

## Systems Advocacy

### Goals:

To remain an independent and critical voice.

To speak out for new legislation, policies and practices that are needed to enable people to lead valued lives.

To highlight where policy is in place but not being implemented in its letter and/or spirit.

To forge new precedents.

To be represented on Committees which are responsible for systems change.

## Education

During the period, Family Advocacy achieved the goal of establishing an independent and critical voice to speak out for change in the education system. The *Kids Belong Together* Campaign, co-ordinated by Belinda Frisch, was instrumental in bringing inclusive education to the fore within the context of the NSW State election and beyond.

### The goals of the campaign were :

- \* to gain political and educational acceptance of the benefits of inclusive education
- \* to ensure that parents who are involved in the project understand their historic role of leadership and experience a greater sense of control over their lives and the lives of their children
- \* to ensure that the community is more exposed to information about the benefits of inclusive education.

The strategies used to achieve the above goals covered a wide range of activities. A brief summary of these included:

Letters written to all State politicians.

Meetings held with 47 local politicians from all the major parties by parents and parent groups. These meetings included a majority of the Coalition's Education, Training and Tourism Advisory Committee, and all of the members of the Labor Party's Education & Youth Affairs Committee.

Deputations held with Minister for School Education, Shadow Spokesperson on Education, and the Leader of the Democrats.

Seven local radio interviews; one local TV report; one report on national TV; six state and national radio interviews; one feature article in a major state-wide newspaper.

Sixteen articles published in metropolitan or local papers.

Subsequent to the election in March, a meeting was organised with the current Minister's senior policy officer to discuss a proposed feasibility study. Suggestions were made on terms of reference for such a study.

Meetings also took place with the Federation of P. & C. Associations, and the Teachers' Federation. Correspondence was entered into in the Federation newsletter to counteract negative stories and insinuations about the push for an inclusive education for all children. Agreement was reached with the Federation of P. & C. Associations about a clearer commitment to inclusion.

#### Outcomes:

- Labor Party policy issued prior to the election stated the need for greater integration and inclusion into mainstream schools and that schools should not discriminate against students on the basis of disability.
- Issue of inclusion in schools firmly placed on the NSW political and community agenda.
- Increases in the numbers of parents who are prepared to inform those in positions of power about their frustration with the education system.
- Useful longer-term alliances made with key figures who influence educational policy.
- Promise of a Private Members Bill.
- Increased public awareness that inclusion is an issue which will benefit all children.

The work on advocating change in the education system will continue in 1995-1996.

#### **Future of advocacy in Australia**

Family Advocacy has continued to support the work of the Australian Advocacy Network, including:

- Helping with the organisation of a weekend event which brought people involved in advocacy from across Australia to discuss widening the Network and establishing priorities for its work.
- Contracting with a person to develop a submission to MGM Consultancy who were conducting an examination about identifying and evaluating effective advocacy.

- Participating in teleconferences.

In addition, during the year, Family Advocacy:

- supported the participation of Judy Ellis on the Disability Advocacy Effectiveness Working Party. The role of the Working Party is to oversee a national consultancy which is examining how to recognise and evaluate effective advocacy efforts;
- met with the consultants carrying out the project, and made a written submission.

The Interim Report of the consultancy will be circulated in July, and it is expected that further involvement will take place.

### **Disability Safeguards Coalition**

Family Advocacy remains represented on the Disability Safeguards Coalition. During the period, the Coalition has acted in a number of key areas, including:

- making representations that all service provider transition plans under the Disability Services Act, 1993 become appellable to the Community Services Appeals Tribunal, thus ensuring full accountability for the future lives of people with disabilities who are in receipt of services;
- monitoring the implementation of the transition of services under the Disability Services Act, 1993.

### **Highlighting gaps in services for people who have a label of challenging behaviour**

Family Advocacy joined with other concerned individuals and organisations to work at ways to highlight the lack of attention to this group of people by the State Government. This informal group felt strongly that the Department of Community Services was increasingly abandoning the needs of this group leading to greater risk of institutionalisation.

The first stage of this was to organise an event which aimed to:

- provide an opportunity for family members, advocates, and professionals to work co-operatively in implementing solutions to the issues raised by challenging behaviour;
- encourage the continuation of education and information distribution on challenging behaviour through the establishment of a group of interested people;
- promote systems change that accepts that solutions to challenging behaviour are more complex than focusing on the individual person.

This event "The Solution Road" took place on April 8 and attracted over 100 people. One outcome was that a report outlining strategies for Departmental services was released at the time of the event.

The initial group has met again to consider follow-up and strategies on how to increase the number of people willing to give up time to carry on with this important advocacy effort.