

## RIDDC SETS STAGE FOR BUILDING A FAMILY ADVOCACY COALITION IN RHODE ISLAND

The Rhode Island Developmental Disabilities Council's (RIDDC) Annual Meeting took place on Saturday, October 15, 2016 at the Radisson Hotel in Warwick from 8:30 am-4:00 pm. The focus for the day was a discussion on strategies for building a statewide **Family Advocacy Coalition** in RI.

The Council invited **Chas Moseley**, US District Court Monitor for the RI Consent Decree, and **Jennifer Wood**, Deputy Secretary, RI Office of Health and Human Services (OHHS), to share their perspectives on building effective advocacy coalitions.

### Consent Decree Opportunities

Chas Moseley commented that there are opportunities available through the Consent Decree for the Council and family groups to influence policy and practice in RI.

“The Consent Decree sets clear goals and expectations for the:

- full inclusion of people with DD in society,
- full access to supports people with disabilities need to be employed in integrated, community jobs at competitive wages, and
- full access to the assistance necessary to enable people to participate in the mainstream of community life.”



Chas mentioned that the Consent Decree requires the State to implement incentives to encourage transition to integrated settings through the use of public-private partnerships with people with developmental disabilities, families, employers and community organizations.

The State also has to develop and publicize its oversight process and mechanisms for people with disabilities, families, providers and advocates to file complaints and have their concerns heard in a timely manner.

The Consent Decree doesn't create Coalitions to ensure that necessary advocacy takes place. Coalitions need to be developed by people with common interests/values.

“Coalitions can be effective with careful planning; long-term commitment; research into best and promising practices; development of goals, plans and strategies; strategic meetings with key players who influence the design, funding and delivery of services; and individual action. It’s critical to be really clear on WHAT you want to accomplish!”

**Advocacy Works!**

Chas suggested that the Coalition become a visible source for education and training which provides excellent opportunities for bringing people, ALL people together for collaboration, problem solving and providing advice and assistance. To build credibility it is important the Coalition be consistent and concise, identify key issues, use reliable data and “KNOW YOUR FACTS” to back up your points. Develop an “*Agenda for Change*” with a planned strategy that specifies a clear set of activities you want to accomplish.

Lastly Chas encouraged the Council to look at the data from the “*National Core Indicators (NCI)*” on the status/needs of families, ways to provide useful information to make a difference in their lives and the need for adequate crisis and health care supports. Another national resource is the “*Supporting Families of individuals with intellectual disabilities Community of Practice*” Initiative. There are now 16 states that are working on gaining consensus on issues related to supporting families at both the national and state level, that would inform practices and identify policies to build a sustainable system that results in improved supports to families.

## **Organizing for Change**



Jennifer Wood shared her thoughts on organizations that she is familiar with that were effective in terms of outcomes. People want to have a seat at the table.

You need to be clear on WHO you are, what is your PURPOSE and what are your GOALS.

She gave several examples of groups that have demonstrated effective organizational and leadership skills including the following:

- **Providence Student Union**  
Young people freely unite to develop leadership skills, organize for ground-up improvements to their schools, and ultimately win a fair say in their education system. They began in 2010 with a series of Campaigns to improve their school, initially Hope High School. After achieving a number of school-based victories, the group then organized 6+ chapters across the Providence School District.



- **Olneyville Neighborhood Association (ONA)**  
The ONA organizes low-income families, immigrants communities, and people of color in Olneyville and beyond to create a diverse, community-led movement that wins economic, social and political justice.

- **The RI American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU)**

The ACLU performs its work in three major ways: litigation, legislation and education. The cases that they take, the bills they lobby on and the public education activities that they sponsor, are designed to help preserve and protect the civil liberties of all Rhode Islanders against government infringement.



- **Young Voices**

For ten years, Young Voices has empowered more than 600 youth to achieve, succeed, and become confident civic leaders in their communities.

- **Marriage Equality RI (MERI)**

MERI's consistent goal for years was to win access to marriage for all Rhode Island couples. The legislation had been introduced in the House every session since 1997 and finally passed in 2013, making RI the 10<sup>th</sup> State to legalize gay marriage.

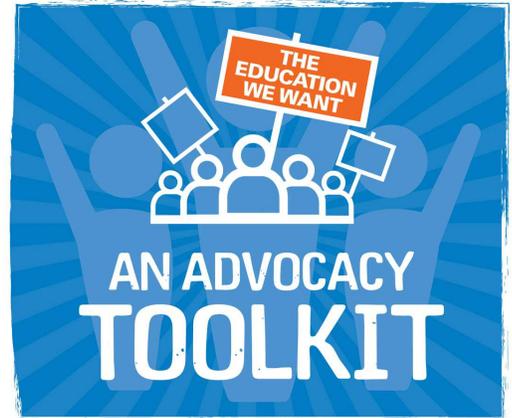
- **Center for Disability Rights (CDR)**

CDR partners with Disability Rights activists across the city, state, and country in order to achieve the goal of independence, integration, and civil rights of all people with disabilities. To achieve this goal, CDR uses a “pitchfork” strategy of advocacy, including Legislative, Legal, Media, Direct action, and Administrative.



Jennifer gave a detailed roadmap of steps to take for being effective and creating positive change that the organizations previously mentioned utilized:

- Collectively define a CLEAR MISSION, VISION and VALUES
- Build Leadership Skills of people who are involved
- Focus on ONE major issue and build a “campaign” around it for social change to show that it is the right thing to do...set and prioritize GOALS
- Think about what is the CHANGE you want to create? Look at the Current State and the Future State (think of the concept of a Magic Wand and what you really want something to be)... “Culture Change”
- Decide on a method of decision-making.... Voting vs. Consensus
- Set an AGENDA for Change with a clear set of activities/practices to change
- Establish CREDIBILITY
- Take ACTION to move the needle
- Assess progress and then REPLAN.



**“You’ve got to start somewhere. Success is the best way to keep people involved, motivated and willing to carry on the campaign. It’s important for people to understand what is in it for them.**

**There are a million reasons NOT to do something but only one reason why you SHOULD do it... YOU SHOULD DO IT.”**

### **Next Steps**

The RI Developmental Disabilities Council (RIDDC) will be scheduling meetings to discuss ideas for next steps for publicizing and establishing a Family Advocacy Coalition to strengthen the voices of families in RI.

If you would like to become involved, know families who may be interested in Family Advocacy or you want more information contact the Council at **401-737-1238** or email us at [riddc@riddc.org](mailto:riddc@riddc.org).

