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Working with and for people with developmental disabilities and their families in Wake County.



ADVOCACY IS A PROCESS...

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A - Awareness / Attitude / Assessment

Advocacy is all about the process of change. An initial step is creating awareness that certain needs are not being met and to heighten this awareness among people with common interests as well as others who may need to be educated about the issue. Illustrate the impact that change would make by focusing upon measurable positive outcomes. Attitude determines altitude. An advocate must proceed with an optimistic "can do" attitude. Complete a needs assessment. Spell out strengths and weaknesses as well as opportunities and barriers. Among your group is there any overlap regarding areas of need?

B - Build a priority list

Upon completion of the needs assessment there may be several areas which you may wish to target. At this point it is important to establish a priority list. What matters the most? What will provide the greatest positive impact? Becoming organized will in turn provide better focus.

C - Collaborate / Collect Data

There is power in numbers. It is important to collaborate with others in order to brainstorm ideas and view a problem from all angles. People are resourceful. By joining forces more can be accomplished. Work can be divided. It is also important to collect data. What are the facts? How many people are being affected by the current situation? How many people will be helped by the proposed change? Gather facts and figures to present to policy and decision makers. Make a case for the changes you are proposing.

D - Develop a S.M.A.R.T. plan of action

Ideas, positive energy, and good intentions are not enough. Establish concrete measurable goals. Use the following acronym to ensure that you are on track. **Specific** - Be clear as to what you are looking to accomplish. **Measurable** - make sure that results can be collected in terms of numbers beyond just general quality of life. **Action Oriented** - who is going to do what in order to effect this proposed change. Write this down as it will also ensure accountability. **Realistic** - Do not bite off more that you can chew! Sometimes baby steps are the best ways to make inroads in order to create change. **Time Bound** - This is a process and as such timeframes need to be instated in order to determine progress towards the goal at hand. Once again, be realistic in providing enough time to achieve the steps in reaching your goal.

E - Effort

For just a moment think about the Revolutionary War, the Civil Rights movement, and the equal rights amendment to name a few. EFFORT is key. Never give up and view setbacks (major or minor) as temporary bumps in the road. The path of least resistance leads down the same old path, whereas the effort it takes to change moves us forward in new and exciting directions. Encouragement among fellow colleagues makes this piece of the journey more tolerable even enjoyable at times.

F - Focus and Follow through

As you are addressing one issue it is not uncommon that other concerns in related or unrelated areas may arise. Do not lose focus of what you are currently working on. Take one day at a time and one issue at a time. It is often said that the squeaky wheel gets the oil. Be persistent! It is so important to follow through and get the information or a response from whomever you have contacted. Unreturned phone calls and e-mails can be highly frustrating. Keep plugging away, and consider making a personal appearance if necessary. Change is not easy to come by. So many people can talk the talk. However, it is those who can walk the walk that truly can make a difference.