

HOMELESSNESS ADVOCACY

#3 of 3 Slide Decks Prepared for Certificate in Working
with Homeless Populations

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Overview

- Grassroots advocacy
- Direct action
- Rights-based advocacy
- Government-to-government advocacy
- Advocacy within Parliament
- Professionalized advocacy
- Policy-based advocacy

What is advocacy?

Definition

- For the purpose of today's presentation, I'll define it as collective effort to bring about changes to legislation, regulations or policies.

Grassroots Advocacy

Definition: Run on a shoestring budget. Informal, internal working relationships. Strong volunteer component.

Examples:

- Calgary: Client Action Committee (Calgary Homeless Foundation)
- Vancouver: Carnegie Community Action Project
- Toronto: Housing Action Now
- Montreal: Front d'action populaire en réaménagement urbain (FRAPRU)
- Montreal: Réseau d'aide aux personnes seules et itinérantes de Montréal (RAPSIM)

Direct Action

- Definition: Very willing and capable of being disruptive (i.e. sit-ins, protest, civil disobedience). Little effort made to charm or cajole their audience. Such tactics often receive a considerable amount of media attention.

Examples:

- CLAC-Montréal
- Ontario Coalition Against Poverty

Direction Action (cont'd)



Rights-Based Advocacy

- Definition: Main argument is that individuals should receive a social benefit because it's their legal right to have it. Among other things, this means challenging interpretations of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms and international law.

Examples:

- Canada Without Poverty
- The Right to Housing Coalition (organized by the Advocacy Centre for Tenants Ontario)

Government-to-Government Advocacy

- Definition: This is self-explanatory

Examples:

- Federation of Canadian Municipalities
- Federal-Provincial-Territorial Ministers' Forum on Housing
- Assembly of First Nations

Advocacy within Parliament

- Definition: This is self-explanatory.

Examples:

- Question Period
- Debates
- Committee work
- Private Member's bills

Professionalized Advocacy

- Frequent meetings with elected officials—sometimes elected officials even seek out the group in question.
- Such groups typically have multiple paid staff and sufficient resources to plan large events (such as conferences), hire consultants, commission research and produce web-based resources.
- Such organizations often provide services to their members (e.g. webinars, trainings).

Professionalized Advocacy (cont'd)

- Also, big emphasis on positive messaging with government (i.e. praising good behaviour, positive reinforcement). For example, they might emphasize how exciting and innovative Housing First is, or they might emphasize how many people *have* been housed recently.
- They might also emphasize what the homeless sector can do better (not just what senior orders of government can do better).

Professionalized Advocacy (cont'd)

Examples:

- Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness
- Canadian Housing and Renewal Association
- Housing Partnership Canada
- Ontario Non-Profit Housing Association

Policy-Based Advocacy

- Definition: A bunch of dorks like myself use a specific policy or funding pitch to galvanize attention and lobby government.

Examples:

- 1% Solution
- Alternative Federal Budget

Glass half-full vs glass
half-empty

Change in tone

- Beginning in the mid-2000s, I observed a change in tone in terms of how many homelessness advocates began making their cases to senior orders of government in Canada.
- Suddenly, advocates talked about what could be done rather than what wasn't being done. This approach was especially popular among those practising the professionalized approach; it has *not* been popular within the direct action movement.

Change in tone (cont'd)

“By saying the problem keeps getting worse, we weren’t getting resources. By focusing on solutions, we got more resources.”

— Nan Roman

Ex's Glass Half Empty Messages

- Waiting lists for social housing are very long!
- Social assistance benefit levels are too low!
- Not enough affordable housing is being created!

Ex's of Glass Half Full Messages

- Let's have a "plan to end homelessness!"
- Let's start doing Housing First!
- Let's keep tabs on how many homeless persons are placed into housing each month!
- Let's start using a new kind of wait list!
- Let's end veterans' homelessness!

Room for all approaches

- There's no inherent reason why all of these approaches can't co-exist.
- Not only do they not need to compete; they can actually complement and reinforce each other.
- I would argue, for example, that direct action approaches 'create space' for professionalized approaches.
- What's more, some people and groups may choose to practise a variety of these approaches.

A Great Documentary

- Shelter from the Storm
- URL: <http://hotdocslibrary.ca/en/detail.cfm?filmId=1662>
- Year: 2001
- 60 min's

Thank You