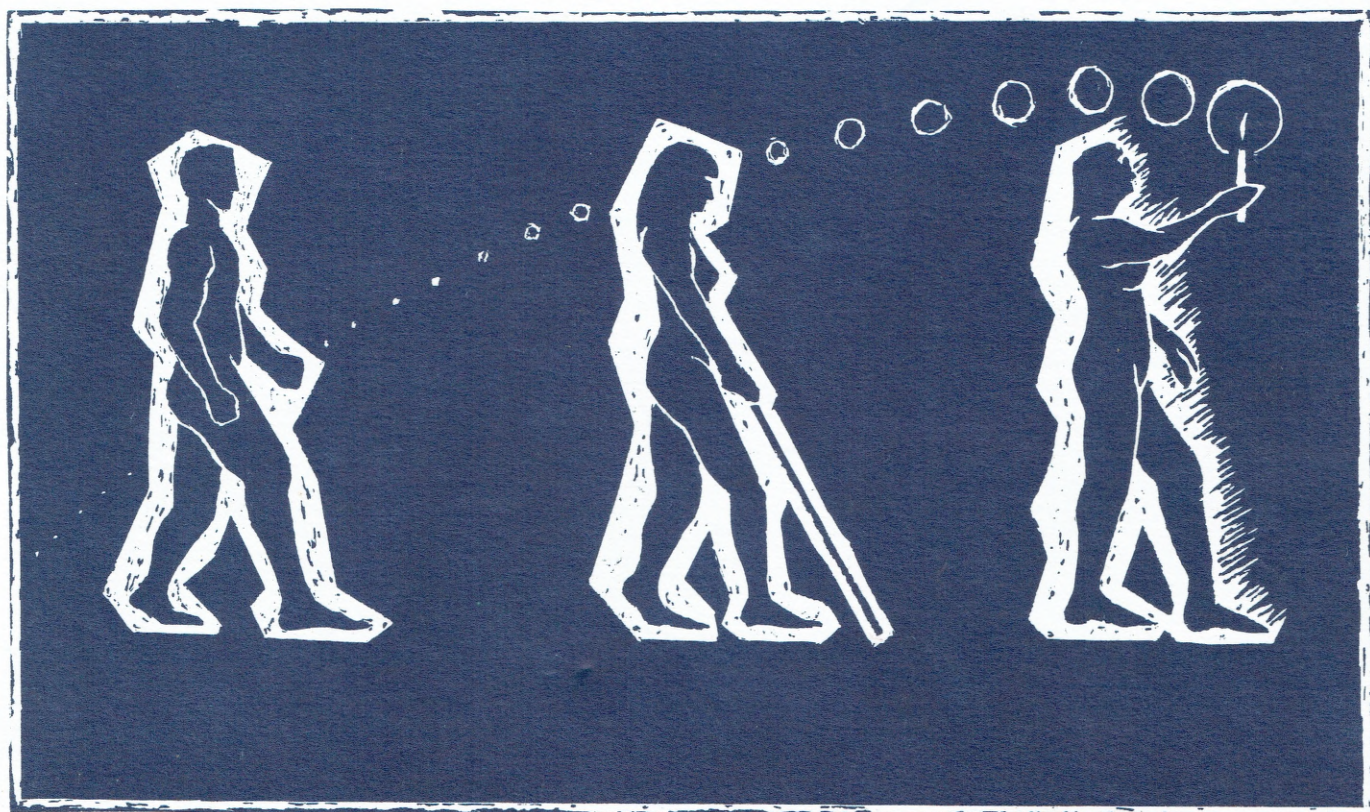# Taking Action

a guide to successful organizing and advocacy in a post-secondary environment for students with disabilities

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Additional copies may be obtained from:

BCEADS
SFU Harbour Centre
515 W. Hastings St.
Vancouver, B. C.
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Acknowledgements

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Introduction

More students with disabilities are entering post-secondary education in British Columbia than ever before. Because of this, post-secondary institutions are modifying their ideas about education and access to education to begin to accommodate these students. There have been some inspired changes made to curriculums and teaching at many institutions throughout BC which have assisted students with disabilities to realize their goal of completing post-secondary or continuing education degrees and programs. However, sometimes the pace of change within an institution does not keep up to the changing needs of its students. Because of this, it is sometimes necessary for the students themselves to give these institutions a nudge to take steps to understand and accommodate the needs of students with disabilities. This manual is intended to familiarize you with some of the tools you can use to have your needs addressed at your college, university or institute.

This manual has two main components: organizing student with disability groups on campus, and advocacy and awareness building. Both of these components are integral to the effective lobbying of post-secondary institutions to resolve issues of concern to students with disabilities, both as students and as a significant and integral part of an increasingly diverse campus population.

Remember, you have as much right to enter and succeed in post-secondary education as any non-disabled student on campus. You have the right to physical access of all public facilities such as public post-secondary institutions. If you feel that any of your rights are in jeopardy you not only have the right to

speak out and take action, but you have the responsibility to all the other people with disabilities who are students now and who will be students in the years to come, to ensure that education is accessible to all people.

PART 1
Organizing

The old adage "strength in numbers" is something to keep in mind if you are interested in affecting change to benefit students with disabilities at your educational institution. Establishing a Student with Disabilities organization on campus is an integral step to becoming an effective advocacy and lobby group to the administration of a college, university or institute.

This section will address the question of how to set up a Students with Disabilities group on campus. We will look at how to get people together for the first meeting, how to set up your group, how to establish a constitution and an organizational structure, and how to publicize your message.

Getting Everyone Together

When you have decided that you are prepared to put the energy and work into getting a group together, there are a few things that should be done to let people know your purpose.

If you know other students with disabilities on campus, ask them if they are interested in being involved in such a group and if they are willing to help with the preliminary preparation. As well, word of mouth is probably the most effective form of advertizing for getting people involved in the group.

Finding a Place to Meet

Finding a room is probably the easiest part of the preparation process. To use a room on campus, talk to the Student Association about arranging a room for your meeting. They will be able to set one up or suggest someone who can. A preferred time and date as well as back up times should already be considered before a room is requested.

Advertizing

Advertizing for this meeting should be directed to students with disabilities rather than the campus community at large. Students with disabilities who attend are then able to take part in discussing and deciding what membership model the group should follow. Three of these models are discussed later in this manual.

Posters are an effective tool for advertizing the first meeting. However, there is a cost for photocopying or obtaining paper for postering. Groups on campus, such as the Student Association or Student Services, may be willing to assist by providing photocopying. Talk to these organizations and see if they would be willing to help with photocopying and distribution.

The student newspaper is also an effective medium for advertizing. Most student newspapers have a classified column and many will place free classified advertizements for students. Ask if they will be willing to place a free ad elsewhere in the

paper. If the campus has a radio station, ask about submitting a community service announcement. Administration newsletters or other public announcement services, for example video monitors or electronic bulletin boards run by campus services, are also good ways to publicize the group.

Disabled Student Services can also be a great help in circulating information about the group. They may be able to send out an announcement of the attempt to establish a group on campus to the students with disabilities on their registration lists. Disabled Student Services may also be able to help with the arranging of alternate print materials or interpreting services for the first meeting.

Remember to include the time, date and location of your meeting in the advertizing!

The First Meeting

Organize an agenda for the first meeting ahead of time. However, this agenda should not be final; there should be room for change. Those who attend the first meeting should feel that they have a say in what will be discussed at the meeting. They will feel more comfortable and involved in the process of setting guidelines for the establishment of the group.

Having a general discussion about problems or issues facing students with disabilities or about successes or good programs available on campus will spark the interest of those attending and draw attention to the need for organizing . Give people a chance to raise their concerns and then focus on why and how to establish an organization to deal with those concerns.

The following things should be considered during the first few meetings.

A Constitution

Do not be intimidated by the word "constitution". A constitution is simply a statement of principles or mandate and rules of organization for a group. A constitution should outline the purpose and function of the organization as well as the principles that are fundamental to the group. The constitution would also outline the decision-making process of the group.

When establishing a club which runs through the assistance of a Student Association, it will probably insist on the submission of a constitution before it will fund the group's events. In this case the Student Association will probably assist in the development of a constitution.

Looking at the constitutions of other groups on and off campus, even if they are not disability groups, is the best way to understand the constitution making procedure.

Group Membership Models

The first meeting should be only for the people who the group will represent: students with disabilities. The group can then discuss who should be included in the membership. If only students with disabilities are present, there will be a more comfortable and safe environment for open and honest discussion of this important matter. Three primary membership models are outlined below.

The "Consumers Only" model:
This model is one in which only students with disabilities are included in the group. One advantage of this model is that it often creates a more comfortable atmosphere in which members feel they are in control of the group rather than sharing

that control with non-disabled members who are not consumers. However, on a small campus this group may be too exclusive to be effective as the membership may be too small and this model may be considered elitist by non-disabled people who would like to support the advancement of students with disabilities on campus.

The "PHAB" Model:

PHAB stands for Physically Handicapped and Able-Bodied. This method has been used in a number of student with disability groups in Canada. The premise of this model is that disabled and non-disabled members have equal say in the group's decision-making and that executive or coordinator positions are open to everybody. The advantage to this model is that it encourages non-disabled students to take an active part and responsibility for the advancement of students with disabilities on campus. As well, the organization invites all members of the campus community to participate and as such is not exclusive to a select group. This can mean a larger and more diverse membership base. One of the concerns with the PHAB model is that students with disabilities, as a marginalized population, have to share power with non-consumers. Another concern is that non-disabled members being present may have an inhibiting effect on students with disabilities. The meetings may not be a "safe" place for students with disabilities to feel comfortable to candidly discuss issues and problems that they encounter.

The Integrated Model:

This system is a compromise of the first two membership models proposed. This model proposes that students with disabilities have the primary power in the group. This model can be revised in a number of ways. One adaptation is that non-disabled students have a primarily supportive role and do not have voting rights in the group. They could, however, take part in the discussion of group policy or how the group should deal with

an issue. Another way of adapting this system could be that, if you choose to have an executive of the organization, non-disabled members would not be eligible for election into these positions, though they would have voting rights in the general membership meetings. This model is popular because of its adaptability and because it allows all students on campus to participate without compromising the position of the consumers as primary decision makers in the group. The major drawback of the Integration Model is that it stratifies the membership by the status of having a disability or not. This can cause division within the group.

Group Organization

The way the group will be organized is a discussion that may continue for the first few meetings and indeed may be discussed through the life of the organization.

The problem of using a hierarchical structure without being exclusive or oppressive to the rest of the members has puzzled many an organization dedicated to social change. Some attempts have been made to maintain an egalitarian base in groups that have coordinators or executives. Some of these attempts to create an egalitarian model are based on changing the structural make up of the hierarchy.

The size of the group is an important factor in deciding how it should be structured. As the size of the group will inevitably fluctuate over time, group structure should be discussed regularly to accommodate fluctuating membership. All of the proposed organizational structures suggested here are flexible and should be adapted to the size of the group at the time that it is being proposed.

Keep in mind that the status of members as students means that this group will probably not be the first priority in their lives. The responsibilities in the group should be spread around so that one member is not left with an unmanageable amount of work. This should be taken into consideration when considering what type of leadership/organizational model will be best for the group.

With these factors in mind, the following are some possible organizational models.

Coordinator System:

The coordinator system allows individuals to be responsible for certain aspects of the groups functions. For example you might have a Coordinator of Internal Affairs who organizes fund management, prepares for meetings, organizes elections and the like. A Publicity Coordinator may take care of writing press releases, making posters and advertizing events. An External Relations Coordinator may liaise on a regular basis with outside organizations and college or university services such as the Disabled Student Services office or the Student Association as well as the President's office and Facilities Management. In this model each of the coordinators would be equal, none being the "head" of the group. This system must have a mechanism in place to ensure that the coordinators meet regularly and communicate effectively.

Classic Executive System:

This is the standard model which is commonly used. This model usually consists of a President, Vice-president, Secretary and Treasurer and perhaps other positions related to these. One adaptation of this model is to change the language to lessen the power implied in terms such as President. Chairperson and Vice-chairperson are commonly used. This structure is more pyramidical than the coordinator system but can be more

efficient for centralized decision-making or idea generating. The positions outlined in this model compose an executive which may or may not be given the power to make decisions on behalf of the group.

Committee System:
The committee system does not give any one person control or responsibility over the group. Different areas of responsibility, such as internal affairs, publicity, advocacy, etc., would be discussed in committees of two or more people who would then make proposals to the greater membership for a vote. The committee would carry through on the directions of the general membership.

None of these structures should be used in exclusion of the general membership. All of these models should be used as tools for the membership, to follow though on the decisions made by the membership.

Community Building

Community building is the process of creating networks with people and organizations who have a similar interest. Groups interested in promoting a better environment for people with disabilities or who have a mandate that is complimentary to those of the group, such as advocacy organizations or student groups, are natural allies. This network will be the basis of the support community which will give strength to advocacy issues and projects that the organization wishes to pursue. The effectiveness of a group depends on developing a strong community base that can be called on for help in actions the group wants to take and events it may want to host.

The group may have to look on and off campus to contact organizations and departments who have an interest in achieving similar or parallel goals. Community groups such as regional community centres, advocacy groups, disability networks and service groups can be an invaluable resource. These groups can often provide materials, resources and valuable experience that may be helpful for successful lobbying and advocacy as well as with organizing projects and events.

On campus there are a number of places to look when community building. The campus Student Association is an important place to begin networking. As the Student Association is given the responsibility of representing and advancing the interest of students, they will have experience and resources for furthering the interest of students with disabilities and may be a good source of support. Student Services departments are the administrative counterpart to the Student Association and may be good resources as intermediaries for communication with the administration when proposing changes to college or university policy or services. Student services may be able to help the group understand the workings of the decision-making process of the institution and how to best present a case.

Unions and employee groups at the institution may also have experience advocating and raising issues of concern to members with disabilities. These groups and unions also have experience working through institutional bureaucracy and may be able to advise the group or members and/or lend support for a campaign or case.

On campus departments such as Adult Basic Education or Adult Special Education, where many students with disabilities may be enrolled, can be a valuable ally. As well, early on in its development, the group should make contact with Board of Governors members and institutional Senators to develop a

rapport with these decision-makers. This will allow the group to find out what the position of these decision-makers are with regards to students with disabilities to get an idea of where to look for administrative support for issues that may arise.

It is important to make these contacts early in the life of the group. People should know the group exists and a relationship should be established before people or departments are approached with problems or complaints. This initial contact can be made by a mailed announcement that the organization is starting up and explaining, in general terms, the group's mandate. This letter or announcement should be followed up with a phone call to the people the group has contacted to set up more personal ties with the organizations.

This network will be the basis for support for events such as awareness days and advocacy and lobbying. After contacting these outside organizations and departments, the group will have a better idea of what kind of community support the group and its activities will have.

Setting Up Committees and Caucuses

Depending on the size and make-up of the group, committees and caucuses can be an important part of its organization. Committees are useful for the intensive discussion of policy or strategy development which later can be brought to the larger group. Caucuses serve to create a supportive and comfortable environment for certain members of the group who share other interests or face other difficulties not common to the whole group.

Committees:

Committees, as explained earlier, are primarily a concentrated forum for discussing or developing items that may be unmanageable in the larger membership, for example developing specific advocacy strategies or organizing a newsletter. The membership should strike, or vote to establish, such a committee and the committee should report back to the membership for ratification or direction. The committee may be responsible for developing a proposal or structure for the greater membership.

Caucuses:

Caucuses would be used primarily as a support mechanism although policy or program proposals may also come out of these caucuses. For example, caucuses may be for gay and lesbian members or women in the group. These caucuses should be exclusive to those for whom they are established, that is to say, they should be "closed". Closed caucuses allow the caucus members to speak candidly about concerns particular to their members. The caucuses can be an important support group for members who face difficulties on other fronts not necessarily related to their disability.

Maintaining the Office

Office space should be arranged either with the administration or the student association. Sharing office space with another group or club might be another alternative. You will find that having stable office space is phenomenally important to the effective workings of the group.

The question of maintaining the office or internal duties of the organization should be fleshed out in a meeting of your group. Looking at how other groups on campus organize their offices can be helpful in deciding how to distribute the group's office duties.

The group should discuss the sharing of office duties and staffing schedules. There should not be too many members attending to office duties as communication about issues that are brought to the office will be difficult among a large number of office attendants. At the same time, one person should not be left with all the responsibility of keeping the office open and dealing with the immediate issues that come to the attention of the office.

Running the office is also important to the usefulness of the group. There should be someone in the office on a regular basis (a schedule should be posted) so that people with concerns or interests in the group can hold meetings without a great deal of difficulty. A small but necessary item, an answering machine, is also important to the accessibility of the group. However, the answering machine is of no real value unless there is someone responsible for responding to calls. The group should also have access to a TDD so that deaf or hard of hearing students can contact and participate in the group.

Group Continuity

Students are not students forever and the people who are in the group now may be gone within a few semesters. Because of this fact, the group must be recruiting members and organizing on an ongoing basis so that it does not die out.

One of the most important ways of maintaining continuity is to keep records of all the meetings, events and issues organized by or relevant to the group. Documents of how these events or issues are managed should be kept in a simple and well organized filing system. Advocacy and policy resources should be similarly organized and accessible.

It is also integral to have an effective means of "passing the torch". The terms of committee membership and/or executive positions should overlap between the outgoing and incoming members holding these positions. This overlap allows the "old" to familiarize the "new" with how the position or committee works and to fill the new person in on the "tricks of the trade". It may also be prudent to not have all positions elected at the same time. This will allow one or more committee member and/or executive member to stay for a few months to help the new executive or committee member to become comfortable and adjust to her/his new position.

Regular skills development workshops are also an effective way of ensuring that the members and executive are skilled and that skills are shared. The importance of continuing communication and sharing of skills and experience cannot be stressed enough with regards to maintaining the effectiveness and morale of the group.

PART 2
Awareness Building and Advocacy

While organizing sets up a support network and political backing, it cannot in itself advance the interests of students with disabilities. This must be done by taking action outside the group. Campaigns and Awareness Raising events are an effective way to draw attention to issues important to your group. Advocacy, which is generally a campaign which arises out of a particular issue or problem, is often the only way to get issues of concern addressed. This section looks at a number of ways to raise awareness. As well, it introduces lobbying methods and introduces the advocacy process.

Building Awareness on Campus

Awareness Days

One way of promoting disability awareness is to hold an "Awareness Day" on your campus. Awareness Days are usually one day long and consist of events, displays, workshops, and information tables. The entire campus community is invited to attend and participate in Awareness Days and through this participation, learn something about disability issues.

Setting up an Awareness Day is an elaborate process. The community building that has been done will really be put to the test. If you are considering holding an Awareness Day and have discussed it within the group, you should look to the contacts that have been made on campus to find out what the climate is on campus for the hosting of such an event. Some things to consider might be:

&. Will you have enough support to successfully hold an awareness day?

&. Do people want to help sponsor this event?

&. How do they want to help?

&. When should it be held?

Organizing a planning committee for the Awareness Day can bring in people from many departments on campus and organizations in the region and allow them to take an active part in preparing for the event. By setting up a committee, the responsibilities of organizing an awareness day are shared between a number of people and groups. The committee should be responsible for planning a theme for the day, programming the day's events, publicizing the event, coordinating information tables, etc. This committee should also decide who should be invited to speak at the event.

Wheelchair sport demonstrations, guide dog demonstrations, band performances, disability simulation, keynote speeches, workshops and accessibility tours are just a few examples of events that have had an enthusiastic response by participants in past awareness days. Events such as these make awareness building enjoyable for all participants.

Contacting regional disability service organizations is integral to the success of such an event. These groups should be invited to attend and staff information tables specific to their group. When you have received responses from these groups, you should carefully record what these participants need in terms of accessible areas, electrical outlets for TVs, VCRs, etc. You should be working with the Audio Visual services of the institution to make sure that the technology required is made available. As well, you will have to coordinate with Facilities Management for the physical setting up and taking down of tables and displays for the day.

Awareness days have been held at numerous campuses in B.C. and have been very successful in raising awareness of disability issues.

Accessibility Tours

Accessibility tours are another effective way of increasing awareness on campus. These tours are usually conducted in conjunction with other awareness events but can also be held on their own. They are usually followed with a discussion for the people involved. Accessibility tours can be held for a specific group such as administrators or Facilities Management staff or can be open to the campus public. These tours should point out good, as well as bad design.

Those conducting the tour should have some knowledge of building standards such as those outlined in the <u>Canada Standard Association Barrier Free Design Guidelines</u>. This reference will give the tour guide parameters from which to discuss good and bad design with regards to physical accessibility. Enquire about obtaining a copy of these guidelines at Canadian Standards Association, 178 Rexdale Boulevard Rexdale (Toronto), Ontario, Canada M9W 1R3.

The tour should be mapped out and a dry run completed before the actual tour takes place. The guide may want to look at one particular area of the campus if it is a large campus. Keep in mind that a tour that takes too much time or covers too great a distance may cause the participants to lose interest or enthusiasm.

Workshops

Workshops are often held as part of an awareness day or along with a tour but can be held successfully on their own if they are well planned and advertized. The audience you want to reach and the topic for discussion are intrinsically linked. Think about who you want to reach before you plan the topic and how you want it addressed.

Videos and other media forms are often a good springboard for discussion in workshops.

Holding workshops based on an egalitarian model where the leader of the workshop is a facilitator and resource person rather than a lecturer is a more effective way of getting your message across. As you know from sitting through long lectures, being able to discuss issues and ideas is a welcomed opportunity in a class. You should think of workshops as a forum of discussion where everyone can participate.

Participating on Administrative and Campus Committees

Sitting on committees such as departmental committees, senate committees or as a member of the Student Association is a very effective way to keep disability issues in the minds of decision makers. Committees such as these also give group members an inside understanding about how the institution's administration works. Your members should be encouraged to sit on these committees and associations and to take an active part in the decision-making process.

Campaigns and Ongoing Awareness Projects

There are a number of ways to keep disability issues in the mind of the campus population. Having a regular column addressing disability issues or writing letters on a regular basis to the student and/or administration newspaper is one effective way of continuing awareness and promoting a dialogue on disability issues.

Other campaigns, such as fundraising campaigns to raise money to buy technical aids for students with disabilities, like a TDD for the Student Society or a talking computer for the library, are popular tools for making your organization known on campus and spreading your message. Not only do these campaigns further the availability of assistive technology for students with disabilities, but they raise awareness of such devices and the needs of students with disabilities on campus. Fundraising campaigns can be held to challenge the administration to match the funds raised. Such campaigns can be done through a number of methods that are as fun to think up as to hold. They do not have to be bake sales and car washes. Raise funds by holding dances, barbecues, film screenings, raffles or whatever you can imagine.

Fundraising campaigns are also useful in lobbying for technical resources for students with disabilities on campus. If you are concerned that the administration is not providing students with the technical assistance they need, you can offer to raise funds for part of the purchase if they match, double, etc. the funds you raise.

Awareness campaigns that are continuous are also effective means of promoting disability issues. One student group in Canada holds an ongoing campaign of placing a leaflet on the windshield of cars not marked as being driven by a person with a disability parked in parking stalls reserved for people with disabilities. Activities such as these and regular postering campaigns are effective in raising awareness and serve as ongoing advertizing for the group.

Discuss with your group the plausibility of holding such campaigns. You might want to appoint a committee to follow through on suggestions or to think up ideas for campaigns.

Developing Advocacy Skills and Resources

Students have many responsibilities associated with their course work so it is unrealistic to expect them to spend a great deal of time being advocates. If there is someone, or a number of people in the group, who is willing to spend the time necessary to develop the tools needed to be an advocate or to develop advocacy resources for your group, you will find them an invaluable resource.

Becoming familiar with the administrative processes and institution policies regarding students with disabilities is an integral part of developing the tools needed for advocacy. There are a number of ways to become familiar with these policies. On campus you should talk to the Ombudsperson, if your institution has one, Disabled Student Services staff, an Adult Special Education coordinator, or Student Association staff. All of these resource people will be able to help you understand the workings of the institution. You should not only obtain documents from these contacts but arrange time to talk to them about the

available resources. Take notes during these discussions to add to the files you are developing and to make sure that you understand the policies and procedures of the institution's administration.

Once you have collected this information, it should be clearly organized or filed where others will be able to gain access to it. This information should not be monopolized. Even if there is one individual who has agreed to be the primary advocate for the organization, that person should not be the only one with access to these resources. Those who are responsible for setting up the advocacy resources should hold workshops or informational seminars for the group's membership to expand advocacy skills within the group. This will encourage group members to advocate for themselves with confidence.

Gaining advocacy skills is an ongoing process. With every case or campaign pursued, the individuals involved will gain valuable experience. The way to go about preparing and presenting issues or cases can be learned before a situation arises. Advocacy organizations in your area will be able to direct you to further resources or be able to give you tips directly. Use the community you have built to get information and advice.

Knowing Your Rights

It is vitally important to know your rights as a student with a disability. The rights that you have will not help you if you are not familiar with them. Off campus you can obtain a copy of the BC Human Rights Act and the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. On campus, the Harassment Office, if you have one, can provide a copy of the institution's Harassment Policy. As well, you should find out, through the Disabled Student Services

office or the Adult Special Education Department if the institution has a Disability Policy. These resources can help you find and understand your rights and the mechanisms available for recourse in case of infringements of your rights.

Being an Advocate

Being an advocate does not necessarily mean being an expert in a particular case. Advocacy is assisting an individual in the process of resolving a dispute or issue or speaking on behalf of an issue or cause with the intention of reaching a solution agreeable to all parties involved.

In being an advocate for another person, the most important skill you can have is that of listening. The advocate should be able to understand the issue as it is understood by the person who is making the complaint. The advocate should never assume that she/he understands the issue better than the person who has experienced the problem that is the root of the case. The advocate should maintain a certain distance from the case so as to help the complainant sort out the specific and key issues that are involved in the case from a more "objective" position.

An advocate should also be able to ensure confidentiality to the extent that it is required. If the case is an issue particular to one individual, there is no need to discuss the case, in terms of specific names and incidents, outside the process that you and the individual presenting the case determine should be followed. Discuss with the complainant her/his wishes regarding confidentiality so that you are clear about how much you can say.

It is important that the advocate does not take the case outside of the procedure agreed upon between the advocate and the complainant. The advocate should keep the complainant informed of every step that she/he is taking. Any new developments, information or ideas that the advocate comes across should be discussed with the complainant. The advocate should encourage the complainant to take as active as possible a role in pursuing the case. It would be ideal for the advocate to act as a behind-the-scenes resource for the complainant allowing the complainant to speak on her/his own behalf.

The advocate should be careful never to misrepresent the complainant. This can be avoided by communicating with the complainant on a regular basis as well as having the complainant write or edit statements prior to a presentation. The complainant, at the very least, should be present at all the meetings, presentations and tribunals that occur in the process.

These are only a few suggestions to point the advocate in the right direction. If you are interested in becoming an advocate, you should look through the available literature, a few resources are listed at the end of this manual under the "Literary Resource" heading.

The Advocacy Process

There are a number of issues that may come up that your group or members of your group feel the need to address. There are different processes to follow for different types of issues. The first steps that should be taken are the same for nearly all of the types of advocacy issues that you pursue.

Many institutions have grievance or appeals procedures that must be followed if the incident can not be resolved between the parties directly involved, for example a student and instructor. These procedures often have strict time guidelines. Adapt the following advocacy steps to these grievance or appeals procedures if these policies are applicable to your case. The Disabled Student Services Department, Ombudsoffice or an Adult Special Education Department will be able to help you understand these grievance or appeals procedures.

Keep in mind that the best way to solve any issue that comes up is in cooperation with the administration of your institution. It is easier on the relationship between the organization and administration to work together to solve a particular problem. Unfortunately, not all issues will be able to be resolved through such a process. At this point you must look to your network for support in advocacy issues.

The following is an example which will follow the advocacy process and help to illustrate the process.

Example

Let us take a hypothetical case where a student with a learning disability was not allowed to take extra time to finish an exam and, because of the lack of time the student was unable to adequately complete the exam and hence was given a poor mark. The student had already asked the instructor for more time before the exam was given but the instructor changed his mind at the time of the exam and made the student write it in the same time as the other students. The student also felt that even though she had explained about her learning disability, the teacher did not take this learning disability seriously throughout the course and made no effort to accommodate her in the classroom.

This example will be used to illustrate the advocacy process. As nothing ever really goes as planned this model will probably have to be revised for each case but you can use these guidelines as reference points.

These procedures can be used either by a self-advocate (someone who is advocating on her/his own behalf) or an advocate (someone who is advocating on behalf of another or others). It is advisable to have an advocate and the Disabled Student Services Department, Adult Special Education Department or the Ombudsoffice involved if the problem is not solved at the departmental level.

Step 1: Identifying the Issue

Identifying the problem areas is not always as easy as it sounds. There may be a number of difficulties surrounding an incident that is brought to your attention. *Three issues can be identified in the situation described in the example:*

> *1. the unfair examination practice of the instructor,*
> *2. the lack of an effective alternate examination policy in the department or the institution, and,*
> *3. feelings of the student that the instructor did not take her learning disability seriously. So a third issue, that of an attitudinal barrier, comes to light. This is much more difficult to identify and as such is more difficult to remedy. Proposing a solution is addressed in a later stage.*

Identify the key issue. The key issue is the one which you can reasonably and successfully deal with as well as the one that is most pressing. Identifying the key issue does not mean that the other issues should be brushed aside. The key issue is simply the first issue on which you want to focus immediately. *In the*

*example cited here the student would probably identify the unfair ex-
amination practices of the instructor as the key issue.This is because the
examination procedure has a direct and immediate effect on the student
who was the victim of discrimination by way of her low grade.*

Step 2: Researching the Issue

It will be helpful to find out as much as you can about the case
you are preparing. You can do this by talking to people who
have had situations similar to the one with which you are ad-
dressing. You can also look for resources that have been pre-
pared on the subject, perhaps logs that had been taken in pre-
vious advocacy cases, or look for policies that the institution has
relating to the incident that you are trying to resolve. *In the
example, the student might talk to other students that have taken
courses in that department or with that instructor to find out if others
have had similar experiences. The student might also want to talk to
the Disabled Student Services and the department in which the dispute
took place to find out if there is a policy around alternate examination
procedures and what that policy stipulates. She/he may look to other
colleges or departments to find out what policies are available else-
where for alternate examination procedures.*

Researching is an important step in preparing proposals to
remedy the problem you have encountered. The research also
helps to prepare you for your meetings. It is very important to
have as much relevant information on hand as is possible when
you are in meetings.

Disabled Student Services should be contacted about the situa-
tion as this department may be able to provide information
such as government acts related to your institution or to ex-
plain policies relevant to the case. Disabled Student Services
may also be able to help you with other resources as well as
possibly helping to mediate the case.

A look through B.C. Human Rights legislation and either the Colleges and Institutes Act or the University Act may be in order to give you some background on specific rights of people with disabilities that you might want to point out when a case is being heard.

Step 3: Proposing A Solution

Once you have identified the key as well as the peripheral issues, you should think about how you feel this situation could best be remedied. Consulting with others who may have been in similar situations and finding out how their issues were resolved will help you develop an idea about how the problem may be fixed. The answer to the problem is not always arrived at simply.

1. In the situation described in the example, one would be looking at a number of avenues to effectively deal with this situation. You might propose that the student be able to rewrite the exam or a comparable exam in a longer time period, perhaps under the supervision of someone from disabled student services. If the student feels that the conflicts that have arisen with the instructor in the class may make him an inappropriate marker for the exam, you might suggest that the student's work be graded by another faculty member who is familiar with the course.

2. If there is no alternate examination policy in the department or institution, or if it is felt that the policy is inadequate, it would be suggested that the policy be revised or that one be created.

3. To address the problem of the attitudinal barrier in this case, it might be suggested that instructors in that department or program take part in an awareness workshop to improve their awareness about disabilities and learn strategies to accommodate students.

The peripheral issues (the second and third issues in the example) should not be ignored, but put on the back burner for the time being. While these peripheral issues and proposed solutions should be brought up when applicable in the process of advocating the key issue, you should clearly place priority on solving the key issue. You should suggest that alternate or later meetings be held to address the peripheral issues.

If you are making a suggestion for the creation or revision of policy or suggesting that disability education take place in the department or program, you should be offering your assistance, or the assistance of the group, in the execution of these suggestions.

Step 4: Documentation

Documentation should include the earliest incident or the root of the issue for which you are advocating. *In the example, the student would have documented the events in the case from the time that the student explained her disability and examination needs and the instructor's agreement to allow the student adequate time in the examination through the examination procedure actually used, to the mark that was received for the exam.*

This documentation ideally would be done immediately after an incident. If this was not done at the time the incident occurs, it should be done as soon as possible even if the events are months old. It is amazing what kind of impression discriminatory incidents can leave on the individuals involved and how much will be remembered.

The student involved should prepare the actual documentation as she/he is the expert on what has actually happened to her/him and the impressions of the incident. Documentation does not have to be clinical and "objective". It is impossible for students to completely remove themselves from their experience and the documentation that they make should reflect their feelings about the situation.

Documentation is integral to the development of an advocacy case. To have a well organized, researched and documented case to present to administrators or an appeals committee increases your credibility to those whom you are trying to persuade. This shows that you are organized and prepared for discussing the issue and that you are serious about pursuing the case. As well, it helps to be able to quickly and accurately refer to specific incidents that may support your case.

Documentation should continue throughout the advocacy process including notes on all meetings and any new information you receive.

Step 5: Preparing for Meetings

Now that you have researched and documented the case, you are just about ready for your first meeting. You should gather all the people who will be attending the meeting on behalf of the individual who has made the complaint. If the complainant wants others to accompany her/him, such as an advocate and/or the Disabled Student Services worker, you should arrange a time with these people to meet to discuss the situation before the formal meeting with the other parties involved.

When you schedule an appointment with the person you want to meet with initially, probably the instructor or program director who is directly involved with the case, you should inform her/him of who will be attending the meeting and what you

want to discuss. At this point you do not have to go into great detail about all the points of your case but simply provide her/ him with the information about the general issue you will be addressing in the meeting.

Step 6: The Initial Meeting

The first meeting you arrange should be with the instigator of the incident. *In the example, the meeting would take place between the instructor who did not allow the student adequate time to write the exam and the student.*

Ideally, this first meeting would be between the complainant and the other party involved, as these are the individuals who can best represent their interests and feelings about the incident. However, it is often the case that the complainant may not feel comfortable dealing with the individual alone for any number of reasons; resentment toward the other individual, intimidation or simply that the individual may feel that having someone else present may lend credibility and strength to the case.

By using the situation described in the example, we can discuss what would take place in the first meeting.We will assume that the student went alone to the meeting with the instructor. She would outline what she felt the problem was with that particular instructor.That is, the student would explain that there was a problem with the examination procedure, and indicate that since the instructor had, earlier in the course, agreed to allow her more time to write the exam, it was inappropriate for the instructor to have changed his mind without consulting the student. Because of this, the student is requesting the right to rewrite the exam or a similar exam, with adequate time allowed for its completion.

At the first meeting, issues should be clearly outlined by the complainant or the advocate and a proposed solution should be explained to the individual involved. Everyone there should be honestly trying to solve the key issue at this level. Keep clear in your mind what it is that you are trying to accomplish with this issue so that you can fairly address suggestions made by the people involved in this meeting. This should not be an adversarial meeting. You should be willing to cooperate with the individuals involved to work together to come to a solution without jeopardizing your goals.

Often a problem is simply a matter of a misunderstanding or ineffective communication. If this is so, the matter can often be resolved easily and directly with the people involved and a valuable discussion can take place. This sort of meeting can be an effective awareness-developing tool.

If this meeting does not produce a solution that satisfies the complainant, you will have to meet with the person who is responsible for the department or program. Make sure that this first meeting is documented.

Step 7: The Following Meetings

If in the first meeting you are unable to reach a consensual solution, you will have to take the next step. This step would be to meet with the chair of the department or the head of the program in which the disputed situation took place. This meeting would again ideally take place between the individual with the complaint and the departmental or program head. The complainant should have documentation of the complaint and the steps that have been taken up to that point prepared for this meeting.

For this meeting you should have prepared a written (typed) statement which clearly outlines the issue(s) and the proposed solutions as well as any other pertinent information you wish to include from your documentation and research. By presenting this statement you are ensuring that the involved parties understand the case that you are making and letting them know that you are serious. It also helps if the person you are meeting with has something to take with her/him if the issue has to be addressed by a departmental or appeals committee.

This meeting would be much like the first meeting where the key issue and its proposed solution would be explained to the head of the department or program. The preparation for this meeting should be similar to the preparation taken for the first meeting. In this meeting, however, you will be elaborating on the discussion you have had with the instructor or individual involved.

Again, this meeting is an attempt to work with the participants to come up with a solution to the situation that is agreeable to everyone.

In the example, the student and an advocate should meet with the departmental chairperson. The instructor has been invited by the department chair and is present at the meeting. The student would present the statement to both the instructor and the departmental chair. The student would outline what has taken place so far as well as the outlining the issues and the proposed solution.

If in this meeting, no solution is reached, the student should look to others to help pursue the case if she/he has not already done so.

Step 8: Expanding the Support Network

If the issue you are pursuing is not resolved at the departmental or program level, you should look to your network for help. People or organizations on campus are your best bet as they will be more knowledgeable about the workings of the institution's bureaucracy.

If there is an Ombudsperson on campus it is advisable to consult with her/him about how to proceed further if you have not already done so. The Ombudsperson will be familiar with many of the institution's policies and procedures and will be able to help you understand them. As well, the Ombudsperson is qualified in assisting people with appeals. The Ombudsperson is probably your best resource if the advocacy case is not solved at the departmental or program level.

A number of campus resources available for assistance in pursuing a case are the outlined in the Developing Advocacy Skills and Resources section of this manual. Consult with these people, like the Student Association, the Disabled Students Services, and the Adult Special Education Department for assistance in proceeding with a case.

Off campus, there may be advocacy organizations which can assist you in the process. While they may not be able to help you understand the particular workings of your institution, they may be able to help you organize your case and advise you on effective conduct in presentations and tribunals, or provide you with valuable technical advice and assistance. However, you should keep in mind that appeals processes and tribunals are different at every institution. You should always refer back to on campus organizations and departments to find out the particular procedures you will be required to follow.

The student and the advocate in the example would, at this point, go to the Ombudsperson to discuss how the case will proceed. The advocate and the student would bring all the documentation and statements to the meeting with the Ombudsperson. The Ombudsperson would then explain the appeals process and discuss with the advocate and the student how the presentation should be made. The Ombudsperson would help in the final preparation for the appeal.

Step 9: Taking the Case Outside the Institution

Taking an advocacy case outside the educational institution where it started is an extreme measure that is rarely used. Unfortunately, it is sometimes necessary in order to resolve an extremely problematic issue. If you are planning to take this type of action it is advisable that you consult a lawyer to help you prepare your case or to represent you. Legal services, listed in the advocacy resources near the end of the manual, may be able to help you get in touch with a lawyer and help you with funding.

The B.C. Council of Human Rights and the Provincial Ombudsoffice may be able to help you pursue your case or may be able to launch an investigation of the situation. Again, these avenues should only be used in extreme cases after all else has failed.

Step 10: Closing the Case

Once the key issue has been resolved, or all appeal mechanisms have been exhausted, you can close the case. It is not simply a matter of tossing out all the research and documentation that was compiled in the case and brushing it from your mind. Quite the contrary. You should never dispose of the informa-

tion you have compiled; it is a valuable resource for the next time around! Make sure that you have made or kept copies of the information and prepared a written summary of the process for later reference.

Follow up on the case. If you are the advocate, contact the student to make sure that everything is going according to the agreed upon resolution, or ask if there has been any new information about further appeals processes that should be considered. If you are self-advocating, call around to the contacts you have made and find out for sure that there are no other avenues to pursue.

In the example we will say that the key issue, the rewrite of the exam, was resolved through the senate with help from the ombudsoffice. While this particular issue is resolved to everyone's satisfaction, you will remember that the other issues, specifically the lack of an effective alternate examination policy, and the attitudinal barriers faced, have not been addressed. The procedure will begin again for the peripheral issues, only in a slightly different form. An advocate would talk to the Disabled Student Services office about how to propose or work on developing an effective policy. As well, the advocate would talk to the department, probably the departmental chair or assistant, where the initial issue occurred about the possibility of setting up an awareness workshop for faculty.

Lobbying

Not all of the problems that face students with disabilities on campus are rooted in the bureaucracies on campus. Often the problems faced are caused by insufficient funding for services or inappropriate policies of agencies designed to serve students. For addressing problems that arise here, large scale lobbying is in order. The lobbying process is not entirely dissimilar to the advocacy process.

To prepare a lobbying effort you must extensively research the issue. This research may include individual case histories of people who have experienced problems as a result, for example, of a government policy or program, general ramifications of this policy or program, and other critiques of the policy of program. The next step is to propose solutions or revisions to the particular policy or program.

The above mentioned steps are most effective when done by a representative group of people from a number of organizations and departments. You might, for example, strike a committee consisting of representatives from the Adult Special Education department, the Disabled Student Services office, the Student Association, as well as with community disability organizations, and provincial student and disability organizations. The committee should develop the plan of action for the lobbying effort. This committee should meet regularly through the lobbying process to revise the plan of action and to discuss any developments or changes in the effort.

In the case of lobbying for a government policy or program or its revision, once the initial research and proposals are compiled, they should be sent to all government departments and Cabinet members and local MLAs who have any relationship to the particular program or policy. The sending of the package

should be followed up with phone calls and perhaps even requests for meetings. Publicizing the issue can be done through writing press releases and holding public forums on the matter as well as any other means that you feel is appropriate. This publicity will help you gain support for the cause.

If you are not satisfied with the response from the government agents you are addressing, the lobbying effort can be upscaled by expanding your community support by further publicity and information sessions, petition signing and letter writing campaigns. You can take this lobbying effort as far as the committee feels is appropriate. You should always keep in mind that the lobby is only as strong as the will of those participating in it. If people involved in the effort "burn out", the campaign will not continue to be effective.

Smaller scale lobbying efforts can be useful for effecting change on campus when dealing with more general issues like inadequate services or policies. Remember that influence on policy making is best done from within the decision making committees, so students with disabilities should be encouraged to take part in these committees.

Advocacy Resources

The Advocacy Access Project at The BC Coalition of People with Disabilities is another resource to assist in the advocacy process. They specialize in advocacy cases involving people with disabilities though not specifically students. However, they will be able to help you prepare and follow through on your advocacy case. Advocacy Access can be reached at 872-1278.

The BC Council of Human Rights is a provincial decision making body which handles human rights complaints in areas of provincial jurisdiction, specifically in reference of the BC Human Rights Act. As post-secondary education is provincially regulated, and as complaints are directed either federally or provincially, any human rights violation which occurs in post-secondary education would be dealt with through the BC Council of Human Rights as opposed to the Canadian Human Rights Commission. The complaints are forwarded to a decision making committee of the Council which investigates the complaints and makes legally binding decisions on the complaints presented. The BC Council of Human Rights can be reached at 660-6811

The BC Educational Association of Disabled Students (BCEADS) is an organization run by and for students with disabilities which is dedicated to advancing the cause of greater access to all aspects of students with disabilities in post-secondary education. BCEADS provides advocacy support and promotes awareness of disability issues in post-secondary education through ongoing awareness and educational projects. You can contact BCEADS at 291-5187.

The BC Human Rights Coalition provides advocacy and educational services for people who are making complaints about human rights violations. They provide the services of lawyers and advocates as well as educators. The BC Human Rights Coalition can help you prepare your case before it is presented to the Council of Human Rights. Their services are free of charge. In Vancouver the number for the BC Human Rights Coalition is 689-8474

Legal Services Society is a provincial government service which provides individuals who could not otherwise afford legal representation with funds for a lawyer. The person applying for legal aid can either arrange funds for a lawyer that has accepted the case or they will set you up with a lawyer to assist you in preparing and presenting your case. While legal aid is usually made available for criminal cases, it can also be used for civil or family cases. You can contact the Legal Services Society at 660-4600.

The Office of the Ombudsman is established by the Provincial Government to investigate complaints made about unfair treatment received from the Provincial Government and its agencies. This includes post-secondary institutions. The recommendations of the Ombudsman are not binding but they have the power to report recommended action to the Cabinet, Legislative Assembly or public. The Ombuds office can be reached in Victoria at 1-800-567-3247, in Vancouver at 1-800-661-3247 or by TDD at 1-800-667-1303.

Literary Resources

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