



EMPOWERMENT REPORT

(The Newsletter of the Empowerment Council)

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ADVOCACY

By Jennifer Chambers

What is it?

Advocacy means “to give voice to” - which means speaking up. Advocates try to get voices heard that are otherwise silenced (or listened to politely then ignored). Ideally, advocacy is about people taking charge of their own lives.



When people are seen as inferior, they are more likely to be ignored. This can be outright discrimination, as in “THOSE people have nothing useful to say”. Alternately, a person can mean to be kind, but

actually be disrespectful by substituting their will for the other person’s, describing it as in the person’s “best interest”. (This is also known as “for your own good”.)

Advocacy must be about what the person wants for her/himself. Self-advocacy is when a person speaks out for her/him self. Individual advocacy is when the person instructs an advocate to speak for her or him. Systemic advocacy is about making changes to systems (like hospital or governmental policy, or laws) that affect a group of people.

Why is it important?

Researchers have found that “violence against persons with disabilities in institutional settings ... appears to be of substantial magnitude,” while staff report it to be much less common than do the people themselves.¹ Of the response to this violence: “There is a prevailing sense that justice is not being served”.²

¹ The Roehrer Institute, *Violence in Institutional Facilities Against Persons with Disabilities – A Literature Review*, 1999, p.3

² The Roehrer Institute, *Harm’s Way, the Many Faces of Violence and Abuse against Persons with Disabilities*, 1995, p.119

For services to meet the needs of the people they exist to serve, they need to be based on people’s self identified needs, (there is research evidence supporting this fact³). People who have been in the mental health or addiction systems are experts on what they need, but we are often treated as lacking the intelligence or values to participate in decision-making.

Organizing for Change – Systemic Advocacy

When does an individual advocacy issue become systemic?

- When many people have the same (or similar) problem
- When the solution requires a change in a system that effects many people (like an institution, or a law)

Community Development is a means of discovering systemic problems, and of organizing to address them. There IS power in numbers, especially when you are a member of a group who is often disbelieved, like people who have been in the addiction or mental health system. Being part of a group in which every member has shared common experiences can be very powerful. We often get blamed for bad experiences we have, and believe it, until we can see in another person that we did not deserve to be hurt. When we can leave behind the self-blame that kept us silent, we can start to address the things that have hurt us.

Power

More power is needed in the hands of the people for whom the system exists. To have places of healing that are safe and beneficial means they must answer to the people they serve.

³ Dushka Crane Ross et al, *Consumer and Case Manager Perspectives of Service Empowerment: Relationship to Mental health Recovery*, Journal of Behavioral Health Sciences and Research, 33:2, April 2006, p. 142-154

THE RIGHT TO COMPLAIN

By Lucy Costa

It is not always easy to speak up especially when you fear that there may be a punishment for doing so. However if clients don't speak up services will never improve for the better. CAMH is committed to being "client centred" which means you should be the person shaping and determining your plan of care.

Right number ten in the CAMH Bill of Client Rights states that all clients have the right to complain. It is important to ask questions and share feedback about the services you receive and you should never be punished for bringing a complaint forward.

There are various ways you can make a complaint and there are also tips you can follow in order to ensure your complaint is taken seriously. Here are some *Frequently Asked Questions* about how to offer feedback:

1. [What is a complaint?](#)

A complaint is an expression of concern about the behavior or actions of an individual or individuals. It can also be a criticism of services or programs. You make a complaint when you are not happy with the standard of service you have received or lack of services offered.

Some complaints are more serious than others and sometimes you may need to consult a lawyer for specific legal advice. The CAMH Bill of Client Rights is an excellent way to learn about your rights as a client of CAMH. You should have received a copy of the Bill of Clients Rights once admitted as a client into the hospital.

2. [Where do I send my complaint?](#)

Any complaints regarding legal status, questions about medications, forms, or need for rights advice should be sent to the **Psychiatric Patient Advocate Office**. (416) 535 8501 Extension 3099. The Patient Advocate operates at arms' length

program from the Ministry of Health.

If you have concerns about services, or programs you can call CAMH's 'in-house **Client Relations Office**' at (416) 535-8501 - Extension 3099, 2028, or 2078.

When several clients have the same complaint, then this is usually a "systemic issue" and should be directed to the **Empowerment Council**. The

Empowerment Council deals with systemic issues within CAMH and is an organization made up entirely of people who have had experience in the psychiatric or addiction system. Call (416) 535-8501 - Extension 3013.

3. [What should be included in a complaint?](#)

It's always good to write things down so you remember and have a record for yourself. It is good to know what changes

you would like to see with regards to a complaint. If you are complaining about an individual or event use the four **Ws** - Who, What, Where, When as a guide. *For example:*

Who am I complaining about - include first and last name if possible.

What are the details of what happened, describe the actions or statements of the individual or individuals. The more specific you can be the better. Keep copies of any records that are part of your complaint.

Where did the incident occur what is in your room, outside or somewhere else - were there any other witnesses around?

When did the incident occur, include the exact time and date if possible.

Complaining is one way for you to assert your rights and it can also be a way for you to clarify what works well for you and what does not. It can also ultimately benefit many others who just may share the exact same issue as you!



Check us out!

WWW.EMPOWERMENTCOUNCIL.CA

Say "No" to Bill C-15 By David Wong

Bill C-15 is going to send more people to prison for drug use.

The Bill requires:

- A minimum of six months in prison for possession of one marijuana plant,
- A minimum one year prison term for selling marijuana linked to organized crime (organized crime could mean 3 or more people involved in the transaction)
- Mandatory two years in jail for selling hard drugs (cocaine, heroin, crystal meth) to young people.

Bill C-15 has passed second reading in the Senate; although not yet law, it is definitely one step closer to becoming one. The Liberals joined with the Conservatives to pass a second reading on Canada's first law determining mandatory minimum jail sentences for drug offenses. This Bill can be very harmful to our society, throwing everyone convicted with a drug offense into prison.

These sentences are unacceptably harsh, as most of the people who are selling are street level people, often dealing in order to support their own habit. Throwing them in prison will not help them out of the addictive cycle, but will put their health at risk. Anyone in prison can get drugs easily if they want them; the rate of transmission of HIV and Hepatitis C from sharing needles in prison has increased over the past 10 years. It is outrageous to put someone who is already vulnerable in a place where drug use, violence and a higher risk of contracting communicable diseases are likely to occur.

Do we really need more people in our jail system? It's expensive to put people in jail; it is estimated to cost \$164/day for each person. If we have the money, our government could better fund more treatment programs to help people with addictions, instead of spending it on enforcement. There are people on a waiting list for six months before being admitted to a treatment program. It is unacceptable for anyone who needs (wants) to get help to have to wait six months. When an individual is seeking help, it needs to be addressed right away. The success rate for overcoming addiction is much higher when individuals want to kick the bad habit themselves.

Government should look at the root issues that are causing people to use drugs. It is often the individual's life experiences (such as abuse and trauma) and environment that put them in a position where they are vulnerable to addiction. Society needs to focus on ensuring the social determinants of health: affordable housing, employment, education, safety, food, supportive communities, etc. This is the long-term solution for those of us with addictions - the government should fund more community-based centres to address the above issues. People need to learn new skills, find a decent living space and create a new life where they can support themselves and their family in order to break free of the cycle of addiction.

Why are people with substance use problems disqualified from receiving Ontario Disability Supports Program (ODSP) benefits? Why does the Ontario government treat addicts differently from other people with disabilities? It is clearly stated in the Ontario Human Rights Code¹ that an addiction is considered a disability¹. It is not fair to anyone with substance use problems who needs some financial assistance to help them overcome tough living conditions. People are in a better position to recover when their lives are stable, with low stress and a guaranteed income to support them.

The Empowerment Council has invited a representative from Parkdale Legal Aid Services to talk about ODSP and Addiction. Join us on Thursday, July 23rd in Room 207 at 60 White Squirrel Way from 4:00 – 6:00 p.m. for a discussion and answers to your questions.

In addition, the Empowerment Council will be hosting a "User Group" seeking your advice, comments, solutions and thoughts on issues that involve CAMH and government policies on substance use. Remember "Nothing about us without us". Join us on Wednesday, August 19 in Room 207, 60 White Squirrel Way from 6:00 – 7:30 p.m. to have your voice heard.

I will also be facilitating an educational workshop for organizations, schools and community agencies that are interested in the subject about how drugs affect the individual, family and society, ODSP issues, Bill C-15, discrimination and stigma, harm reduction and more.

If you have any comments or want more information about the above topics, call 416-535-8501 x7007 or email david_wong@camh.net.

¹ www.ohrc.on.ca "Disability" covers a broad range and degree of conditions, some visible and others not. A disability may have been present from birth, caused by an accident, or developed over time. It includes physical, mental, and learning disabilities, mental disorders, hearing or vision disabilities, epilepsy, drug and alcohol dependencies, environmental sensitivities, as well as other conditions.

Under the *Code*, protection from discrimination because of disability includes past, present and perceived conditions. For example, a person who experiences discrimination because she is a recovered alcoholic is protected by the Code, as is a person whose condition does not limit his workplace abilities but who is believed to be at greater risk of having limitations in the future.

Examples of Systemic Advocacy Issues Addressed by the Empowerment Council:

- **The development of the CAMH Bill of Client Rights:**
The EC asked clients of CAMH what rights they required at CAMH. We submitted the list to CAMH, who responded. We then went back to the clients to ask how to proceed. This process took years, but finally resulted in a Bill that contained rights important to clients of CAMH, which was adopted by CAMH.
- **The legal right of people with addiction to get ODSP:**
The Social Benefits Tribunal has been denying people with addictions Ontario Disability Supports, because of legislation passed by the former conservative government of Ontario. The first step in addressing this was to argue that the Ontario Human Rights Code must apply to the SBT. We acquired funding for legal counsel and intervened in a case that went to the Supreme Court. Our side won the case.¹
- **We have surveyed people using addiction services at CAMH as well as people in the Law and Mental Health Program at CAMH to advocate for their needs both at CAMH and regarding the law.**

¹ The Ontario Human Rights Code states: Every person has a right to equal treatment with respect to services, goods and facilities, without discrimination because of race, ancestry, place of origin, colour, ethnic origin, citizenship, creed, sex, sexual orientation, age, marital status, family status or disability.

The Queen Street Site Empowerment Council Presents:

Mental Health Court 102

Do you use mental health services?
Are you currently facing charges?

Do you worry about getting arrested?
Do you know your rights?

Free Information Session
August 19th 2009 : 2:00 PM - 3:00 PM
Empowerment Council Office – Room 160

Guest Speakers:

Laura Horsman - Mental Health & Justice Worker
Michael Leitold - Lawyer

For more information call (416) 535-8501 Ext. 3013

EMPOWERMENT COUNCIL GENERAL MEMBERSHIP FORM

EC Statement of Purpose: *To conduct system wide advocacy on behalf of clients.*

CONTACT INFORMATION: (Please Print Clearly)

Name _____ Address _____
City _____ Postal code _____
Telephone _____ Email address _____

I have used mental health and/or addiction services (*check those that apply*):

College Street site _____ Queen Street site _____ Other: Mental Health _____
Russell Street site _____ White Squirrel Way site _____ Other: Addiction _____

I support the purpose of the Empowerment Council:

Signature _____

Send to: Empowerment Council, 33 Russell Street, Room 2008, Toronto, ON M5S 2S1
You can also fill out a membership form online at our website: www.empowermentcouncil.ca