

HIGHLIGHTS OF DRW 2009 ADVOCACY PLANS

Disability Rights Wisconsin (DRW) advocates on behalf of adults and children with developmental disabilities, mental illness, and a variety of physical, sensory and other disabilities. DRW's Annual Plans cover a wide range of advocacy issues, as shown below.

Community & Institutions

1. Advocating for people to live in the most integrated setting

- (New)** • Work with state and county staff on the Southern WI Center downsizing
- Assist in discharge planning for people in institutions
- Promote diversions to prevent institution admissions
- Play an active role in institution closings and downsizings
- Advocate for less restrictive residential placements

2. Promoting Quality Community Services and Self Determination

- (New)** • Work with state staff to implement the new funding for the Children's Medicaid Waivers
- Assist people on waiting lists
- Advocate for seamless transitions to the adult service system
- (New)** • Advocate for enrollees in Family Care, Partnership, and Ombudsman Programs via the new Family Care Ombudsman Program
- Promote recovery based mental health services
- Work with local sexual assault and domestic violence programs to help them become more disability friendly
- Advocate for increased funding for community based services for adults and children
- (New)** • Monitor the implementation of the new Medicaid waiver for adults with mental illness
- Advocate for people in SSI Managed Care Program
- Advocate for people with mental illness in substandard housing (with special emphasis on Milwaukee County)
- (New)** • Work with state government and other disability advocates to implement the new IRIS program
- (New)** • Work with Milwaukee County staff and other mental health advocates to develop a long range plan for the Milwaukee County mental health system

3. Confronting Abuse and Neglect

- Investigate reported instances of abuse and neglect (especially when state officials have failed to conduct an adequate investigation), including wrongful deaths
- Release the “Angie Report” documenting the death of a young girl in prone restraints in a day treatment center and proposing a variety of policy recommendations
- Promote policy and statutory changes to reduce the use of seclusion and restraints, and the incidence of other abuses

4. Advocating for people with disabilities in the criminal justice/correctional system

- (New) • Investigate for-profit health care provider for 20 county jails
- Advocate for appropriate treatment, services, and accommodations
- Promote diversion programs
- Challenge disciplinary programs which do not acknowledge behaviors that are a manifestation of a person’s disability
- Target “special managed units” at Taycheedah
- Investigate prolonged use of segregation in juvenile units at Mendota and Southern Oaks
- Focus on health care quality in selected county jails
- (New) • Monitor implementation of DOC’s new policies re long-term segregation of inmates with mental illness

Schools

1. Confronting Abuse and Neglect

- Investigate individual reports of abuse and neglect
- Continue efforts to pass new legislation re use of seclusion and restraint in schools

2. Ensuring the right to a free and appropriate education

- Challenge inappropriate expulsions and suspensions
- Provide advocacy and training to disrupt the “school to jail pipeline”
- Oppose the inappropriate use of day treatment as a school placement
- Promote appropriate transition planning, with a focus on integrated employment and assistive technology

- Continue litigation against Madison Public Schools re the right to the district's payment of pre-school tuition
3. Advocating for children with disabilities to be educated in the same schools and classrooms as other children of the same age
 - Provide consultation and training on this issue
 - Oppose growth in segregated schools
 4. Continue major reform efforts in Milwaukee Public School System
 - Continue class action litigation
 5. Continue efforts to increase state and federal funding for special education
 - Work within Survival Coalition and the Quality Education Coalition on a variety of strategies
- (New) • Monitor use of Federal Stimulus Package funding in WI's schools

Civil Rights

1. Advocating for the right to supports necessary to participate in community life
 - Advocate for passage of legislation to require insurance companies to cover the cost of cochlear implants and hearing aids for children
 - Advocate for accessible, affordable transportation
 - Advocate for more accessible and affordable housing options
 - Advocate for reduced use of selected workshops and sub minimum wage certificates
 - Promote more emphasis on integrated employment programs in the Family Care and Partnership Programs

(New) • Participate in the implementation of the DHS Employment Task Force recommendations
2. Overcoming accessibility barriers
 - Challenge employment discrimination and advocate for reasonable accommodations in the workplace
 - Challenge housing discrimination in individual cases and through training and technical assistance to a variety of agencies
 - Play an active role in Milwaukee and statewide fair housing coalitions
 - Oppose building codes, zoning restrictions, or new legislation that would impede consumer choice in where to live

- Engage in a variety of activities to promote the voting rights of people with disabilities
- Promote increased availability of service animals, interpreters, testing accommodations

Public Benefits

1. Advocating the rights of persons with disabilities to benefits for which they are eligible

- Provide legal backup services to existing Disability Benefit Specialists (DBSs) in counties which have Aging and Disability Resource Centers (ADRCs)
- Expand legal backup services to new DBSs in ADRCs beginning operations this year
- (New) • Explore possibilities of expanding DRW's benefits advocacy for inmates with disabilities
- Respond to callers on DRW's Medicare Part D toll-free helpline
- Provide direct representation in benefits-related administrative hearings (in selected cases in DBS counties)

2. Providing high quality training on benefits issues to various audiences

- Conduct Medicare Part D training in various locales around the state
- In collaboration with Employment Resources, Inc., provide training on a variety of benefits issues to DBSs, Employment Benefits Counselors and others

DRW Administration

1. Strengthen overall DRW administrative infrastructure

- Review and revise personnel policies in light of DRW expansion (DRW will hit the 50 employee mark in 2008)
- Add part-time Administrative positions in Milwaukee and Madison offices

2. Enhance DRW's use of Information Technology

- Expand use of DRW's computerized case management system
- (New) • Explore purchase of new accounting software
- (New) • Utilize web-based media list building and press release distribution package to enhance DRW's media pressure

3. Ensure statewideness of DRW's advocacy work

- Continue to compile, analyze and present data to DRW staff re the geographical pattern of DRW's information and referral, individual advocacy and training activities

4. Lead DRW's development activity

- Continue to support/expand DRW membership, including the generation of various print and electronic updates

Cultural Competency

1. Increase diversity and cultural competency in DRW's individual advocacy work

- Continue to give priority to individual advocacy requests involving racial discrimination and/or culturally insensitive practices
- Continue contracts with multiple tribes to provide special education advocacy for Native American students with disabilities
- Implement new contract with Great Lakes Intertribal Council to provide special education advocacy to additional tribes
- Increase focus on immigration issues in DRW's benefits related advocacy
- Increase minority outreach activity in SE Wisconsin

2. Address specific cultural issues in DRW's systems advocacy efforts

- Increase the dialogue with DHFS and Native American organizations regarding the possible development of Native American ADRCs and Disability Benefits Specialists

3. Strengthen organizational and coalition relationships

- Continue to build on our already growing relationship with the Deaf Community and Deaf organizations
- Continue to support and participate in the Native American Disability Coalition in NW Wisconsin
- Develop new strategies to work with Hmong service providers
- Attempt to strengthen DRW ties to the Somali population in NW Wisconsin

4. Enhance cultural competency in DRW's training and technical assistance

- Team up with FACETS and UNIDOS to provide bilingual training on special education and domestic violence and sexual assault issues
- Add new focus on Latina and Native American Women in DRW's Violence Against Women with Disabilities Program

5. Make DRW materials accessible to more racial/ethnic minority populations
 - Increase variety and number of DRW materials translated into Spanish and Hmong
6. Increase the diversity of DRW Staff
 - Intensify minority recruitment for DRW graduate students and interns