Human service professionals share a passion for helping others. As a student, do you have this passion? One way of helping others is through advocacy. Whether you are a student helping others or a career professional, you must equip your passion for helping! This unit defines “advocacy” and gives you methods for advocating.

**Objective:**
- Explore advocacy activities and methods.

**Key Terms:**
- action plan
- advocacy
- lobbying
- SMART objectives
- stakeholders

**Advocacy: What Is It, and How Do You Do It?**

**Types of Advocacy**

Advocacy is support of a cause, a policy, or a proposal communicated verbally or in writing. Advocacy activities influence public policy, obtain resources for individuals or groups, or educate others. Lobbying is a type of advocacy. Lobbying is influencing political policy for a shared interest. Paid and volunteer individuals or groups hoping to get political support for a cause conduct lobbying efforts. The Alliance for Justice clarifies the difference between lobbying and advocacy: Lobbying is a type of advocacy, but not all advocacy efforts are lobbying.

**Independent Advocacy**

Independent advocacy is working for the benefit of one or two other people. A family member advocating for health issues of a relative is an example.
Systemic Advocacy

Systemic advocacy is working to inform or change the system. A group of educators encouraging legislators to support funding for their cause is an example.

Self-advocacy is similar to independent advocacy except that it involves a person undertaking the effort on behalf of himself or herself. (There could be a group of people advocating for themselves.)

ADVOCACY METHODS

Following are different methods for advocacy activities. You will read tips for writing letters, making phone calls, and using email and media for doing advocacy work.

Letter Writing

Letter writing is a good first step to make contact with an individual, group, company, or government agency. Keep the letter concise, and limit it to one page. Use full-block format for a typed business letter.

The first paragraph should be an introduction, the second paragraph should contain the details, and the last paragraph should be a summary. Each paragraph should begin with a topic sentence. State facts without emotions, arguments, or accusations.

Congressional letters should be handwritten or typed. Form letters are ineffective. Generally, for a letter to a member of Congress to be effective, you must be a member of the congressional district.

Sign all letters, and include your name and mailing address.

Phone Calling

Making phone calls on behalf of a cause is a common way to show commitment. To make an effective advocacy phone call, keep the following in mind. First, identify yourself: “This is ____. To whom am I speaking?” Second, state the purpose of the phone call in common terms: “I’m calling to register my support for ____.” Third, use precise words, and talk at a moderate pace. Finish the conversation positively, and ask if there are any questions.

If leaving a name, address, or phone number, spell the necessary words, and ask politely to have the information repeated: “Do you mind repeating that number to me so I can be sure I gave it to you correctly?” When leaving a voice
mail, state the message clearly and concisely. A message should include the date and time as well as the caller’s name and phone number.

**Email**

Advocacy emails are formally written but in a shortened format. The emails should be planned in advance. Spell-check and grammar proofreading functions should be used. The use of common email phonetic spellings or emoticons should be avoided. Subject lines should be succinct: subject, name, title, and date. Some professionals receive hundreds of emails daily. As a result, follow-up is a good policy—asking the person in question to confirm email receipt.

**Media**

Contacting the correct person when requesting media coverage is essential. When using newspapers, contact reporters with bylines, editors who assign articles, and/or photographers. At a small newspaper, the reporter may also take the pictures. When using radio, contact salespeople who sell airtime and on-air personalities who determine programming. When using television, contact producers who control local news programs, assignment editors who research background information, and/or reporters who conduct interviews.

Media programs, such as “Unsung Heroes,” “Letters to the Editor,” or “Spotlight on _____” are often looking for sources of information. Contact the media well in advance of an event and again the day before coverage is requested. Being a subscriber is wise when asking for event coverage from a newspaper.

**ORGANIZING IMPORTANT ELEMENTS OF ADVOCACY**

When you are planning advocacy activities, important organizational elements must be kept in mind. Following are tips for organizing the key elements of education, research, activity management, and strategic planning, which includes objectives and goals of the advocacy.

**Education**

Legislators may be educated using correspondence, copies of news articles, displays at the capitol building, and personal visits at a district office or at the capitol. The public may be edu-
cated via workshops, billboards, media programs, bulletin boards, networking, blogs, and other Internet avenues.

For instance, the AAFCS Obesity Initiative is a program that advocates for the prevention of childhood obesity. This source is used at community groups and with youth organizations (e.g., FCCLA and 4-H) and in FCS classrooms. Information about the Obesity Initiative is found at http://www.aafcs.org/Advocacy/obesity.asp.

Research Efforts

An advocacy cause may need statistical data collected and often requires that materials be reviewed or field-tested before wide distribution. Many groups request funds for ongoing research and need volunteers to solicit funds.

Activities

A rally, gathering, or meeting may be planned for advocates with common causes to come together. Advocates often network with others to exchange ideas, request funds, or share contacts. Advocacy groups provide training or professional development for members of the cause.

Strategic Planning

Advocacy groups use strategic planning to ensure events are organized and that contingency options are considered. A strategic plan often includes the following: a mission statement agreed upon by the organization or its board of directors, a list of issues the group wishes to tackle, a list of stakeholders—individuals or groups having a direct interest in the issue.

Objectives and action plans provide an organizational structure for the group’s activities. Strategic plans often use SMART objectives: specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, and timely. The construction of a clear message is a crucial objective. An advocacy group typically constructs an action plan to carry out the objectives. An action plan is a sequence of steps to achieve the desired results. Monitoring and evaluation of the objectives and the action plan keep an advocacy group on target.
Summary:

Advocacy is support of a cause, a policy, or a proposal communicated verbally or in writing. Advocacy activities influence public policy, obtain resources for individuals or groups, or educate others. Independent advocacy is working for the benefit of one or two other people. Systemic advocacy is working to inform or change the system. Self-advocacy is similar to independent advocacy except that it involves a person undertaking the effort on behalf of himself or herself.

Different methods of advocacy include writing letters, making phone calls, and using email and media. Important elements of organizing advocacy include education, research, activity management, and strategic planning.

An advocacy group typically constructs an action plan to carry out its objectives. An action plan is a sequence of steps to achieve the desired results. Monitoring and evaluation of the objectives and the action plan keep an advocacy group on target.

Checking Your Knowledge:

1. What are three types of advocacy presented in this unit?
2. What are three important guidelines to follow when writing an advocacy letter?
3. What are two tips for how to start an advocacy phone call?
4. Who are the important people to contact at a newspaper when you want coverage of an advocacy event?
5. What are three elements of advocacy strategic planning?

Expanding Your Knowledge:

Complete an Internet search of “most successful advocacy campaigns.” Read three examples, and write a one- or two-page essay discussing them, including what made the examples such successful advocacy campaigns.

Web Links:

Advocacy Strategy Planning
www.pitt.edu/~super7/18011-19001/18351.ppt

Quotes About Advocacy
http://www.goodreads.com/quotes/tag/advocacy

What Is Advocacy?