

Slide 1



THE ADVOCACY TOOLBOX
"Tools of the Trade"

Brain Injury Association

Slide 2

What is an Advocate?

ADVOCATE: "One that pleads the cause of another."

Webster's Dictionary

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Slide 3

Why Advocate?

- The Numbers Demand It! 5.3 Million Americans with brain injuries
- TBI is not an Equal! As of 1998, TBI Public Spending on brain injury was \$226.5 Million for 38,357 people in community services, compared with DD spending of \$15.5 Billion dollars for 650,000 people



Brain Injury Association

Slide 4

Why?

- Medicaid Waivers-TBI-2,478
Individuals; \$118 Million
- Medicaid Waivers-DD-184,283
Individuals; \$5.7 Billion



(Source: Starr, 1999; Braddock, 1999)



Slide 5

Why?

Because government affects almost every aspect of what we do in life, from the roads we drive on to the air we breathe to the taxes we pay to the food we eat...and because ultimately persons with disabilities need government supported systems to help them live independent lives.



Slide 6

Why?

States Need our Help in Planning for the Future: The Olmstead decision interpreted Title II of the ADA and its implementing regulation, which oblige States to administer their services, programs, and activities "in the most integrated setting appropriate to the needs of qualified individuals with disabilities." (28 CFR 35.130(d)).



IS YOUR STATE READY?



Slide 7

High Ranking Communication


- Spontaneous letters from constituents
- Visuals--family photos
- Office visits from constituents
- Articles in state/district newspapers
- Telephone calls from constituents



Slide 8

Written Communication

- Be Accurate
- Be Brief
- Be Clear
- Be Timely
- Follow up with a phone call
- Include of the bill # and sponsor when applicable



Slide 9

Your letter to your Legislator



- Use personal or business letterhead, handwrite or write a postscript
- Say clearly who you are and what action you want
- Write one page in your own words--NO FORM LETTERS



Slide 10

Your letter to your Legislator



- Ask for a response
- Don't threaten or overstate influence
- Make sure the letter arrives before the vote
- Say thanks



Slide 11

Other Thoughts...

- Include a one page fact sheet—legislators like condensed materials
- Leave your address and phone number, envelopes get lost



Slide 12

Meeting with your Legislator



- Legislators are generalists
- Make an advanced appointment
- Keep groups small and personal
- Be prepared for five to ten minutes max
- Ask and don't demand
- Leave a fact sheet and offer follow up information
- Acknowledge any known opposition
- Say thanks



Slide 13

Telephoning



- Very persuasive form of communication
- Keep it brief
- Talk to an aide if you cannot get through, staff can be very effective advocates with legislators
- If it's a simple up or down vote you need, a message is ok
- Ask for a response



Slide 14

Emails and faxes



- Most do not want to be lobbied by email
- Email is not used to communicate with constituents
- Postal letters rank the highest
- Faxes are next



Slide 15

Testimony

- Learn Committee protocol and informal practices
- Be short and sweet (less than three minutes)
- Outline or write testimony, with copy to committee staff
- Highlight what the Committee needs to know
- Be early...they may not go according to schedule



Slide 16

Testimony

- Choose witnesses who represent all constituencies
- "Loose Cannon" testimony will kill a bill
- Commit to finding answers you don't have
- Don't overkill a supportive committee
- Plan for questions/Script friendly faces on the committee
- Provide a script for your sponsor if necessary



Slide 17

Finding a Sponsor



- Find someone from the Majority party
- Seniority Counts!
- Dedicated to your cause
- History of successful efforts
- Chooses co-sponsors wisely
- Gets along with others



Slide 18

The Executive Branch



- REMEMBER: Not all changes in policy need to be in the form of a bill
- The Executive Branch can include expansion funds for persons with brain injuries within its budget



Slide 19

Working with the Executive

- Understand that your lead service state agency will be a key player
- Keep your state agency informed of your advocacy effort
- Seek support or at least a neutral position
- Seek support from advocacy bodies such as the Governor's Council, Advisory Councils, and other important internal advocates. Ask them to include you in their legislative agenda



Slide 20

Don't forget the Governor!

- The Governor should be a key part of your advocacy efforts, particularly if you are introducing legislation
- Keep strong grass roots advocacy effort focused on a Governor who is ambiguous.



Slide 21

Test Drives


- Run your ideas past Committee Chairs and legislative leaders to get input.
- Take your idea on a test drive by presenting to an Interim Committee, or call for hearings on brain injury.
- Ask for assistance or tips from staff on the off season.
- Run it past your personal legislator for feedback.



Slide 22

For the More Creative



- Get friendly with like advocates and lobbyists
- Legislative breakfasts or luncheons with constituents
- Write a press release on the latest figures on brain injury in your state
- Invite legislators to attend your meetings or speak to your support group
- Follow up rewards those who are true supporters



Slide 23

Avoid at all Costs



- Rallies where no one shows up
- Petitions with large amounts of unknown signatures
- Threatening a legislator
- Making disparaging remarks about legislators who oppose your position
- Coming in with last minute requests



Slide 24

Bumps in the Road



- Tabling is the kiss of death
- Referral to Ways and Means is generally a one way ticket
- Late introduction is not a good start
- Stalled scheduling should raise eyebrows



Slide 25

Signs of Success

- Small amount of subsequent committee referrals
- Quick scheduling in committee
- Leadership support
- Unanimous votes
- Passage though finance



Slide 26

When it's Over

- Winning is getting the word out
- Review what you learned
- Ask for input or thoughts for improvement
- Say thanks and try again next year

