

## Help and Tips for being an Effective Advocate

### KEEPING THE ENTHUSIASM GOING

While it is a challenge to become involved in advocacy activities as an individual, or as part of a group, it is perhaps even more challenging to keep the original enthusiasm and momentum going indefinitely. Self motivation is required as a general rule and it is also very useful to engage a 'buddy' who could be a fellow consumer, carer or a member of the organisation you are involved in.

#### Staying motivated

One of the best ways to keep the momentum going is to make sure that you are getting satisfaction and enjoyment from your involvement. Some of your motivating factors may be:

- Satisfaction from 'being involved'.
- Enjoyment from being with like-minded people.
- Pride in having made a real contribution to the wellbeing of people with a mental illness and people who care for them.
- Doing work that is valued by others.
- A sense of 'belonging'.

#### Maintain your motivation

Make sure there is a real purpose behind the meetings or activities you are involved in. Members of groups feel valued when they are acknowledged and genuinely listened to. But be careful not to overwhelm yourself, take stock of personal stress and have time out if needed.

## Keep things in perspective

In carrying out self-advocacy activities it's very easy to think that nothing much is improving.

While we all want to see visible results from any work we put effort into, positive change often takes a long time to occur. This is especially so in relation to community attitudes and cultures of large organisations. It is a good idea to occasionally sit back and have a look at what has been achieved generally. You may wish to do this regularly, as a strategy to maintain momentum and retain morale.

## Acknowledging the reality

The reality of working in mental health advocacy is that there is often a lot of work to be done by a few people. We often feel there are barriers or obstacles in the way. Sure there are many rewards as well but, unless the reality is acknowledged, the rewards may not seem significant.

The reality is also that all people make mistakes except those who don't do anything! Very little is achieved without some risk-taking, and with risk-taking comes mistakes. We are all encouraged to take risks, be allowed to make mistakes and learn from our mistakes.

## Achieving and celebrating success

Be realistic about your achievements, keep things in perspective. Reward yourself for your achievements.

Perhaps the best way to keep enthusiasm going is to achieve some successes along the way. The key to achieving success is to start off with small expectations, set your first objectives and celebrate your wins. This will bring encouragement and hope.

## **Acknowledgement**

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## **Disclaimer**

The Network acknowledges the source of material for this resource as *The Kit, the advocacy we choose to do. A resource kit for consumers of mental health services and family carers* published by the Australian Government in June 1998. While the Network has taken care in the development of the content, it is not responsible for any action taken in response to it. Consumers of the resource are advised to seek help from their GP, mental health support worker or Lifeline if they are distressed by the contents.

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