

HIGHLIGHTS OF DRW 2010 ADVOCACY PLANS

Disability Rights Wisconsin (DRW) advocates on behalf of all people with disabilities in Wisconsin. This includes 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

- Work with state and county staff on the Southern WI Center downsizing
- Assist in discharge planning for people in institutions and other congregate settings
- Promote diversions to prevent institution admissions
- Play an active role in institution closings and downsizings
- Advocate for less restrictive residential placements in Family Care

2. Promoting Quality Community Services and Self Determination

- Work with state staff to implement the increased funding for the Children's Medicaid Waivers
- Assist people on waiting lists
- Expand opportunities for people with disabilities to choose the self determination approach to planning and selecting their services
- Advocate for seamless transitions to the adult service system
- Advocate for enrollees in Family Care, Partnership, and IRIS Programs on a wide variety of issues
- 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
- Advocate for people in SSI Managed Care Program via the SSI Managed Care External Advocacy Program
- Advocate for people with mental illness in substandard housing (with special emphasis on Milwaukee County)
- Continue collaboration with DHS on implementing a trauma initiative
- Work with state government and other disability advocates to implement the new IRIS program
- Work with Milwaukee County staff and other mental health advocates to develop a long range plan for the Milwaukee County mental health system

- Participate in the planning effort to create a new direction for mental health Services in Wisconsin
- Increase access to integrated employment opportunities for adults with disabilities
- Advocate for increased DHS oversight of day treatment programs

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
- Follow through on ensuring implementation of the recommendation in the “Angie Report” documenting the death of a young girl in prone restraints in a day treatment center
- Promote policy and statutory changes to reduce the use of seclusion and restraints, and the incidence of other abuses
- Continue efforts to reduce preventable deaths in institutions and community settings

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

- 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
 - Focus on health care quality in selected county jails
- 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

- Work in coalitions to support increased funding for special education
- Monitor performance reports from individual school districts
- 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
 - Conduct assessments for school programs at Mendota and Winnebago Mental Health Institutes
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 our focus on improving the transition from school to adult services through individual advocacy and training.
 5. Continue major reform efforts in Milwaukee Public School System
 - Continue class action litigation
 - Accept new cases
 6. 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
 - Monitor use of Federal Stimulus Package funding in WI's schools
 7. Provide training and technical assistance to parent advocacy and support groups.

Civil Rights

1. Advocating for the right to supports necessary to participate in community life
 - Monitor the implementation of new 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
 - Monitor the implementation of the DHS Employment Task Force recommendations (including the new definition of “prevocational services”)
2. Overcoming barriers

- Address a variety of accessibility problems faced by people with disabilities
- Challenge employment discrimination and advocate for reasonable accommodations in the workplace
- Address a variety of problems experienced by DVR clients
- 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
- Advocate the right to appropriate assistive technology
- Engage in a variety of activities to promote the voting rights of people with disabilities (including the passage of progressive legislation)
- Promote increased availability of service animals, interpreters, testing accommodations

3. Investigate reports of financial abuse by representative payees and others.

Public Benefits

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

- Continue to support expansion of Disability Benefits Specialist (DBS) services to all Wisconsin counties
- 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 (which will include Milwaukee County)
- Explore possibilities of expanding DRW's benefits advocacy for inmates with disabilities
- Provide high quality, in depth responses to callers on DRW's Medicare Part D toll-free helpline
- Advocated for Systemic improvements in the Medicare Part D Program
- Provide direct representation in benefits-related administrative hearings (in selected cases in DBS counties)

2. Increasing likelihood of a favorable outcome at the earliest stage of eligibility determination and in various post-eligibility issues, using variety of strategies.

3. 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
- Utilize a variety of training formats (e.g. webcasts, regional round tables, distance learning on-line)

DRW Administration

1. Strengthen overall DRW administrative infrastructure
 - Review and revise personnel policies in light of DRW expansion (DRW has hit the over 50 employee mark)
2. Enhance DRW's use of Information Technology
 - Expand use of DRW's internal website
 - Explore use of webcam for DRW interoffice meetings
 - Implement new accounting software
3. Ensure statewideness of DRW's advocacy work
 - Deepen DRW's analysis of data regarding requests for advocacy we are unable to respond to, and trends of requests by issue
 - 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
5. Students at DRW
 - Expand and refine the role of law students and social work students in all DRW offices

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
 - Expand 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 DHS and Native American organizations regarding the possible development of Native American ADRCs and Disability Benefits Specialists
 - Work with Milwaukee Mental Health Task Force to host a summit addressing "Race, Ethnicity and Culture: Mental Health in Milwaukee"
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
 - Work with FACETS and Alianza parent groups in Milwaukee
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
 - Continue focus on 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