

ADVOCACY

Definition: The arena of advocacy falls into two interrelated domains. The Youth Service Bureau is challenged to advocate on both an individual and systems level. For both domains, advocacy means to speak in favor of, recommend. It is characterized by a person who argues for the cause of another; a supporter or defender. A person who pleads on another's behalf and is an active supporter of a cause, idea, or policy.

Advocacy at the local level may include speaking on behalf of a child in order to procure needed services. This may occur at planning and placement team (PPT) meetings, pre-sentence investigation hearings, juvenile court and even within the child's own family. At a systems level, the Youth Service Bureau may advocate locally for an enhanced case management system or to change environmental variables which impact the positive development of young people. Statewide advocacy efforts could be directed toward action which enacts policies beneficial to youth and family issues.

Skills: Effective Advocacy relies on consummate diplomacy and a full awareness of the total context of advocacy efforts. Advocates must possess a clear understanding of all issues pertinent to a particular advocacy issue. They must be able to succinctly articulate the main issues pertinent to a particular area in an informative rather than an emotional manner. Advocacy relies on an understanding of the complex systems within which the advocacy occurs. Advocacy efforts are as effective as the information supplied, the credibility of the person/group doing the advocacy, and that person/group's ability to influence and change the attitudes of other people and institutions.

There exists significant potential within local communities for a dramatic clash in one's ability to conduct individual and systems advocacy simultaneously. No greater opportunity exists for this to occur than during planning and placement team meetings. When a Youth Service Bureau strongly advocates on behalf of a student, (in order to procure needed services which requires a response from the school system), the school system may be more reluctant and resistant to participate with the Youth Service Bureau when the Bureau advocates for some systems change, (which also requires a response from the school). In this illustration, the individual advocacy may undermine the ability of the Youth Service Bureau to

conduct system advocacy. This potential for conflict requires a delicate balance and recognizes that you may win a small victory when you conduct intensive individual advocacy but may lose the larger systems advocacy effectiveness.