

4.6 – Core Characteristic: Integrating Service and Advocacy

The last HCH core characteristic in Module 4 is ‘integrating service and advocacy.’ In this module, you will learn how HCH defines the terms *advocacy* and *policy*, explore the HCH theory of integrating service and advocacy, and hear examples of policy and advocacy activities in HCH.

What is advocacy?

From *vocare*: “to call.”

1. A person who pleads another's, or one's own, cause
2. A person who speaks or writes in support of something



The word *advocacy* comes from the Latin word *vocare*, which means “to call.” Webster includes two definitions: A person who pleads another’s, or one’s own, cause, and A person who speaks or writes in support of something.

Advocates call for justice, fairness, equality, more or less of something. They explain, translate, convince, argue, articulate, remind and direct change in thought, policy and action.

Examples

- **Call a shelter** on behalf of a client
- **Ask a hospital social worker** to develop a more realistic plan
- **Call the Department of Social Services** to assist with a case
- **Explain to a friend** the realities of poverty and homelessness

Employees of HCH projects have long advocated on behalf of individual clients. You are in fact "doing" advocacy whenever you:

Call a shelter to explain why a client's mental illness should not keep her from having a place to stay for the evening;

Ask that a hospital social worker to develop a plan that is more attentive to the needs of your elderly and disabled client;

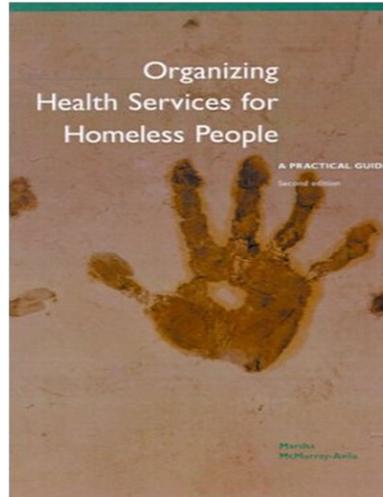
Call the Department of Social Services to "straighten out" a client's assistance case; or

Explain to a friend the realities of poverty and homelessness.

What is advocacy in HCH?

"Advocacy is the educational process through which data, experiences, and insight are shared with those who craft public policy so that they may make informed decisions."

■ McMurray-Avila



In her book, *Organizing Health Services for Homeless People*, Marsha McMurray-Avila provides a definition of advocacy certainly more relevant for HCH projects:

"Advocacy is the *educational* process through which data, *experiences*, and insight are shared with those who craft *public policy* so that they may make informed decisions."

This definition of advocacy for HCH introduces an additional term: policy.

HCH projects work intimately with individuals, advocate on their behalf, collect the information from hundreds and thousands of individual clients and then share that information with those who craft public policy. All of our individual advocacy work contains relevant questions and issues for policy advocacy.

What is Policy?

1. Policy is Written
 2. Policy is Approved by Legitimate Authority
 3. Policy is a Guide to for Further Action
- Example
 - Federal minimum wage = \$7.25/hr
 - Employers must pay &7.25/hr or pay fines, face restrictions, etc.
 - “Living wage” advocates favor a policy shift away from “minimum wage”

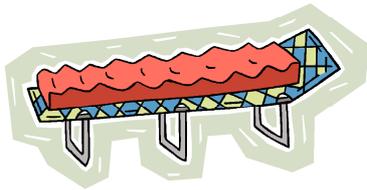
Policies have three things in common: Policy is written, policy is approved by a legitimate authority, and policy is a guide for further action.

For example, the federal government has set the policy that there is a minimum amount that all workers should earn per hour. This is called a "minimum wage" and we're all familiar with it. Laws and regulations then set that amount and outline the consequences one faces for not following the policy.

Advocates for a "living wage" favor a policy shift from a "minimum wage" to a "living wage" which guarantees that a worker earns enough to satisfy basic human needs of housing, food, and clothing.

From individual advocacy to policy advocacy

- "If only there were enough shelter beds, Mr. X would have a place to stay tonight!" she says.



- Encourage the city to increase the number of shelter beds



In the midst of individual advocacy, HCH projects discover the need to also engage in policy advocacy. With policy advocacy, we recognize that if the systems were in place to provide adequate services, an individual – and others like him or her - wouldn't be in a certain situation.

Consider this example: An HCH Nurse Practitioner calls the YMCA and several missions to find shelter for a client. She is advocating that he be given a shelter bed for the night. She is unsuccessful and tries again the next day. This is an example of individual advocacy. *"If only there were enough shelter beds, Mr. X would have a place to stay tonight!"* she says.

Working to find a place for Mr. X. is indeed important, and it makes the HCH nurse aware that this isn't just a problem for Mr. X, but also a problem for Mr. &, Ms. Z, and Ms. Z's children.

By engaging in advocacy to encourage the city to increase the number of shelter beds, the HCH nurse can bring about improved and increased services for Mr. X, Mr. Y, Ms. Z and the many others in need of shelter.

Who Should "Do Advocacy"?



Providers
Administrative staff
Office staff
Volunteers
Consumers

Policy makers want to hear from YOU.

The question of who should do HCH advocacy work is important. Remember, when HCH began, workers expected to end homelessness. They quickly learned that ending homeless meant being able to advocate for both individual clients and also for policy changes that would decrease and eventually end homelessness. HCH that all members should integrate their service with advocacy work: providers, administrative staff, office staff, volunteers, and consumers. Policy makers want to hear from the people who experience the effects of poverty and homelessness first-hand.

Benefits of Integrating Service and Advocacy

For Staff

- Adds credibility
- Combats staff burn-out

For Consumers

- Adds even *more* credibility
- Facilitates recovery
- Empowers people

Involving direct service staff in advocacy activities adds weight and credibility to the positions being presented, and helps counteract burn-out in staff.

Working with people who are homeless can be incredibly frustrating for staff when the resources needed are beyond the control of both staff and clients. Advocacy can offer staff an opportunity to channel their frustration into positive energy for making changes in the system and creating or maintaining necessary resources.

Involving persons experiencing homelessness in advocacy efforts can add even more credibility, and while sometimes difficult to orchestrate, can be an facilitate the recovery process and empower all involved.

- Start with clients
- Be deliberate about advocacy
- Join local, state, or national groups
- Subscribe to the HCH *Mobilizer*

Start with your clients. Practice identifying their needs and advocating to help them meet those needs by helping them get enough food, appropriate shelter, and any programs or services they need and are entitled to.

Be deliberate about addressing big-pictures issues in HCH meeting agenda, job descriptions and work plans.

Join local, state, or national homeless coalitions, health care/welfare coalitions, and primary care associations. (See other sections of this manual for a list of organizations).

Subscribe to the HCH *Mobilizer* or similar advocacy publication. These newsletters provide updates and calls-to-action. Keep a record of your advocacy activities, and let groups know when you are calling or acting on behalf of particular movements.