

The mission of the Independent Living Centre of Waterloo Region is centered around independence, integration, and choices for persons with disabilities. While our mandate is to work with individuals, we are often faced with societal, systemic, or political circumstances that have a negative impact on the disabled community. This policy helps to clarify roles in the broad area known as advocacy.

Definitions follow for the three basic forms of advocacy and the position of the organization, including the roles of board and staff:

- self advocacy
- individual advocacy
- systemic advocacy

SELF ADVOCACY

DEFINITION

Speaking or acting on behalf of oneself.

OBJECTIVE

To further or promote one's own individual interests or grievances.

ADVANTAGES

- Speaking up for yourself develops pride, confidence, courage, patience and persistence.
- Only you know what you need or want; if others speak for you, they could misrepresent your interests.
- People take you more seriously if you speak yourself; if others speak for you, people may think that you are unable to speak for yourself.
- Speaking up for yourself promotes your own interests but, in the end, could also help someone else who is experiencing the same problem.

DISADVANTAGES

- Little support from others.
- Working by oneself may become difficult and discouraging.
- Seldom produces social change beyond the individual grievance.

THE POSITION OF ILCWR

ORGANIZATIONAL PHILOSOPHY

Increased control in a person's life benefits the individual through the satisfaction of self-accomplishment and the resulting increase in self-esteem. ILCWR encourages individuals to take charge of their lives and to self-advocate.

ROLE OF BOARD

Through setting policy, the board will encourage self advocacy with individuals and throughout the community.

ROLE OF STAFF

Staff will encourage and support consumers in their efforts to overcome barriers, solve grievances, or deal with issues affecting their independence.

INDIVIDUAL ADVOCACY

DEFINITION

A process whereby one person works with and represents the interests of another individual.

OBJECTIVES

- To help persons with disabilities to remove barriers to independence and to obtain what is rightfully theirs.
- To prepare consumers to advocate on their own behalf, while being ready to provide assistance should it be requested. (i.e. to inform and support, not to tell them what to do).
- To develop a relationship based on respect and acceptance.

ADVANTAGES

- Teaches the individual new skills (e.g. managing, coordinating, negotiating) and assists them in becoming self-advocates.
- Has the potential for going beyond what is routinely done, through new ideas and thoughts from someone not directly affected.
- Provides a spokesperson for those who are unable to speak for themselves.

DISADVANTAGES

- Focuses only on individual need; rarely produces systemic change.
- Possible conflict of interest (if advocate is an employee of a service provider).

THE POSITION OF ILCWR

ORGANIZATIONAL PHILOSOPHY

ILCWR supports the self-determination of persons with disabilities, and will provide programs and services to assist individuals to develop skills that will enable them to participate fully in the community.

ROLE OF BOARD

The board will support the development of programs and services that assist or encourage individuals to develop self advocacy skills. It will also ensure that these programs are making a difference in people's lives by mandating regular reviews of program outcomes.

ROLE OF STAFF

Staff will be supportive of self-advocates and will provide opportunities and options for consumers to determine their independence. This could include skills training in independent living, self advocacy or empowerment. As a last resort, staff will speak *on behalf* of an individual, but only at the direction of the consumer.

COLLECTIVE OR SYSTEMIC ADVOCACY**DEFINITION**

A (usually) voluntary group concerned with issues and common problems, rather than individual grievances.

OBJECTIVE

To promote the needs and defend the rights of the group (and/or those it represents).

ADVANTAGES

- Can lead to changes in law, policies, procedures or practices.
- Awareness and credibility exist when the group consists of consumers, family members, and friends directly affected by existing social conditions.
- Increased effectiveness when collaborating with other groups affected by the same issue.
- Usually free from conflict of interest.

THE POSITION OF ILCWR**ORGANIZATIONAL PHILOSOPHY**

ILCWR believes that its mandate is to serve the individual's quest for independence and will focus its resources to that end.

ILCWR acknowledges the need for advocacy organizations. It recognizes that structures in society need improving and that systemic advocacy initiatives are important instruments of change.

As part of its community education stream, ILCWR will continue to inform and educate the community of individuals, organizations and government about disability issues.

ROLE OF BOARD

The board should keep itself aware of systemic changes locally, provincially and nationally and how these changes might affect the ability of ILCWR to realize its vision through regular environmental scans and participation in community awareness events. In their dealings with

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other organizations or in the community in general, individual board members are expected to promote the rights of persons with disabilities.

ROLE OF STAFF

Situations may arise when political or other changes in the environment may inhibit the organization's ability to fulfill its mission. In these instances ILCWR might participate, under the direction of the chief executive, in systemic initiatives to influence change. Staff however will not engage in activities that would hinder relationships with funders or community partners.