

Communities for Kids Advocacy Guidelines

It is desirable that *Communities for Kids* (CFK), at a regional (Steering Committee) and local (Community Table) level, engage in advocacy in order to promote optimal health and development of children aged 0-6 in the South Okanagan – Similkameen¹.

Since its inception, a significant amount of CFK's daily work at both the local and regional level has been, and will continue to be, *cause* advocacy. That is to say, CFK disseminates information, in many ways, to raise awareness of the critical importance of the early years in order to advance and enhance early childhood development.

Occasionally, individuals and organizations ask CFK, regionally and locally, to advocate on their behalf. It is CFK's desire to support such requests wherever possible and appropriate². The nature of this *case* or *situational* advocacy will be to provide information relevant to the circumstances of the request in order to promote understanding of early childhood development (ECD). As is the case in CFK's *cause* advocacy, CFK's *case* advocacy will take the form of evidence-based information provision.

Procedure: CFK's regional and local level *case* advocacy will only be undertaken after Steering Committee consideration. In time-sensitive cases the Executive Committee may decide to act without Steering Committee consultation. If the Executive considers that a proposed action may have a particular bearing on a partner organization(s) then that action will not be pursued before Steering Committee consideration, which may include consultation to determine consequences.

Procedure: CFK Community Table, i.e., local level, *case* and *cause* advocacy will be supported by Community Table facilitators, the CFK project coordinator, and the Steering Committee. To promote optimal ECD outcomes, all Table advocacy will be considered by the facilitator, project coordinator, and the Steering Committee where appropriate.

¹ It is important to note that advocacy is one of the seven 'core activities' of Children First initiatives.

² The Steering Committee or Executive Committee will decide what may be possible and appropriate in open and frank discussion guided by the Committee's Terms of Reference, and by any professional Standards of Conduct applicable to individual Committee members.

APPENDIX A

Advocacy Guidelines for Children First Community Development Initiatives *Draft*

Advocacy is “the act of speaking, or of disseminating information intended to influence individual behaviour or opinion, corporate conduct, or public policy and law”.

Advocacy is one of the core activities of community development initiatives. Advocacy often evolves from local information gathering and planning efforts. As community coalitions come to understand the needs of their community, it can become necessary to advocate for those needs. Advocacy activities should not be undertaken prior to building partnerships, or before research and planning activities. You can advocate on behalf of children and parents in your community only when you have first heard their voice.

Children First initiatives list the following core activities. These should be considered relatively developmentally.

1. **Working Together**
2. **Spreading the Word**
3. **Research**
4. **Planning**
5. **Advocacy**
6. **Allocation**
7. **Evaluation**

Even if you are on the right track, you will get run over if you just sit there.

Mark Twain

To advocate is to participate in a democratic society. Advocating for supports for young children requires collaboration with many sectors of the community. Collaboration provides the impetus for social change in our communities.

Advocacy

What can it change? Policies, implementation of policies, laws and practices

Target group Decision-makers, leaders, policymakers, people in positions of influence

Does it mainly target people who have influence over others? Yes

Information and Education

What can it change? Awareness and behaviour

Target group Particular age group, gender, residents of an area, etc.

Does it mainly target people who have influence over others? No

Community mobilization

What can it change? Capacity of communities to identify and address their problems

Target group Members of a community

Does it mainly target people who have influence over others? No

By collaborating together, communities can create increased government awareness of community concerns and give policy makers greater support when trying to influence public policy development. Gathering the information, educating the community, building support and collaborating with government to create viable solutions to policy issues, can raise the priority placed on community concerns and increase the likelihood of positive action. When communities use the positive power of advocacy to develop a united voice on common community issues, they increase government awareness of and support for the development of responsive public policy solutions.

Advocacy is most effective when it is proactive and part of a planned strategy, not just a reaction to a particular policy or program decision that is unpopular. Initiatives should develop advocacy objective and activities as part of their regular strategic planning process. What do we want to change and what actions can we take to bring about that change?

Questions for Consideration:

1. Who is the most effective spokesperson for a community coalition?
Community coordinators are most often called upon to speak on behalf of the coalition. This often makes sense as only the coordinator is clearly accountable to the coalition. The coordinator needs time, however, to engage in an appropriate consultation process with the entire group prior to speaking. You cannot speak on behalf of the group without sound knowledge of what the group is saying. It is also helpful to have other people willing to act as spokespeople. This mitigates the perception that the coordinator is acting in isolation from the group.
2. What about government employees who are members of the coalition?
Each member of the coalition needs to have an opportunity for approval prior to their names or their organization's name being attached to any communication. However, coalitions are speaking ultimately on behalf of the community, not their member organizations.
3. What about speaking to the media?
Use of media of course is an integral part of most advocacy strategies. Again, being proactive is the best approach. Coalition coordinators should have some training in media relations and be prepared for any media contacts.
4. What about letters of support?
Coalitions are often asked to provide letters of support for individuals and organizations. This is better done by each organization separately, not by the coalition as a whole. An effective advocacy strategy would see the coalition undertaking activities that would encourage universal access to early literacy programs, not just supporting the provision of that service by one provider.

APPENDIX B

The Vancouver Coastal Health Authority has produced a paper entitled “Population Health Advocacy: VCH Guideline and Resources”. That paper is available as a reference to support CFK’s advocacy work, and includes the following topics;

- ✓ What is Population Health Advocacy?
- ✓ Advocacy within VCH
- ✓ Principles of Advocacy
- ✓ Advocacy Resources
- ✓ Types of Advocacy
- ✓ Communications and Advocacy
- ✓ Advocacy Framework
- ✓ Advocacy Strategies
- ✓ Information Sources