



Nova Scotia
Association for
Community Living

Diversity includes.

ADVOCACY GUIDE

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ADVOCACY

This toolkit is intended to assist families, self-advocates and their friends and supporters, to access their living, working and leisure choices and to take their rightful place in the communities of Nova Scotia. It may be used as a guide to individual advocacy or group advocacy.

“Change happens when a group of people who have the same goals in mind work together in making their goals a reality” (*Coming together...to create change, A National Family Leadership Series, CACL*)

People First provides the following definitions:

Advocacy: Advocacy is helping a person or a group of people to stand up for their rights and get what they need - helping or supporting someone to make their own choices.

Self-Advocacy: Self -advocacy is knowing your rights and speaking for yourself to get what you need or want.

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WHERE TO BEGIN?

Preparation is essential. A well defined plan will guide you step by step and reduce unnecessary work and frustration. A template to help you build an advocacy plan is included – see Attachment A.

Advocacy planning for an individual: A Person-centred plan is a very helpful tool. There are several types of planning methods, some of which are PATH, MAPS, Circles of Support, Essential Lifestyle Planning, Personal Futures Planning, you may want to use. No matter which method you use, your personal plan will help you identify much of the information you will need to develop an advocacy plan.

Advocacy planning for a group: Develop a common agreement and understanding of the goal(s), clearly define what you want and confirm that the group agree with the goal and description. This step may take a little time but will be a valuable investment as you move forward. Disagreement or inconsistent messages later may delay or prevent the achievement of the group's goal.

You may find there are several things you need or want and the planning will also help to set priorities.

Talk to others who have achieved the same or similar goal(s), have accessed a needed support, service or funding. Ask them how they went about achieving their goal, who they spoke with, who helped them, things they learned and things they wouldn't do again.

The advocacy of parents and self-advocates has resulted in the positive and inclusive supports available today. They have been achieved with a lot of hard work and hard fought battles so these parents and self-advocates have a lot to share. The Community Living Association federation in Canada and Nova Scotia is built on their foundation and continues to support families to build and strengthen full inclusion in society for individuals with intellectual disabilities. (refer to the Resource List appended for contact information)

IDENTIFY YOUR GOAL – WHAT DO YOU NEED/WANT?

Clearly state the goal: what, where, when, with whom, by whom, and what else?

A few examples of individual goals:

	EDUCATION	HOUSING	RESPITE	LEISURE
WHAT	Full inclusion in class with peers	Supported living in a small home	Funding to purchase in-home respite for one weekend per month	Participation in Saturday morning soccer program
WHERE	Home community school	Home/local community	In our home	Local community centre
WHEN	Beginning of school year	Within one year	To begin within three months	Saturday mornings for three months
WITH WHOM	Teaching Assistant for academic assistance (math and reading)	With a peer or friend who is mutually chosen who also requires supported living		Peers participating in soccer program
BY WHOM	Local School Board	Name of desired support provider Funding – Community Services of Nova Scotia (identify amount required)	Name of Respite Provider (if known), or profile of a potential Respite Provider	Parents will transport and be present with other parents during practices and games Coach and assistant who will take a little extra time to explain/coach
WHAT ELSE	Pairing with peer Buddy for bus	Identify any additional supports and/or funds required	Flexibility of scheduling	

WHAT IS ALREADY IN PLACE?

Start from a positive place.

There may be conditions that need to be in place to access or acquire the supports/services/funding you are requesting and being able to clearly identify them will demonstrate your knowledge and preparation. It will allow discussions/meetings to focus on the goal.

Clearly identify the following as they relate to your current life and goal:

- Strengths
- Achievements
- Community Involvement
- Supports in place - be sure to start with and include the supports naturally occurring from family, friends, your neighbours, your faith community, and any others from your community at large.

WHO/WHAT ARE THE RESOURCES YOU ALREADY HAVE?

Outline the resources that are already in place that will contribute to achieving your goal.

Who are the people who will be part of the solution, include names and the commitments they have made.

Identify the barriers/issues that prevent the existing resources from meeting the need or achieving the goal.

WHAT IS STILL NEEDED?

Propose the solution.

Be clear and specific – look back at your goal and if the request is related to funding, try to estimate the funds needed.

Include how you will contribute to achieving the solution.

WHO/WHAT CAN PROVIDE IT?

Identify the key decision-makers:

- Identify the department, division, provincial department, or local authority with the responsibility for the support/service you are seeking.
- Identify who to approach first: is the teacher, care coordinator, coach able to make the decision and commit to the solution? If not, then identify the person who does the authority to make the decision or take the solution forward for a decision.
- Identify who to approach if the first contact cannot make the decision: the school principal, the department division supervisor, the recreation coordinator, the local authority supervisor (this will allow you to quickly follow-up from your initial contact)

WHO/WHAT CAN HELP YOU ACCESS IT?

Investigate the policies and regulations related to your goal – provincial departments, municipal governments, school boards and other local authorities will all have them. If they are not available on-line then call and ask for them to be sent to you.

Include a reference to the related policy/regulation/guideline in your plan. If the support/service/funding you are seeking is not presently included in the existing policies and guidelines, identify why the existing supports/services do not meet your needs.

Identify other advocates and organizations who offer information and assistance.

PREPARING FOR THE MEETING

Finalize your plan. Ask someone you know and trust, but who is not too familiar with the situation, to listen to your presentation or read your written submission and give you feedback about whether it is clear and complete, if they understand the issue, the solution proposed and the rationale.

Contact the appropriate person and make an appointment to meet. Be brief if asked for the purpose of the meeting – simply state you wish to discuss the support or issue. Save your plan and presentation for the meeting. If the appropriate person is not available leave a message asking for the meeting. If leaving the message with a receptionist ask when the person will be in to receive the message.

The issue is important to you and you will naturally be emotional about it. It may be helpful to practice your presentation with a friend or someone you trust. Ask them for feedback – and to ask you questions or challenge you as you might expect in the meeting.

Also time yourself, it will be important to ensure you can get through your information in a timely way, and to allow for questions/discussion and then to identify next steps within the timeframe of the meeting.

Write out the main points of your plan in a letter to the person you are meeting with. You can leave this with them as an official record of your issue and request.

Prepare an agenda for yourself with the key points you wish to make, you can check them off as you proceed through your meeting.

THE MEETING

Once introductions have been completed, explain that you have developed a Plan to address your issue and would like to present it to lay a foundation for mutual problem solving. Be calm, polite and persist through your information.

Listen carefully to their questions and response.

Hopefully their response will be to agree and commit to the request. Confirm the commitment and timeline.

Note any information they need to proceed and commit to provide it if you can. If the information they need to make a decision must come from within their office or department, ask when they will be able to get that information, make a note of the timeline and how they will get back to you, in person or in writing.

If they agree that you have the right to access the support/service but note that the resources or funding is not presently available, ask them when they expect it to be available. If the answer is not within a reasonable and acceptable timeframe, ask who and how you can assist them to access additional resources. Note the details for follow-up.

If your request is denied at the initial meeting, ask for the rationale and whether an additional meeting with someone with wider decision-making authority can be arranged. It may take more than one meeting with more than one person to get the decision you desire. Be persistent. But remember this person may have limited decision-making authority, you may need to go further.

If the denial is confirmed at the initial or subsequent meetings, ask that the decision be provided in writing with the reason for the denial, along with information regarding the Appeal process, the timelines for appeal, and to whom it should be directed. Ask when you will receive the original decision in writing.

THE APPEAL

Most if not all government or government funded departments/organization will have an appeal process.

Review the requirements for the appeal carefully, noting any deadlines.

Apply for the appeal, include any requested supporting documentation to your request/proposed solution, and continue to build your file. Seek out other recipients of the supports/services, talk to them, find out the details of how they were able to access the resources. You may also want to get information a public body has about you or your family member – request it from the government/organization representative you are speaking with, if the initial request is denied, you may want to make an Application for Access to a Record (Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act). Present it simply as wanting to have the same information government has so everyone is operating on the same basis.

Refine your plan and presentation to meet any questions or suggestion you may have received in the response.

Present your case to the appeal. If successful, share your experience with others who may be seeking the same or similar supports/services.

If you are again denied, ask for a written response with the rationale for the denial. Provide any follow-up required to alter the decision.

If no follow-up is requested, your next steps will be to contact the appropriate Ombudsmen, if available, or to contact your local MLA. Present your case to them and ask for any assistance they can offer to move your case forward or advice on how to advocate for change to the current policy.

At this point, you will need to revisit your plan and begin one to effect a policy change.

KEEP RECORDS

Keep a journal or log of all contacts. (see Attachment B)

Keep a file of all correspondence.

Note the date of receipt on all correspondence, as the date the correspondence was written may differ significantly, and the timelines may be important in any appeal process.

Also note the date you sent correspondence and in some instance sending correspondence with a delivery receipt may be worth the small additional cost.

A well planned Advocacy Plan can bring success. It may take more time than seems reasonable. Be patient and persistent. Draw on the knowledge and experience of others who have been successful and share the same values.

While this guide is focussed on advocacy for an individual the same format and planning can be used for group advocacy to address policy and procedural changes.

Attachment A

THE ADVOCACY PLAN

<p>THE GOAL</p> <p>Be specific – what, where, when, with whom, by whom, and what else?</p>	
<p>WHAT IS ALREADY IN PLACE?</p> <p>Strengths, Achievements, Community Involvement, Supports in Place (naturally occurring and paid supports)</p>	
<p>WHO/WHAT ARE THE RESOURCES ALREADY IN PLACE?</p>	
<p>WHAT IS STILL NEEDED?</p> <p>Propose the solution!</p>	
<p>WHO/WHAT CAN PROVIDE IT?</p> <p>Go to the right source</p>	
<p>WHO/WHAT CAN HELP YOU ACCESS IT?</p> <p>Who are your allies?</p>	

Attachment B

CONTACT LOG

DATE:

TIME:

PERSON CALLED OR CALLING:

TELEPHONE NUMBER:

POSITION/TITLE:

If no answer, message left: Yes No

If yes, with whom:

Voicemail: Yes No

SUMMARY OF CONVERSATION:

NEXT STEPS:

TIMELINE/DATES:

RESOURCE LIST

Nova Scotia Association for Community Living	www.nsacl.ca
Lessons for Champions	www.youtube.com/nsacl
Disabled Persons Commission of NS	www.gov.ns.ca/disa
Human Rights Commission of NS	www.humanrights.gov.ns.ca
Freedom of Information & Protection Act	www.gov.ns.ca/just/IAP
Government of Nova Scotia	www.gov.ns.ca
Department of Community Services (NS)	www.gov.ns.ca/coms/disabilities/index.html
School Boards of Nova Scotia	www.ednet.ns.ca/contact/schools.shtml
Municipalities of Nova Scotia	www.municipalities.com
Early Intervention in Nova Scotia	www.earlyintervention.net
Nova Scotia Residential Agency Assn.	www.nsraa.ca
People First of Nova Scotia	www.users.eastlink.ca/~pfns
Canadian Association for Community Living	www.cacl.ca
National Community Inclusion Initiative	www.communityinclusion.ca
Inclusive Education Canada	www.inclusiveeducation.ca
People First of Canada	www.peoplefirstofcanada.ca
Disability Tax Credit	www.cra.gc.ca
Registered Disability Savings Plan	www.rdsp.com
Access 2 Entertainment	www.access2.ca
Disability Travel Card	www.smd.mb.ca
Inclusion International	www.inclusion-international.org
UN Convention on the Rights Of Persons with Disabilities	www.un.org/disabilities