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# Let Your Voice Be Heard!

Liz Hecht  
Family Voices of Wisconsin

# Goals for evening

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- Parent roles as an advocate
- Opportunities with state legislators
- State biennial budget process
- Survival budget for children
- Action steps

# What is advocacy?

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- “to plead the cause of another”
- Policy advocacy.... takes that pleading into the political arena...It is a practical way to translate basic values like respect for human dignity into policies and laws, and is a core part of our democracy.

*Nancy Amidei So You Want to Make A Difference*

# Parents are advocates

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- IEP
- Doctors office
- School team
- Community providers
- Advisory committee
- Health insurance
- Policy makers

# What Difference Can I Make?

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- The only way your legislators will know what is important to you is if you tell them!
- In the first 6 months of 2001 in Wisconsin:
  - 606 organizations registered to lobby
  - 687 lobbyists were registered
  - \$13.8 million was spent
  - 144,000 hours of direct lobbying conducted
  - 25% of all lobbying expenditures by 18 organizations

# The World of Your Legislator

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- He wants to do a good job
- She wants to be re-elected
- He wants to be responsive
- She is not an expert in your business
- He is busy
- He doesn't know what you want
- She wants to know how her decisions will affect you
- He is concerned with dozens of bills
- She is likely to forget your name, Re-introduce yourself
- She deserves respect

Adapted from Bobby Silverstein

# Joint Finance Hearing

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- “Committee members were quite moved by the testimony and following the hearing, Assembly Co-Chair John Gard made it clear that because of the impact of the testimony, he and others were going to support increased funding.”

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- “These parents told emotionally powerful stories and made a compelling argument that this program was vitally necessary to help children live healthier, happier and more productive lives. These are good kids with loving families who at a young age have encountered a lifetime of barriers. They certainly didn’t deserve to have their government turn it’s back and fail to provide the funding to help these programs achieve their promise.” Senator Bob Jauch

# Why tell stories?

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- Stories are what people remember
- Deepen their understanding of issues for children and families
- Makes the problem real
- Help them make decisions that lead to more supportive policies
- Help them find touchstones to our experiences in their own lives

# Telling your story

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- Limit the length of your story to 1-2 minutes.
- Tell only the parts that best illustrate the point you want to make ex. What impact has being on a waiting list had on your child/family?
- Chose the story with the most impact ex. “Because we could not afford to put a ramp on our house, my daughter has to leave her wheelchair at school, and crawls around all day. She is 13.”
- Be honest. Don’t exaggerate.
- Don’t tell “hearsay” stories.

# Tips for Delivering Your Message

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- Be informed, brief and clear about what you want
- Know what you want to say, try not to read from your notes
- Be respectful, patient and persistent
- The goal is not to be liked, but to be respected and listened to
- Deliver your basic message in about 2 minutes. Share additional information if time permits.

# Your Message

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- Who you are
- Explain the issue or problem
- Share a personal story about how the issue is affecting your or your child's life
- What you think needs to be done and what you want your legislator to do
- What will happen if the problem is fixed
- Ask for a commitment-will they support...an increase in funding...
- Leave written information your contact information