

## **Advocacy Training: Skills for Social Workers**

**Goal:** Ability and understanding of how to best advocate for social justice

### **Objectives:**

- Understand the necessity of political activism
- Understand the repercussions of legislation on the profession and populations social workers serve
- Present self and issues in effective manner
- Utilize information and resources
- Provide alternatives to legislators

### **Purpose:**

- Add professional credibility
- Accountability
- Increase awareness and understanding
- Ethical duty
- Effective advocacy
- Impact legislation

“In a democracy, where every vote and voice count, doing nothing is a political act.”

*Nancy Amidei*

### **Myths of Activism**

- Activism will bring immediate and decisive victory.
- Activism has to be huge.
- We need a super leader.
- Our generation is politically impotent.

### **Why Don't People Advocate Legislatively?**

- We don't know how
- We don't know the legislative process
- We are intimidated by legislators
- We believe that we are powerless

### **How to Do Grassroots Advocacy**

**Advocate:** to speak or write in favor of; support or urge by argument; recommend publicly

### **Advocacy Actions**

- Visit your legislators
- Write a letter
- Call your legislators
- Email

**Less Is More: The Less people do it, The Greater Influence it has with legislators**

Meet your legislator – only 1 person in 10,000 will go in person

Write Letters – 1 in 100 people will send a letter

Make Phone Calls – 1 in 100 will call on the phone

Email – many people will send an email; however, they do get counted!

**The Visit**

- Call ahead and schedule an appointment.
- Be specific about your reasons for the visit.
- Keep your request for time brief. 15 minutes is enough.
- You might speak with staff.
- Dress nice.
- Be direct and succinct. – What are you asking the legislator to do?
- Keep a cool head.
- Always thank them for their time and send a follow-up thank you letter.
- District vs. capitol office – district best.
- Prepare handout.

**Letter Writing**

- Keep it brief – 1 page.
- Cover 1 topic per letter.
- Neatly hand-written letters work best.
- State your position and what you want the legislator to do in the first paragraph.
- Make sure the legislator knows you are his/her constituent.
- Describe the legislation and how it affects you.
- Always request a reply.
- Sign up for NASW Critical Advisory Alerts.

**The Call**

- Most useful when a vote has been scheduled, and there isn't time for a letter or visit.
- Give your name and address to verify that you live in the district.
- Keep it short and simple:
- "I support [bill number], the [bill name] and I urge [legislator's name] to vote for this bill."
- Follow up!
- You can also call to request a legislator's position. If the staff person doesn't know, ask them to find out and get back to you.

**Influencing the Influential**

### The 3 C's of Preparation

- Control the Discussion
- Be Credible
- Be Clear

### Strategies and Skills – Tips to Be More Effective

- Take hardcopies of key information you wish to share
- Be specific about the action needed
- If you are unsure, follow up
- Limit to one issue
- Let them know if you are a constituent
- Know the history of a bill
- Use your social work skills of establishing rapport and communication
- Group efforts make this less scary.
- Always be courteous.
- Personalize the issue.
- Always follow up.
- Logic is not the strong suit of most legislators.
  - This is a **human** process!
- Empathy is your best weapon.
- Use other Social Workers as your power base.
- Inform your Legislator that other Social Workers are involved in the same process.
- Know your issue thoroughly.
- Anticipate oppositional claims and formulate persuasive rebuttals.
- Think about if the issue you address is better attacked through incremental or fundamental changes.
- It takes small steps to get to a big goal.

### What Can I Do...As an individual:

#### ■ V O T E !!!

- Write letters, make phone calls, sign petitions to include on line, e-mail, and visit my representative and senator
- TELL A FRIEND about this issue, and get their support to include on-line buddies.
- **Join/Invite others to join NASW.**
- Join NASW/TX "Take Action Now" List serve
- Get involved in a candidate's race
- **Run for public office!**
- Join a NASW Critical Issue Advisory

### What Can We Do . . .As part of a statewide movement:

- Be an advocate for your area of interest
- Plan on attending Social Work Advocacy Day activities on March 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2011 – WEAR TEAL SCARF!!!

- Plan on attending a local Social Work Advocacy Day activity if you can't come to the Capitol
- Testify at public hearings – in writing or in person

### **Possible Local Social Work Advocacy Day Activities**

- Request citation from City Council or Commissioner's Court on local social work contributions to the community; have a social work contingency receive that citation at a council or court meeting that week
- Have a letter writing campaign (letters to the editor) to the local paper regarding the many ways social work impacts the community
- Host a benefit for a local charity using a local personality and featuring social work/social workers
- Ask local paper or news outlet to do a feature on social work
- Do a project that gets media attention such as painting someone's house, getting blankets or socks for the homeless, providing a dinner to the elderly, repairing someone's home, helping with people's taxes, etc.
- Have a Guinness Book of Records attempt, like the most social workers who volunteer at local schools in a day, etc.

### **Possible Local Social Work Advocacy Day Activities continued**

- Use a major news story of the day or week to point out how social workers can impact that situation for the better
- In groups of 3-4, meet with every City Council Member and Commissioner's Court Member in your community and talk about social work
- In groups of 3-4, meet with every state representative and senator in your district(s)
- Buy a billboard and promote social work for the day or month
- Create a mural about social work and display it at a local mall or gathering place
- Compile a book of testimonials from clients who appreciate the work of social workers

### **Possible Local Social Work Advocacy Day Activities continued**

- Reach out to employers who employ lots of social workers and ask for their cooperation and involvement
- Give a "Good for Texas" award to a local official or personality who has supported social workers in the past
- Have branch members sign a petition in favor of a loan forgiveness program or a social work profession resource center and send it to state representatives and senators
- Create some local statistics that you can use to impress the public, for example, # of vets receiving services from social workers, # of students seen daily by school social workers, # of elderly receiving APS visits, # of people placed by nursing home social workers, # of mental health visits daily, etc.
- Make up your own!!!

## **Advocacy "DO's" and "DON'T's"**

### **"DO's"**

- Do learn Members' committee assignments and where their specialties lie.
- Do present the need for what you're asking the Member of Congress to do. Use data or cases you know.
- Do relate situations in his/her district.
- Do ask the Representative's or Senator's position and why.
- Do—in case of voting records—ask why he/she voted a particular way.
- Do show openness to the knowledge of counterarguments and respond to them.
- Do admit you don't know. Offer to try to find out the answer and send information back to the office.
- Do spend time with Members whose position is against yours. You can lessen the intensity of the opposition and perhaps change it.
- Do spend time in developing relationships with Congressional staff.
- Do thank them for stands the Member has taken which you support.

### **"DON'T's"**

- Don't overload a legislative visit with too many issues.
- Don't confront, threaten, pressure or beg.
- Don't be argumentative. Speak with calmness and commitment so as not to put him/her on the defensive.
- Don't overstate the case. Members are very busy and you're apt to lose their attention if you are too wordy.
- Don't expect Members of Congress to be specialists. Their schedules and workloads tend to make them generalists.
- Don't be put off by smokescreens or long-winded answers. Bring the Members back to the point. Maintain control of the meetings.
- Don't make promises you can't deliver.
- Don't be afraid to take a stand on the issues.
- Don't shy away from meetings with legislators with known views opposite your own.
- Don't be offended if a legislator is unable to meet and requests that you meet with his/her staff.

## **Basic Legislative Process**

- Representative drafts bill and files it.
- Speaker of the House assigns bill to a committee.
- Committee chair schedules a hearing to hear public testimony for the bill.
- Committee issues favorable report on bill. Goes to House floor.
- House votes on bill. If it passes, goes to Senate. Start at Step 2.
- Senate passes bill.
- Governor signs bill.

## **General Facts about the Legislature**

- There are 150 Texas Representatives
- There are 31 Texas Senators

- Both houses are in session for 5 months (January thru May) every odd year
- In 2009, over 7,000 bills and resolutions were introduced, and about 1,500 enacted

### **Legislative Profile – 82<sup>nd</sup> Session**

	House	Senate
○ Male	116	25
○ Female	34	6
○ Democratic	49	12
○ Republican	101	19
○ Incumbent	118	29
○ Freshman	32	2
○ Caucasian	105	22
○ African-American	15	2
○ Hispanic	29	7
○ Asian-American	1	0

### **Ethics**

- Our ethics of social justice and political advocacy make us different from other disciplines
- Our mission is to enhance well-being and help to meet the basic needs of all persons, especially those who are vulnerable, oppressed, and living in poverty
- We promote social justice and social change with and on behalf of our clients
- Our core values: service, social justice, dignity and worth of the person, importance of human relationships, integrity, competence
- Political action, lobbying, and advocacy thus is a unique and essential component to social work

### **Student Involvement**

- Political involvement as a student leads to advancement of macro social work skills.
- Students gain valuable skills, including community organizing, public speaking, writing for advocacy purposes, learning the legislative and electoral process, professionalism, and how social work and advocacy intersect.
- Students are a powerful source of social work advocacy and empower of our profession.

### **Social Workers in Politics**

- Necessary to reassert our role in social welfare policy
- Necessary to represent populations who are marginalized and hold little power
- Necessary to stabilize authority, rights, and power for the social work profession

### **Social workers make good political candidates because they:**

- are well educated

- are articulate and experienced in public speaking
- are comfortable at persuasion
- are knowledgeable about their communities
- understand social problems and are committed to social justice
- understand how policies affect individuals and communities

**Social workers run for public office because they:**

- are attracted to politics through an issue or cause.
- realize they are just as capable as many officeholders.
- see the opportunity to make changes on a broader scale.
- want to provide leadership to improve their community.

**Only One Social Worker in the Texas Legislature**

Elliott Naishtat, Texas Representative

- Served District 49 in Austin since 1990
- Worked as VISTA volunteer for LBJ's War on Poverty
- Holds social work and law degrees