



SUNSHINE COAST

# CITIZEN ADVOCACY

## INSIDE

- Legal Standing of Citizen Advocates!
- The question of technical training for Citizen Advocates!
- Advocacy - not what you Expected!

March 2017

Inclusion will occur when those  
in the world around a disabled  
person choose to change their  
behaviour  
rather than requiring the disabled  
person to change.

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## Commitment

Every 'successful' relationship has the element of commitment.

This is the type of relationship which all of us consciously or not, have need of.

Advocates too in their relationship, could do well to occasionally reassess their own level of commitment.

Commitment is all about entrusting, caring, binding oneself to another.

Some Core beliefs of  
Citizen Advocacy:

All people have abilities

All people are worthy,  
and entitled to personal  
relationships and  
experiences.

We make commitments based on faith, hope and trust. Making a commitment involves risk. It has an unconditional quality to it. We may even give up some of our freedom, individuality and control over our lives.

Commitments are worth the effort, and sometimes the sacrifice, because when all is said and done, people are almost always better off because of them; if we keep them the way they were meant to be kept ... with care as well as consistency ... we are laying the foundation for the only kind of life fit for human beings. This is ultimately why commitment keeping is worth a try.

Lewis. B. Smedes, Caring Commitment

*One of the oldest human needs is having someone to wonder where you are when you don't come home at night*

*Margaret Mead*

## Citizen Advocacy is not ....

- taking over a person's life (or problem) and making all decisions for them
- squelching efforts of self help
- reinforcing feeling of helplessness and dependence
- keeping individuals in the dark while doing everything for them
- keeping individuals uninformed about their rights, so they will have to rely on the advocate for everything
- discouraging people from becoming activists
- making excuses for unavailability or inadequacy of services
- making decisions for people who can make their own
- controlling people
- persuading people to accept 'make do' services
- closing the door to a person because 'there's nothing I can do to help'
- recommending 'hands off' with politics
- accepting the status quo when legislation is not implemented
- accepting unavailable and inadequate services
- denying existence of problems reported
- dropping a complaint after initial contact
- filing a lawsuit at the first approach to a problem
- a 'parent/child' relationship

## **When speaking up**

Some protégés will at some point in their lives, need another person to vigorously represent their interests. This may be because their rights are (or are at risk of) being compromised.

Sometimes, taking on the role of Citizen Advocate will mean that you may have to enter into conflict with service providers, many of which are government run. Issues that require spokeswomanship may be small and can be dealt with quite quickly, or it may be a serious issue (e.g. abuse or neglect) and may mean you will need to take a lobbying role.

There is no doubt about it, it can be a daunting prospect, one that will take tenacity, determination and PLANNING and will always mean having a meeting or conference by phone.

Here are some points that you may find useful when speaking up for your protégé.

- Think about the relative advantages of the different ways of lobbying someone.
- Try to assess how great a gap there is between your interests and the interests of the people you are wanting to influence.
- Try to imagine yourself in the other person's shoes. What would persuade them to give into your demands.
- Make use of supportive organisations in getting other people to be involved in your campaign, e.g. Suncoast Community Legal Services; Queensland Advocacy Incorporated; or other advocates fighting similar battles with the same service.
- Try to identify which people are likely to hold some sway over the people you are wanting to influence and work to get them on side.

..... See page 4 for ideas!

## **WHEN SPEAKING UP cont'd**

- In getting people on your side to support you, be careful to present your issues honestly.
- Find out who the decision maker is. There is no point in wasting time having a number of meetings to produce the same outcome that could be achieved in one or two.
- Confirm dates and times before the meeting .
- Remember you are dealing with bureaucracy and may get frustrated with the process
- Always have answers ready for the usual bureaucratic replies. Develop counter arguments to their response. For example:
  - We don't have the resources
  - there is nothing wrong with the way things are
  - We don't have enough data
  - I can't do anything it's not my job.
  - Staff could not cope with that
  - Other parents wouldn't want this

Remember, being brave and standing up against the services that control our protégés life can be a difficult thing. The "professionals" may ridicule, ignore or get nasty with you. Or they may totally agree with you in the very nicest way and then do nothing! BUT! Don't give up – by speaking up for your protégé you are already changing the balance of power in favour of justice.

### **Core belief of Citizen Advocacy:**

**It is incorrect to assume that people with disability have their needs adequately met by the human service system.**

**People with disability should be part of the community and live as independently as possible.**

## Advocacy - not what you expected?

While being a citizen advocate rarely turns out to be exactly what we might have anticipated, for some the experience is far outside their expectations as to question their role with the program. One frequently identified issue concerns a lack of communication from the protégé (those who have intentional communication skills), to the advocate which can result in self-doubt and disillusionment for the advocate. It may be helpful to know this issue is a common one and rarely has anything to do with the personality or abilities of advocates. So why does this happen?

### Some Core beliefs of Citizen Advocacy:

All people have abilities

All people are worthy, and entitled to personal relationships and experiences.

which over a period of years, results in learned helplessness, undermining self-confidence and restricting independence. Although this may have occurred with the best of intentions the ability for an individual to self-initiate any task can be heavily diminished.

When we apply this to communication it may manifest in relationships seeming to be totally one sided. An example may be your protégé never calls you on the telephone but waits for you to call. Sometimes they may even wait for you to initiate the conversation before speaking at all. It takes confidence and a belief that what we have to say is of value before we talk with others and this is something that advocates may take for granted. Usually the Protégé is happy to hear from you and may talk willingly but leave you wishing they would sometimes call you instead. It has little to do with you the advocate, your personality or ability to fulfil the role.

## Advocacy not what you expected cont'd

However, you may still be left feeling that the person with whom you are matched remains uninterested in you or your efforts to get to know him or her. Once again it is always helpful in the first instance to try to see the situation from their point of view of the protégé. Personal relationships can be tricky for any of us. Can you remember as an adult the last time you made a new friend? Take some time to think of the social skills you need to invest in a new friendship or maintain an existing one. For a protégé who may have few ongoing relationships in their life the opportunities for learning these skills can be minimal even non-existent.

Further examination of the quality of advocacy you are providing may be worth a look. Do you identify and respond to the needs of your protégé? Can you speak up on their behalf when something appears not as you think it should? Are you prepared to follow through on issues you believe important to your protégé? Are you accessible to the protégé and encouraging of the relationship with them? Do you imagine how their quality of life would be diminished or at risk without an advocate? If you answered yes to any of these questions then you are doing just fine!

Support for your relationship with a protégé is always at hand through the staff of the Citizen Advocacy program who have every confidence in you as an advocate before you were matched. Advocates are carefully selected by the program so trust in the faith the staff have in you. Continuous support is regularly available because nobody ever said it was going to be easy and in fact a good advocate will ride across a bumpy ocean from time to time. Advocacy is rarely what we thought it would be but always a deep learning experience about ourselves and others.

Never lose sight of the value of the relationship you have generously allowed to exist with the potential to achieve untold good in our community.

Bernice Jurgeit

## **The 'legal standing of Citizen Advocates', and the great importance of developing 'standing' in representing their Protégé's:**

When people first hear about the nature of Citizen Advocacy, some will often query the status of advocates, in terms of the recognition and authority accorded to their role in representing individual people with disabilities. Typically, in response, we would point to the following indicators of the legitimacy of a citizen advocate's role.

- (i) At least in Australia, Citizen Advocacy is funded, and mandated, by one level of government (the Commonwealth Government) to undertake its mission of facilitating independent, personal advocacy for people with disabilities by suitable citizens.
- (ii) More recently, legislation-derived standards—e.g., the Disability Services Standards—which are intended to regulate (at least in theory) the conduct of government-run or government-funded agencies, clearly refer to, and acknowledge the role of, advocates in representing people with disabilities who are clients of such services. Thus, in relation to the above two points, it may be argued that the ostensible imprimatur of government—as manifested in legislation and, derivatively, prescribed standards — can provide a citizen advocate with "legitimate" entrée in embarking on his/her advocacy role.
- (iii) Most importantly, however, is the "standing" an advocate can develop, as a concerned and committed party, especially through continuity and depth of involvement with the protégé. It is this third point, the nature and implications of advocate standing, which is explored hereon.

### ***The importance of "standing" in the conduct of advocacy***

Standing, as the term is used here, refers to the perceived legitimacy of involvement of one person with another, particularly when acting on behalf of the other person.

*Continues page 8*

For example, parents will generally have high standing in their role of raising—and making decisions for—their children, at least until the siblings reach a certain age. Clearly, in the context of Citizen Advocacy, standing attributed to, or gained by, the citizen advocate is crucial, since the advocate's role is to represent the interests of his/her protégé.

Usually when a match is arranged by the Citizen Advocacy office, the advocate will not have had any prior involvement with, or obligation to, the protégé—unlike, for example, family members of the protégé, presuming there is active family presence—and so the advocate's "credentials" may be questioned by at least some parties. Particularly in those instances where the advocacy is directed "against" some party say, and agency of which the protégé is a service recipient, efforts are likely to be made by that party to undermine or delegitimise the role of the feather-ruffling advocate. Obviously, in the above scenario, if the advocate has high standing—clearly acknowledged legitimacy of representation—it will be more difficult for the service provider agency to denigrate or dismiss the advocate.

The advocate's standing, therefore, may be of decisive importance in advancing the interest of his/her protégé, especially in the face of non-co-operation or hostility from other parties with competing interests.

### ***Acquiring legal standing through assumption of formal roles***

In Citizen Advocacy, the potential exists for an advocate to acquire legal standing by assuming a formal role such as that of a guardian or adoptive parent, in certain situations. Of course, it is not necessary, possible, or even desirable for the majority of citizen advocacy relationships to attain a formal status. For example, if legal recognition is unduly accorded to a citizen advocacy relationship, the (unnecessary) formality of the advocate's role will, at the very least, image the protégé as being less competent than he/she really is.

Nonetheless, in other instances, it may be patently necessary, even absolutely crucial—for an advocate's role to achieve legal standing in order to effectively protect the interest of his/her protégé. For example, the assumption of the role of a guardian can give an advocate indisputably recognized authority to make decisions for a person with decision-making difficulties who may be targeted by, and vulnerable to, predatory parties.

*Continues page 9*

## Earning moral standing through demonstration of commitment, particularly over time

As mentioned above, most citizen advocacy relationships will not, and need not, be sanctioned by the law. As such, informal citizen advocacy relationships are analogous to culturally typical associations formed in the larger society. On the one hand, the informality of a citizen advocacy relationship can invite the possibility (as alluded to previously) that the status of the advocate's role will be challenged by others who may have a vested interest in declaring the advocate to be persona non grata to the protégé. But an advocate who has a demonstrable commitment to his/her protégé will be less vulnerable to accusations such as those which anathematise the advocate as an "undesirable presence" or "meddler". When a citizen advocate's presence and actions exude an unequivocal commitment to his/her protégé, it could be said that the advocate has earned moral or social standing. Dr Wolf Wolfensberger (the founder of Citizen Advocacy) has observed that standing of this kind is likely to grow with the advocate's (i) duration of involvement, and (ii) depth of involvement, with the protégé.

(i) Obviously, an advocate's involvement with, and representation of, his protégé over a sustained period—perhaps many years—will fortify the credibility of the advocate, especially given the reality that such an ongoing presence is typically uncommon in the ever-changing relationship world of most people with disabilities.

ii) Additionally, the depth and intensity of an advocate's engagement, in contrast to that which is perfunctory or token in nature, can also confer standing to the advocate. A corollary to the foregoing is that a citizen advocate who has a long-term association with his/her engagement remains at a superficial level—perhaps because it is characterized by infrequent contact with the protégé, and/or a reluctance to pursue advocacy goals for the person which place a demand on the advocate. On the other hand, it may be possible for an advocate to increasingly gain standing, despite being in the role for a relatively brief period of time, if the advocacy is conducted with depth, intensity, and in a state of solidarity with the protégé. Ultimately, then, an advocate's standing will correspondingly increase with a "track record" of close and conscientious involvement.

Mitchel Peters—Published in In-roads

## LISTENING

### You are 'not' listening to me when:

You say you understand; You have an answer for my problem before I've finished telling you my problem; You cut me off before I've finished speaking; You finish my sentences for me; You are dying to tell me something; You tell me about your experiences, making mine seem unimportant; You refuse my thanks by saying you really haven't done anything.

### You are listening when:

You really try to understand me, even if I'm not making much sense; You grasp my point of view, even when it's against your own sincere convictions; You realise that the hour I took from you has left you a bit tired and drained; You allow me the dignity of making my own decisions, even though you think they might be wrong; You do not take my problem from me, but allow me to deal with it in my own way; You hold back the desire to give me good advice; You do not offer me religious solace when you sense I am not ready for it; You give me enough room to discover for myself what is really going on; You accept my gratitude by telling me how good it makes you feel to know that that you have been helpful.

Author unknown

### A Smile

A smile costs nothing, but gives much. It enriches those who receive, without making poorer those who give it, takes but a moment, but the memory of it sometimes last forever.

None is so rich or mighty that he can get along without it, and none is so poor but that he can be made rich by it. A smile creates happiness in the home, fosters good will in business, and is the countersign of friendship.

It brings rest to the weary, cheer to the discouraged, sunshine to the sad, and it is natures best antidote for trouble. Yet it cannot be bought, begged, borrowed, or stolen, for it is something that is of no value to anyone until it is given away.

Some people are too tired to give you a smile. Give them one of yours as none needs a smile so much as he who has no more to give.

## Understanding another person better!

These questions provide on basis for clarifying and organising ones understanding of another persons history, situation and needs. Keep these questions in mind as you get to know the person with a disability for whom you will be an advocate.

- What relationship does this person have with his/her natural family? At present? Throughout his /her life?
- What set of roles does this person have in his/her community? How have these roles changed over the last few years?
- What connection does this person have to the cash economy? What impact does his/her income have on his /her life?
- Who are the persons friends? What sort of things does he/she do with them?
- What relationship does the person have with people who don't have identified disabilities (e.g. neighbours, church members, co-workers, fellow learners etc.)?
- What contribution does the person make to other peoples lives?
- What are the persons greatest competencies? Which of the persons skills and attributes are needed and wanted by others?
- How do members of the public respond to the person? How does the person presently manage potentially stigmatizing characteristics

**Why is it neither necessary nor desirable for Citizen Advocates to receive technical training as a pre-condition to their Advocacy engagement**

.....*Mitchel Peters*

**What we have to learn to do, we learn by doing.**

Aristotle (384-322 BC) Greek philosopher

A question commonly asked of people involved in a Citizen Advocacy programme is: what sort of training, if any, do advocates receive for and in their role. Mostly, it is a genuine query from those who, on first hearing of Citizen Advocacy, are interested to learn more about the practical aspects of an advocate's role. Occasionally, however, the question may be framed – by some (e.g., human service workers who have had prior exposure to, but do not understand or like, Citizen Advocacy) simply to invoke the issue of technical training, in an effort to undermine the legitimacy of "unqualified" citizens acting as advocates to people with disabilities.

It is, of course, true that advocates are not required to undertake any technical or clinical training (e.g., learning about the cause, "treatment," prognosis, and so on, of impairments, by the Citizen Advocacy office – for clear reasons. Thus, in explaining why the Citizen Advocacy office consciously chooses not to train advocates, it is important to communicate the very essence of Citizen Advocacy, the role and responses of advocates (as opposed to those of paid staff of disability services, for instance), and the implications of training. Reviewed below are some rationales as to why it is unnecessary, and even undesirable, for citizen advocates to receive training in order to embark on an advocacy role on behalf of people with disabilities.

**Assumptions about the role and resources of citizen advocates and the Citizen Advocacy office which obviate the need for technical training.**

The absence of training for advocates must be understood in the context of some assumptions which are central to the premise of Citizen Advocacy. Specifically, these assumptions pertain to the nature and efficacy of the responses of advocates, and the facilitative role of the Citizen Advocacy office, vis-à-vis the needs of people with disabilities.

1. **Citizen advocates have pre-existing skills to directly respond to, or facilitate the address of, the needs of people with disabilities.**

*Continues page 13*

A core belief in Citizen Advocacy is that there are suitable citizens with pre-existing skills who can effectively assume a range of advocacy roles for people with disabilities. Sometimes, a citizen advocate will directly respond to his/her protégé's needs, such as being a friend or mentor.

In other instances, given the representational nature of many citizen advocacy roles, the advocate's efforts may be aimed at a third party who is in a position to directly effect a desired outcome for the protégé, or to secure a service needed by, but hitherto withheld from, the person.

Regardless of whether the citizen advocate directly responds to his/her protégés needs, or is instrumental in addressing those needs via other parties, what is noteworthy is that the advocate's actions are similar to, and typical of, the kinds of responses of competent citizens utilizing already-held capabilities in everyday functioning in the larger society.

Nonetheless, two important qualifications must be stated in regard to the competencies and corresponding roles of citizen advocates. (a) The belief in the capacity of ordinary citizens does not imply that *everyone* will have the necessary attributes, dispositions, and so on, to assume effective advocacy roles. Consequently, the Citizen Advocacy office must be discerning, rather than indiscriminate, in order to recruit suitable and competent advocates. (b) On the other hand, the pre-existing competencies of the advocate may be of limited practical value, unless these specific skills are *relevant* to addressing the needs of the protégé, a matching function of the Citizen Advocacy office, as elaborated below.

**2. The Citizen Advocacy office will strive to arrange suitable matches in which there is a good "fit" between the particular needs of the protégé and the identified skills of the advocate.**

A second assumption, which militates against the need for training citizens to function as effective advocates, is that the Citizen Advocacy office will endeavour to arrange a *suitable* protégé/advocate match. The very word "match" suggests that there should be systematic thinking and planning in bringing people together in a way which will, first and foremost, be beneficial to the protégé. In practical terms, the goal of the Citizen Advocacy office must be to facilitate the formation of a relationship in which there is a good "fit" between the identity, needs and interests of the protégé and the identity, skills and resources of the citizen advocate, so that the advocate can be enabled to assume an advocacy role which is most responsive to the important needs of the protégé.

For example, if a protégé's primary need is for spokeswomanship, it will be imperative for the Citizen Advocacy office to identify, recruit and match with the protégé, an advocate with the relevant identity – someone who has spokeswomanship-related skills and positive social image – for effective representation of the person. On the other hand, given the above needs-scenario, it makes little sense to recruit a citizen advocate who is unwilling and/or unable to provide spokeswomanship, even if the advocate is likely to be successful in responding to other relatively trivial needs of the protégé.

**3. The Citizen Advocacy office will provide support, in a variety of ways, to advocates.**

It is also recognised that, in order to sustain and potentialise their advocacy engagement, even suitable-matched advocates are likely to need various forms of non-intrusive support (rather than mandatory technically-oriented training) from the Citizen Advocacy office. Another assumption, then, is that the Citizen Advocacy office will provide appropriate and proportionate support to advocates in the course of their match. Typically, before commencing their advocacy, all advocates receive orientation to the concept of Citizen Advocacy, the range of roles which advocates can potentially play, the specific advocacy role which they have been asked to assume in response to the particular needs of a protégé, and the nature of support they can expect from the Citizen Advocacy office. Orientation is thus intended to prepare – instead of "skill-up" – citizen advocates for their role, laying the foundation for hopefully enduring and effective protégé/advocate relationships.

Moreover, once the match is established, the Citizen Advocacy office maintains regular contact with advocates, which provides the opportunity to readily identify, and respond to, the need for specific forms of support. Support to advocates may be moral or practical (e.g. encouragement or reassurance in the face of setbacks; discussion of, or guidance in pursuing options, strategies; provision of, or suggestions in accessing information, resources; etc.). A particular form of support is linkage to advocate associates with relevant backgrounds, recruited by the Citizen Advocacy office, who voluntarily advise advocates on technical matters pertaining to their advocacy relationship (e.g. offering informed advice on the law, medicine, various clinical services, guardianship and administration). Access to advocate associates – whose experience, knowledge and skills constitute a reservoir of useful information – easily refutes the contention that, particularly in regard to issues which have a technical dimension, citizen advocates will be "out of their depth." As well, citizen advocates are encouraged – but not obliged – to attend periodic information sessions, arranged by the Citizen Advocacy office, the themes of which are intended to raise advocates' level of knowledge about matters which can, or do, affect their protégés.

*Mitchel Peters*

## Pumpkins are pumpkins, aren't they?

Pumpkins are pumpkins aren't they? Well maybe not. After a recent event I've had to rethink how I perceive them. At least one of the ones I've been given was solid gold. At least that was what it was worth to me. You see, I helped out at a haven for men who are down on their luck and about 18 months ago I noticed a man who kept himself apart from the rest. When he had money he had drunk it and seemed to have lost interest in living. Every Tuesday morning when I went in I would look him up and stop for a few words and every so often I would slip him a few extra bikkies to have with his morning tea.

One morning when he seemed a bit more receptive than usual, I handed him the bikkies openly and appointed him my official cookie taster. Of course the other men paid us out severely but it got a grin out of him. After that I started to notice little improvements. He started shaving on Tuesday mornings and even combed his hair. Eventually he got himself a cat. I like cats too, so now when we meet we have something in common to talk about.

Back to the pumpkin. Now that he has a flat he also has a neighbour with whom he has made friends and someone has given him a second hand bike. Apparently his neighbour likes gardening and planted a pumpkin vine which produced several fine healthy pumpkins. Being a nice kind person he gave two of them to my friend who promptly put one of them in a shopping bag, hopped on his bike and brought it down for me. He was so happy to have something to give me and I was thrilled that when he had something to give (probably for the first time in his life) that he saw fit to give it to ME! Pumpkins aren't just pumpkins mate!

They can also be a gift from the heart and therefore worth much more than gold.

By Eileen Loth

## Website of Interest

This website is designed to resource people through articles, videos and ideas drawn from the Community Resource Unit.

It has lots of interesting content for people with disability, their families, friends and those people that support them— both paid or unpaid!

This resource will may be helpful to people as they prepare for the role out of the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS).

The website contains 6 pages that cover the following Topics:

- The good life
- Getting started
- Including others
- The role of the NDIS
- Funded Services and Support
- Blocks and barriers

Coming soon:

- Keeping going
- The bigger picture

[WWW.thegoodlife.cru.org.au](http://WWW.thegoodlife.cru.org.au)

### **Thank you for your financial membership and donations.**

Your membership and donations demonstrates your support for the aims and objectives of this program, as articulated in the constitution. Namely, to facilitate the establishment of and to support the development of freely given relationships between people with disabilities who are vulnerable, and competent, principles and valued citizens in the community.

Membership entitles you to vote at all general meetings of the association, details of which you will be notified as they occur. Newsletters and notices of functions and fundraising activities will also be forwarded to you.

We would also advise you that Sunshine Coast Citizen Advocacy has been accepted as a Deductible Gift Recipient, any donations (over \$2.00) you may wish to make in the future will be tax deductible.

Should you wish to make contact with any staff or board of management at any time please phone the office.

Again we appreciate your support for the aims and objectives of the program.

If you know of someone that would be interested in becoming a financial member or a potential advocate please call the office for further information on 54422524.

### **Office resources of interest**

#### **BOOKS**

- From behind the Piano – The building of Judith Snow's Unique Circle of Friends
- Observing, Recording, and Addressing personal Physical Appearance by means of the Appear Tool
- Suppression Stories
- A guideline on protecting the health and lives of patients in Hospitals – especially if the patient is a member of a societally devalued class
- Oliver Twist has asked for me – The politics and practice of getting justice for people with disabilities
- Duty of Care – Who's responsible?
- Social Role Valorization – Advanced issues in SRV Theory
- A brief Introduction to SRV – WW
- Public Policy Private Lives
- Talking about A series of Community Conversations
- The Homes West Experience – steps to independent living for adults with a disability
- One person at a time – How one agency changed from Group to Individualised services
- The Forgotten Generation
- The Inclusion Papers – Strategies to make inclusion work
- Christmas in Purgatory
- On being the change we want to see – Volume 3
- Standing by me – stories of Citizen Advocacy

#### **DVD's**

- Living a good life
- Circles of Support
- A history of human services, Universal Lessons, and Future implications
- Advocacy for People with Disability

**Please note:** If anyone would like to view Sunshine Coast Citizen Advocacy policies and/or procedures we will be more than happy to supply copies to you.

**Sunshine Coast Citizen  
Advocacy**

Is funded by the Department of Social Services Families and Communities Team

The program primarily operates in and around Maroochydore, Nambour, Caloundra, Mooloolaba, Buderim, Coolum Noosa and the Hinterland areas.

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Rachel Irvine

Your motivation to help people in need should not be out of obligation  
Or because you have money

But because they are your fellow man