

Thank you.
YOU are the
change!



www.abilitiesmanitoba.org

A printable version of this toolkit is
also available on our website.

Advocacy Support for Agencies and Families



PROVIDED BY





Abilities Manitoba is a not for profit coalition of member agencies that fosters excellence in services for people with intellectual disabilities. Abilities Manitoba advocates on behalf of our members to government and the community at large.

The greatest changes are a result of the advocacy of family members.

Your voice is the most important.

Do what you can, where you are, with what you have.
—Theodore Roosevelt

Learning to advocate is a skill set that becomes necessary when you love someone with a disability. You have the most information about the person you love and an informed opinion about what will work and what won't; what can and what cannot be compromised.

We offer this toolkit - to affirm what you know, to offer tips and suggestions, to let you know you are not alone and to encourage you on your path. Maria Nunez, a lawyer with a disability offers the following wisdom on advocacy:

- Be curious and follow your intuition
- Surround yourself with like-minded people
- Share your story
- Take risks and step out of your comfort zone
- Ask for help
- Be both patient and persistent
- Focus on your strengths and believe in yourself

ABILITIES MANITOBA'S THREE PRIORITIES

79
Agencies Across Manitoba



42
Agencies in Winnipeg



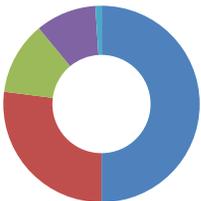
7,454
People Supported



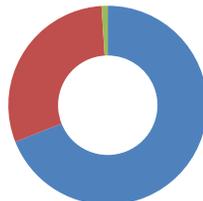
8,931
Full & Part Time Employees



3,631
People Supported in Residential Programs



3,823
People Supported in Day Programs



When we talk about **better outcomes** we are seeking fair wages for Direct Support Professionals, improved training and a quality assurance framework.

When we talk about **better access** we specifically mean better access to services and are seeking to address wait times, system coordination and cost of living increases for agencies.

When we talk about **better inclusion** we mean a stronger emphasis on person centered supports.

This relates to an increased focus on relationships and community connections as well as continued work on the Accessibility for Manitobans Act, employment for people with disabilities and a dignified income.



EIGHT WAYS TO ADVOCATE

1 Sign up for e-newsletters

Visit www.abilitiesmanitoba.org to sign up.

2 Strong Relationships

Invest in relationships up front. Whether with agencies, teachers, MLA's or the Minister; get to know them. When the need to advocate arises, strong relationships will pay off.

3 Meet your MLA

What to do:

Prepare for the meeting

- Call or email your MLA (Member of the Legislative Assembly) and ask for a meeting to discuss your issue. (Contact information for all MLA's at www.abilitiesmanitoba.org)
- Think of a few examples of how this is personal for you and your family (ie: family member has had too many support professionals and it's difficult, the needs of your family member are complex and standard training is important... it will be different for every family—but relate it back to Abilities Manitoba's current goals where possible)
- Practice your story

The more our elected officials meet and know people affected by these issues, the more likely they are to take them seriously and advocate on your behalf.

Attend the meeting

- Be friendly and respectful, this is a chance to make a contact who will also become an advocate on your behalf
- Ask if your MLA has any personal experience with a person with a disability
- Ask your MLA what's in the works for funding/services through Community Living disABILITY Services
- Take a supporter—bring a friend or family member with you
- Tell your MLA that disability funding and services is very important to your family. Then explain why: use the personal story you thought about. It's really important to make the visit personal. Share your family's story and how these issues impact you
- Ask for a personal commitment to the issue
- Ask for a photo (selfie) on your smartphone to tweet/share via Facebook/Instagram later



Follow up

- Follow up with an email or a letter to thank your MLA for the meeting. Reiterate how important disability services are to you and what you discussed
- Let him/her know that you'll be in touch
- Share the photo on social media thanking him/her for their engagement and support of disability issues. Use the **#disabilitiesmatter #mbpoli** hashtags



4 Call, email or write to the Minister of Families

What to do:

Tell the Minister your story, ask for support, ask for a meeting

In the email/letter or on the phone:

- Introduce yourself
- Tell the person why you are calling or writing—you care deeply about issues related to people with intellectual disabilities
- Explain how this is personal for you—why does this affect YOU? Tell your story
- Ask your questions. Example: Will you support the Abilities Manitoba initiatives to develop mandatory training for staff?
- Discuss your concerns honestly and respectfully
- Ask for support
- Ask for a response (if written)
- Ask for a meeting, if you're comfortable meeting with the Minister
- CC your MLA

After you send the communication/speak on the phone:

- Keep a record of your communication and of any response you receive
- Share on social media that you have contacted the person and tag them in the message that you're looking forward to a response. Use the **#mbpoli** hashtag

The squeaky wheel gets the grease.

5 Use social media/media

What to do:

Social media/media can be wonderful tools for connecting with people in a public forum

Social Media

- Like, retweet, and share content that you support—retweeting and sharing Abilities Manitoba posts is very helpful!
- Share things you see online that are of interest on your social media: news stories, photos, articles
- Engage in conversation—comment on posts in a respectful and thoughtful way
- Post your opinion when decisions are made in government that relate to the goals we are working towards
- Engage politicians and ask questions publicly

Media

- Write a letter to the editor
- Call your local newspaper, TV or radio news outlet

Media outlets are always looking for human interest stories. They may not always publish your story but if you haven't had luck advocating in other ways, give it a try.

Be brave enough to start a conversation that matters.



6 Attend events in your area

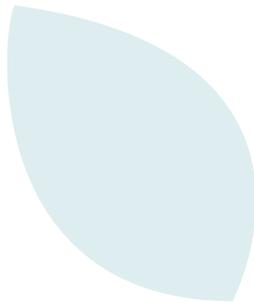
Attending events hosted by your local politician or events where your representative is advertising their attendance are great “casual” opportunities to remind them that you are there and that you are expecting them to support you. These can be town hall meetings, visits to community centres, honorary grocery bagger at the grocery store. These folks are out in the community a lot.

What to do:

- Showing up means a lot
- Be friendly & respectful
- Introduce your MLA to other constituents/family members
- Make yourself the expert on disabilities and offer to be available for questions, should they want to hear a constituent perspective
- Take the opportunity to ask for updates if the environment is right

*You help me.
I'll help you.
That's politics.*

—Terry McAuliffe



7 Involve your friends and family

The recipe for social change is not one dimensional, it has multiple ingredients:

- *a burning platform*
- *a compelling narrative*
- *agitators and protesters, brought powerfully together through social media,*
- *surprising friends and solutions which, if not tested and proven, at least on the best available evidence and research, seem to have a chance of working.*

—Julia Unwin

What to do:

- Talk to your friends and family about why this is important to you. Tell your story
- Share this tool kit with them and ask them to become an advocate
- Support and thank them!



8 Act now!

Voting is easy and marginally useful, but it is a poor substitute for democracy, which requires direct action by concerned citizens. —Howard Zinn

What to do:

- Talk to people
- Be inspired to take action when the moment is right, this could be: calling into a radio talk show, writing a letter to the editor, rallying your contacts to take action, organizing a protest... anything that will help the cause in a respectful way
- Attend events, participate in Abilities led campaigns
- Have a topic you're passionate about? Abilities Manitoba is always looking for family members willing to speak to media. Email margo@abilitiesmanitoba.org



SAMPLE LETTER

MLA Name
Address
City, MB Postal Code

Date

Dear <<NAME>>,

I'm writing today because I live in your constituency and I'm concerned about <<fill in your concern>>.

This is personal for me because <<Add your personal story and why this is so important to you—**this is the most important and powerful part of the letter**>>.

I hope that you will <<fill in what you are asking for. Ex: I hope that you will let the Minister of Families know that you support a training program for direct support professionals. >>

I would like you to tell me what the government is doing to address these concerns. You can reach me <<fill in how he/she can reach you>>.

Please let me know if there is anyone else to whom I should speak.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Thanks,

<<Signature>>

<<Name>>



RESOURCES AND SUPPORTS

Abilities Manitoba

website: www.abilitiesmanitoba.org

email: margo@abilitiesmanitoba.org

phone: (204) 890-6751

social media handles: @AbilitiesMB (Facebook and Twitter)

Barrier Free Manitoba

website: www.barrierfreemb.com

email: barrierfreemanitoba@shaw.ca

social media handles: @barrierfreemb (Facebook and Twitter)

Community Living Manitoba

website: www.aclmb.ca

email: aclmb@aclmb.ca

phone: (204) 786-1607

social media handles: @aclmanitoba (Twitter);
Community Living - Manitoba (Facebook)

Continuity Care

website: www.continuitycare.ca

email: info@continuitycare.ca

phone: (204) 779-1679

social media handles: @contcare (Facebook)

Inclusion Winnipeg

website: inclusionwinnipeg.org

phone: (204) 786-1414

social media handles: @inclusionwinnipeg (Facebook);
@Inclusion_Wpg (Twitter); @inclusionwinnipeg (Instagram)

Manitoba Family Advocacy Group for Individuals with Disabilities

social media handle: @familyadvocacymb (Facebook)

People First of Canada

website: www.peoplefirstofcanada.ca

email: info@peoplefirstofcanada.ca

phone: (204) 784-7362

social media handles: @peoplefirstofcanada (Facebook)

People First of Manitoba

email: peoplefirstmanitoba@gmail.com

phone: (204) 899-2924

social media handles: @peoplefirstmanitoba (Facebook)

Society for Manitobans with Disabilities

website: smd.mb.ca

email: info@smd.mb.ca

phone: (204) 975-3010

social media handles: @SMDFoundationEasterSealsManitoba

Winnipeg SPaRC

(Special Parents and Remarkable Children)

Search *Winnipeg Sparc* on Facebook

