



# Advocacy in Action

## Nonprofits across Connecticut are making their voices heard!

By Liza Andrews, MSW, Public Policy Director

Connecticut Association of Nonprofits' staff has been traveling across the state to facilitate advocacy roundtables with our members. The roundtables have provided an opportunity for nonprofit executives, staff and board members to discuss innovative advocacy ideas and tips with one another. They have been valuable forums for everyone to learn what great advocacy nonprofits are doing all over Connecticut.

Many nonprofits know the importance of building and maintaining relationships with their elected officials. So much of what nonprofits do is dictated by policies made at the local, state and federal levels. From the funding that gets allocated to your organization and the regulations that direct how you provide services, to the policies that are put in place to either help or hinder individual giving, elected officials play an important role in the world of nonprofits. Whether you are a health and human services provider, a member of the arts and culture community, an advocate or working to protect the environment, building relationships with your elected officials can only benefit your cause.

The advocacy roundtables have highlighted many effective ways that nonprofits can begin to build relationships with their elected officials. Here are just a few:

**Congratulatory Letters following Elections:** With Connecticut's state and federal level elections just having concluded in November, now is a great

time to congratulate newly elected and re-elected officials. Send them some information about your organization if you haven't met them before, or remind re-elected officials that you are still available as a resource.

**Legislative Open Houses and Breakfasts:**

Invite your elected officials, be they local, state or federal, out to your organization to meet your staff, Board and consumers. Have a discussion over breakfast about the issues you are facing or give them a tour of your facilities. This is a great opportunity to put a face to your consumers and highlight your services while allowing legislators to see your day-to-day operations.

**Invite Elected Officials to your Annual Meeting or Special Event:**

Annual meetings offer another opportunity to educate your elected officials about the important work your organization does. Ask them to give opening remarks or say a few words to your attendees.

**Community Events:** If there are events being held in your community and elected officials will be present, you should make

every effort to attend and introduce yourself.

Once relationships are built, they must be maintained. Here are few examples of how CT Nonprofits' members maintain relationships with their elected officials:

**Be a Resource:** It's not all about what elected officials can do for you, but also what you can do for them. Legislators are faced with countless policy issues that cross a wide spectrum from energy and environmental policy to taxes to human services. You are an expert in your area and it's important that you make yourself available to share that knowledge.

**Follow-through:** When an elected official asks your for information or to help with providing services to a constituent, make sure you follow-through and do what you say you're going to do.

**Give Awards:** Any chance you have to honor elected officials who have worked to support your organization will help to solidify this mutually beneficial relationship.

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# SAVE THE DATE | January 7, 2011

## Advocacy 101 Workshop

### Learning how to achieve change for those you serve

We all know from working at a nonprofit that there are so many people and communities in need that it is often difficult to make time for anything other than providing direct services. However, it is critical for all nonprofits to become involved in advocacy.

If you are not speaking up about the funding for your programs or the regulations and laws that govern your services and the resources available for your consumers, then who will? It is incumbent upon nonprofits to be the voice for those who have no voice.

CT Nonprofits' Center for Professional Development training – **Advocacy 101** – is a wonderful opportunity for nonprofit staff to learn the ins and outs of advocacy. This interactive workshop will cover the basics of how a bill becomes a law, but more importantly, you will discuss and discover creative ways in which to convince legislators to support and champion your cause. The training will also discuss using the media as an organizing tool.

Join us on **Friday, January 7, 2011** for this exciting opportunity. To register, visit [www.ctnonprofits.org/education/offerings](http://www.ctnonprofits.org/education/offerings).

As the regional advocacy roundtables have demonstrated, nonprofits are working hard to make their voices and the voices of their consumers heard. There is no denying that nonprofits are stretched thin and many find it difficult to make time for advocacy. But there is also no denying that the present climate of local, state and federal budget deficits, decreased private giving and increased service demand necessitate that nonprofits make advocacy a priority.

CT Nonprofits encourages all nonprofits to take time to get to know their elected officials. Build those critical relationships and then don't be shy about ensuring that elected officials know about the challenges and needs of your particular services. Just ten minutes a week to send your elected officials an email or make a call about a pending piece of legislation is all it takes to effect change. And don't hesitate to get your staff, Board and interested consumers involved. The true power of nonprofits lies in our dedication to our missions and our numbers. The more of us there are to speak up, the harder it is for our needs to be ignored. ■



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