



Harm reduction for local drug policies

Getting Your Act Together -
Mobilizing Support Through
Advocacy

Advocacy

- To publicly recommend or support
- Stems from Latin *advocare* = call to (from *ad-* 'to' + *vocare* 'to call')
- Making the case for a particular cause (convince, educate, explain, persuade, support, etc.)
 - Act in a way that gets „decision makers“ (anyone in the position to change policy, making laws or proposals) to support that cause as well
 - Something specific must change – persuading other people that something is wrong and must be fixed
 - Targets decision makers and opinion leaders
 - Has a specific goal
 - Gets others involved

Advocacy Happens Everywhere

- We already advocate (convince, educate, explain, persuade, support, etc.) before a variety of audiences, including:
- **Funders:** we persuade them to invest in our ideas and programs
- **Policy /Decision makers:** we try to convince them of policy reform
- **Public:** we educate them about needs and rights of PWUD

Lobbying

- Seeks to influence (a legislator) on an issue
- From medieval Latin *lobia*, *lobium* 'covered walk, portico'.
- The verb sense derives from the practice of frequenting the lobby of a house of legislature to influence its members into supporting a cause

Challenges for HR programs

- Some policies infringe on human rights and drive users underground and out of reach
- lack of sustained funding and a tendency towards project-based funding with no assurance of continuity.
- Harm reduction messages must be constantly repeated in order to get through to those opposing them.
- “Not in my back yard” (NIMBY) actions by neighbourhood groups make it difficult to site programs and services.
- Police opposition to programs sometimes borders on political repression.

Lessons Learned – what works?

Community buy-in strategies

- Build broad coalitions of community members, services, researchers and potential partner organisations
- Ensure that logistics are well worked out before launching a program
- Court the media and educate them about what you are doing and why, before a program is launched
- Establish good working relationships with key police staff and politicians
- Anticipate (or assess) community concerns and address them

Lessons Learned – what works?

Involvement of community members with drug-use experience

- Capitalize on their experiential understanding and „street smarts“.
- Include them in program planning, delivery and evaluation.
- They can be advocates within their own community,
- They can act as spokespersons to the broader community, help counter misinformation about drugs and the people who use them.
- Through involvement they will develop commitment to the program.

Lessons Learned – what works?

Clear profile

- Deliver services close to clients; collaborate with other agencies to ensure continuity of service
- Develop a network of supporters and spokespeople.
- Seek out and hire staff with experiential knowledge and pair seasoned workers and volunteers with new ones
- Employ a multidisciplinary approach and ensure that all collaborating disciplines buy into it.
- Decide on your approach and portfolio – this is what you stand for towards your staff, the community, donors, policy makers *and* the clients

Lessons Learned – what works?

Involve in community-based research

- Contribute to the body of evidence on the efficacy of harm reduction programs and practices.
- Be selective in the research you get involved in and ensure that it will be used in a way which benefits both your clients and program.
- The collection of data on the use of services and on the clientele will prove invaluable when applying for funding, evaluating programs, and adapting to changing trends.
- It is also a useful tool in advocacy

Lessons Learned – what works?

Use patience and perseverance

- Often a community's fears are worse than the reality and, after services have been open for a while, the fears subside.
- Identify your allies and support them.
- Be strategic and creative.
- Think outside the box.
- Celebrate successes, even small ones.
- **DON'T GIVE UP!**

Weight and Leverage Matter

- **See-saw:** the side with the greatest weight goes down while the lighter side can flip up and fly off
- **Tug-of-War:** the side with the greatest weight and best leverage usually wins
- Enhance your strength and weight through allies – and look for those who sit at the longer side of the lever or have more weight in the community/towards decision makers



Source: council of nonprofits : <http://www.councilofnonprofits.org/nonprofit-advocacy/power-knowledge/nonprofit-advocacy-easy>

Sharing

What works or does not work in
your organisation?