Symposium: Advocacy On Behalf of Children and Families Needing Mental Health Care

Lenore B. Behar, Ph.D., Child & Family Program Strategies
Chris A. Zeigler Dendy, M.S., Author, ADHD Consultant, and Publisher
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The Role of State-Level Advocacy in Making Change

Lenore B. Behar, Ph.D.
Child & Family Program Strategies

Vantage Points

- State Director of Child & Family Mental Health Services in North Carolina, 1968 – 2002
- Member of Technical Assistance Panel, appointed by the Federal Court for Felix v. Waihee, 1992-2000

Advocacy from the View of a State Director

- In 1968, 42 years ago (!), the concept of advocacy was just emerging—as promoted by the Joint Commission on Mental Health of Children (1969)
- Advocates were professionals who spoke out on behalf of children
  - Breaking the silence of “therapy”
  - Not talking about parents as partners
  - Not collaborating with other agencies

Gaining Strength Internally

- Gathering data to estimate need
- Gathering data from service providers about failures/inability to provide appropriate services
- Developing a foundation for a lawsuit
- Finding legal advocates to help
- Basing system change on guiding principles

What Was Missing

- Parents as advocates
- State and local partnerships, not competition with other providers
- Commitment of providers beyond their individual clients
- Higher level recognition of needs for services
- Collaboration with non-lawsuit professionals
What Helped to Push Ahead

- Willie M. lawsuit got the attention of State and local leaders
- CASSP focus on needs assessment, data collection, automated data systems
- Robert Wood Johnson Foundation grants
  - Introduction to ways to maximize federal funds
  - Requirements for state and local partnerships

Advocacy from the View of a Court Expert

- In 1991, the *Felix v. Waihee* suit was filed
- Role as the expert for the State of Hawaii
  - To determine if needs were being met
  - To recommend a course of action for the state
- Role as the court-appointed panel member representing the State's interests
  - To plan with and advise the State agencies
  - To help determine whether or not the State was meeting expectations

Strengths That Helped

- Organized groups of parents as advocates
- Internal advocates with strong commitments
- Excellent data system
- Settlement plan based on SOC guiding principles

Inside and Outside Advocacy!

Chris A. Zeigler Dendy, M.S.
Florida 1970-1986
- Dir. Children Services, ACMHC
- FL DHRS Children's MH Supervisor
- CEO Florida Council CMHC
Georgia 1986-1998
- Dir. Georgia Mental Health Association
- Bd. Mem. and Chair, GRN MH, MR, SA

Progress In Florida
Federal and State Support

- ACMHS, Fed Grant, children's services expanded
  - DHRS Children's MH funding
  - SAFE, partner with school
  - Multi-agency multi-disciplinary training and staffing—wraparound without the label
- Established DHRS Children's Planning Committee
  - Identified total amounts spent on residential care by DHRS
  - Counted out-of-state placements—Bring Our Children Home
  - Funded all components on statewide basis—each dist.
  - $30M funding; $2M prevention

Bring Our Children Home
Progress in Florida
State and Local Support

- Est. Statewide Children’s Blue Ribbon Com.
  - Statewide multi-agency conferences (families included)
  - Policy development conferences
  - Published policy goals; make sound official
  - Issued report card at end of year
  - Launched BOCH campaign
  - Reported results monthly in newsletter
    - Send to legislators, budget staff, DHRS districts, and CMHCs
- Developed continuum of care/linked with FMHI

Data Published in Newsletter

Progress in Georgia
State and Local Support

- GA Mental Health Association
  - Drafted children’s mental health bill for legislator
- GRN, Fed Grant, children’s services expanded
  - Developed therapeutic foster care
  - Parent involvement

Lessons Learned

- Advocacy skills learned are with you for life
- Support for children’s services waxes and wanes
- Enjoy and make best of it in good times
- Chemistry changes when players change
- Build into system so it’s systemic
- Partner inside and outside advocates: state, local, parents
- Analyze bottom line goal; determine key action steps
- Set specific measurable objectives; analyze & plan Policy Development goals
- Know who writes/approves policy/budget issues at each level
- Report data—BOCH, Objectives for Blue Ribbon Committee, report card
- Out of state and hospital placements, reported/honor roll

Current Challenges

- Numerous challenges
- Lack of money
- Fewer legislative statesmen
- Disseminate information to new generations
- Disseminate best practice treatment information

Final advice:
Look at your sphere of influence; determine if you can impact change
Christina Kloker Young

- Illinois—advocate for abused and neglected children, 1971 – 75
- Co-taught course at Kent State University on “Child Abuse & Children’s Rights”
- Chair and co-chair of Advisory Board—Research & Training Center for Improved Services for Children, CNII & Family Studies, University of S. FL 1985 – 2008
- Advisory board for Child & Adolescent Services System Program (CASSP)
- Technical Assistance Center at Georgetown University
- Contributed to book Advocacy on Behalf of Children With Serious Emotional Disturbances; 1990
- President of C.K.Young & Associates Creative Planning Systems since 1990
- Consultant and speaker on Advocacy
- Founding member of A START – Alliance for the Safe, Therapeutic and Appropriate Use of Residential Treatment 2005

Enhancing Advocacy Through Communications

Maria Rodriguez

President, Vanguard Communications
Project Director, Caring for Every Child’s Mental Health Campaign

Communications Can Transform Perceptions

The “Big C”
Breast cancer is part of the vernacular

Isolation and fear of AIDS patients
Increased understanding, acceptance, and inclusion

Inconsistent drinking and driving laws
Zero tolerance

Caring for Every Child’s Mental Health Campaign

Effective communications and advocacy are changing attitudes about people with mental health needs:
- Awareness
- Understanding
- Inclusion

Application: Caring for Every Child’s Mental Health Campaign
Early Role of Communications was Mental Health Awareness

- There are children and families with serious mental health needs
- Isolation and separation are not the best approaches
- Serious mental health needs can be addressed through the System of Care model

Next Stage was Understanding and Engagement

Goal is increased commitment to a coordinated system of care that helps children and youth thrive at home, in school, and in the community

Current Campaign Focus is Acceptance and Inclusion

- Counter blame-the-victim mentality
- Remove barriers to accessing care
- Eliminate us vs. them rationale

Communicating in 2010 and Beyond

- Build sustainability into programming
- Bring programs to scale
- Address ethnic/racial disparities and cultural barriers

Know Your Audience

- What is important to them?
- How do they spend their time?
- What do they think or know about your issues?
- Where can you find common ground?
Sharing the Experience

Tell a story that is:
- Actionable
- Timely
- Relevant
- Relatable
- Interesting

Your Main Message

Audience will retain one or two key messages from a presentation
- Organize your thoughts around a Single Overriding Communications Objective (SOCO)
  - Reflects core messages
  - Helps to organize your thoughts
  - Keeps you focused

Tips for Maximizing the Opportunity to Communicate

- Know your audience
- Use data and research to illustrate your points
- Use personal statements and anecdotes
- Be transparent
- Remember your SOCO
- Keep it short and simple

Questions?