reduced Supportive Home Care and Personal Assistance Services.
- ✓ Total elimination of dental services.
- ✓ Medicaid reimbursement rates were reduced by 10%.
- ✓ State General Funds reduced dramatically.

How You Can Help to Make a Difference

1) Call your legislator

Many legislators spent very little time in their office during the session, but can be reached early or late in the day. Weekends they may be found at home.

Ask to talk to your legislator personally. If he or she is not available, don't hang up. Give your message to the receptionist and ask the legislator to return your call. You may leave a message with the receptionist.

- ✓ Identify the bill by number, or the subject matter.
- ✓ Give a brief reason why you support or oppose bill or subject.
- ✓ Leave your name, address and phone number. Your address tells them you are in their district. They are most responsible to voters living in their district.
- ✓ Request that the legislator gets back to you with the results of the legislative action. This says that you are interested and will remember the action.

2) Write a letter to your legislator

- ✓ Your letter is a permanent record of your position.
- ✓ In a letter writing campaign, ten, twenty or fifty letters can be perceived as an outpouring of support.
- ✓ Most legislators are conscientious about their mail and consider the views of their constituents when they deliberate an issue.

How to write:

- ✓ Write your own letter. Use your own words to express your thoughts.
- ✓ State your reason for writing. Explain how the issue affects you and those around you. Remember the personal anecdote! Include a personal/family photo.
- ✓ Use the Bill number, author and title, if you are writing about legislation.
- ✓ Clearly state what action you are seeking -- support, oppose, authorize funding, etc.
- ✓ Refer to research, data, statistics, etc. Give your legislator good reasons to support your position.
- ✓ Be reasonable, specific and positive. Don't engage in threats or ask the impossible. Ask your legislator to state his/her position on the issue in a written reply.
- ✓ Thank your legislator for the time and attention, for the support, for the vote.
- ✓ Put your return address in your letter. Envelopes can be thrown away.
- ✓ Write again. When you establish a record of correspondence you will develop clout on future issues.

You may want to review this sample letter:

November 5, 2010

The Honorable _____
Kansas State Senate
State Capitol Building Room 123
Topeka, KS 66612

Dear Senator _____

I am your constituent and writing to urge you to support elimination of the developmental disability (DD) waiting list. Despite the efforts of many during the past few years, there are still over 4100 children and adults waiting for appropriate services in the State of Kansas.

My husband and I have a son with DD. Sam graduated from the school system two years ago. His needs are great and my husband and I are doing our best to provide. Sam cannot be left at home alone, so I had to quit my job so I could stay at home to care for him. I do my best to keep Sam active, but he has ceased to progress! Sam's dream is to attend a community day program where he can master job skills for future employment; however he has been on the state-wide waiting list for DD services for three years now, and is still waiting. In addition to helping Sam, it would allow me to go back to work and earn money needed to pay college tuition for my younger son.

Sam so wants to be a productive member of the community, but barriers persists. Those barriers cannot be removed without your assistance.

I look forward to learning about your position on this issue and ask for your support to expand funding for vulnerable men, women and children of our State. Please call me if I can answer any questions for you.

Sincerely,

(Your name)
(Your address)
(City, State, Zip code)
(Phone number)

3) Arrange a personal visit with your legislator

Here are some simple steps to follow:

- ✓ Make an appointment

Here is a sample script for calling to make an appointment: "Hello, I am (a parent of a child with a developmental disability) and would like to make an appointment to speak with (Representative X or Senator X) about the importance of full funding for the waiting list for MR/DD services. I will be in Topeka on Jan. 27 and would like to stop by for a few minutes to speak with the (Representative or Senator)." If you are told that the Representative or Senator is not available on that day, ask to make an appointment with a staff member. Meeting with a staff member is also very valuable, as they often influence how a legislator votes.

- ✓ Always introduce yourself, even at a second or third meeting. Don't put the legislator or their staff member in the awkward position of having to grope for your name.
- ✓ Get down to business quickly. Begin on a positive note. State the Bill number, title and author, or state the issue, your position, and what you want him/her to do.
- ✓ Thank him/her for previous support. Legislators like to know that you know of their record. If you don't know the record, thank him for taking the time to meet with you.
- ✓ Be specific, be clear and be simple. Provide information about how this issue impacts his/her constituency and people throughout the state. Use fact sheets, charts, statistics, etc.
- ✓ Use personal stories or anecdotes. Remember, your job is to persuade... and a personal story will leave an image that the legislator will remember when he/she votes on the issue.
- ✓ Ask what you can do. Ask if you can provide further information, arrange a tour of local services, or contact others.
- ✓ Leave brief written materials. Your legislator will file the materials and refer to them when questions come up later and/or when he/she votes on the issue.
- ✓ Thank him/her again. Send a written thank you, recapping the meeting, as soon as you return home.

"Goals are dreams with deadlines"

-Diana Scharf Hunt

Our deadline is now! Please help make our dream a reality by taking action! Your advocacy will make a difference!

