

**Tools for Advocacy:
Making a Difference in Our World
Anglican Outreach Networking
Conference**

*Keynote
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Good Morning. I am really very honoured and happy to be here at a conference with the words advocacy and outreach in the title. One of the reasons has to do with a speech I once wrote but never gave called “Why is advocacy a dirty word and why is activism even dirtier?”

I had to write it because of a three distinct events that happened a few years ago that I can now share. These became important lessons for me.

Some of you will know I’ve been doing this work a long time and you can imagine I’ve seen a lot of bad things and I’ve had a lot of hard days. However, you may be surprised to learn that June 15, 2000 was definitely the hardest day I have ever had to work. It was the day of the so called Queen’s Park riot and it was necessary that I work as hard as possible to try to message that what happened that day was about homelessness, poverty, hunger and desperation in our province. That was difficult because suddenly activists became targets and propaganda was spread about them. This was my first hard lesson.

The second. The day that I was told that Adam Vaughan from CITY TV was not allowed to enter my worksite – even to wait for me to do an interview off site caused me serious concern. Then there was the day that I was forced to do a media interview in the dark in a CBC reporter’s parked car on a side street, instead of in my office, on a very innocuous subject. These were the days that I knew I was in serious trouble as a nurse in this province if I was to remain truthful as a nurse advocate.

And thirdly, I realized I was not alone. Systemic silencing became the norm. Muzzled were some of our finest workers and agencies. This occurred immediately after Mike Harris

was elected. And it was reinforced by our increased reliance on charitable donations and fundraising instead of holding governments accountable. And it was worsened by divisions in the left when we were incapacitated by the attack on social services and weakened as our workers reacted with fatigue, depression, illness, and vicarious trauma in response to the workload they were expected to uphold, and to the trauma they were expected to be in the midst of and stay silent about.

This is why I'm happy to be here today, because you have chosen to talk about advocacy.

Never has it been more necessary to embrace advocacy

Never has it been more necessary to embrace advocacy and never has it been more critical to develop new and creative ways to do the advocacy. Although there are obviously sympathetic politicians, bureaucrats and decision makers, they work in a milieu that is shifting towards privatization, maximum profit, costs versus life, and heavily influenced by polls. People who are poor are increasingly marginalized and stigmatized. That translates into prejudice, hate crimes, and hate legislation such as Councillor Doug Holyday's motion for a zero tolerance policy for people sleeping at Toronto City Hall in Nathan Phillips Square and for the development of a homeless registry. It's time we stopped victimizing the victims.

So what is advocacy?

Advocacy is promoting, fighting for and defending the welfare of others and it is based on caring and on the values

of social justice and human rights. I know that's why you are each here today.

Bishop Colin Johnson recently expressed a wish for renewed Anglican passion and energy to tackle child poverty, to provide resources that nurture children, to eradicate HIV/AIDS, to house the homeless and even suggested a special SYNOD on that which I would particularly welcome. He is right to call for this. There will be more bang for the buck with your advocacy because of who you are – Anglicans! I don't know how else to say it.

Now I'm supposed to be inspirational.

I was asked to share with you some of the things I've learned about advocacy. So here we go.

I'm going to talk about strategies that I've come to realize are, for me, the bricks and mortar of a campaign or movement.

It's a bit of a shopping list. I'm hoping you'll use your imagination to extend the potential of these 11 strategies.

1. The starting point. Locate the work as close as you can to the people affected and involve them.

- This is why the 1996 inquest into the 3 freezing deaths occurred. Homeless people said to us – what are you doing about these deaths? So we formed a coalition

and fought for an inquest.

- This is why Tent City occurred. People asked us for help and we gave it in the form of housing, food, toilets, generators, propane, and wood stoves.
- This is also how we prevented the people at Nathan Phillips Square from eviction (so far) – they asked for our help and we gave it.

2. *Make the problem visible.* Witness the truth, show it and tell it despite the obstacles.

- This is why we do disaster tours, showing influential people the scope of the problem. People like Buzz Hargrove, Howard Hampton, Michael Valpy, Alexa McDonough, George Smitherman and David Miller.
- This is why we used a secret camera to expose the horrendous conditions in an emergency shelter.
- This is why we work with documentary filmmakers. You might want to order Shelter from the Storm or Street Nurse from our TDRC office – or you might want to buy them today!

3. *Develop a sound and simple solution.* The powers that be try to make these issues so complex. But really it's about housing the homeless, taking care of our children, making sure people have enough money to live on.

- For us, we looked at the concept of how a nation could respond to a disaster. We came up with the need for emergency relief and the 1% solution. It was based on solid research but without the unnecessary and complicated messages of co-ops versus shared housing or jurisdictional issues.

- Another example of a simple solution is the housing prefabs – this is how we developed the idea of housing for Tent City. This is disaster housing that Canada manufactures and is used overseas and we realized could be applied here.
- Another idea, the ProHome is a type of housing developed by architect John Van Nostrand. We had planned to use this form of housing to relocate the Tent City people to Commissioner Street prior to the eviction. This model can be utilized quickly on vacant land.

4. *Message and the media.* In most cases the media are essential to getting the message out and influencing public and political opinion.

- Witness Home Depot's eviction of Tent City – it made international news and was in part responsible for a solution that created a pilot rent supplement program that housed over 100 people, and this will go down in Canadian housing history as a big political win.
- Offering an exclusive to a particular media outlet is often an important means to comprehensive coverage. Our secret shelter video footage was so sensitive it necessitated this tactic.
- Never hesitate to contact a person in the media if you have suggestions for a story. I've learned they are more than happy to hear from anyone.

5. *Developing allies and coalitions* – that is always useful.

- When we hold a public inquiry or press conference we

often ask prominent Canadians to partake with us. For example, one of the first public inquiries we ever did on homelessness included Michael Valpy and Sarah Polley as panelists. They brought credibility and attention to the issue.

- We worked with the Labour Council and the Canadian Autoworkers on a small coffee table picture book that was meant for working Canadians on the issue of homelessness. Copies are here today and make great gifts for teachers or colleagues.
- We are planning for a Housing rock concert in 2005 in part to build new allies with the music industry and to bring youth on board.

6. *Provide logistical support.* This is always important because individual groups have limited resources.

- It was the Newtonbrook United church, among others, that brought disaster relief to Tent City on a cold winter day in the form of hot turkey dinners - while we delivered the disaster houses, the pre-fabs on a flatbed truck in the midst of a heavy police presence.
- On November 21 and 22 (and this is where you might be able to help), we are planning a 48 hour period of action on housing for national Housing Day that will include 2 sleep outs, the first night at City Hall, the second at Queen's Park. We will need food, sleeping bags, donations, and most importantly people. For some of you who cannot sleep out, providing support for the logistics of an event can be just as important.
- We're also looking at the creation of a permanent homeless memorial, perhaps at the Church of the Holy Trinity. We will be looking for donations and artistic

support for this project.

7. *Think outside of the box.* This is where creativity comes into play.

- For instance, why can't we use pre-fab housing on existing land, on church land, in parking lots, etc. to house some people? A couple of years ago we showcased this idea at a conference however the idea was never followed up on. At the end of the conference we drove that house down Yonge St. to Tent City on a flatbed and a couple lived in it. The woman recently told me it was the first real home she had ever known. I just came back from visiting York region where they are constructing fifteen 2-bedroom pre-fabs for families to live in as a shelter. They are beautiful.
- Why can't we establish a permanent homeless memorial or sculpture in this city. The time has come to recognize this shameful situation. Like we remember fallen police officers, nurses who died from SARS, people who died of AIDs, workers who died in the course of their duties.
- And like Bishop Colin Johnson has remarked: why can't there be a special synod on poverty and homelessness?

8. *Working within legal systems for policy change.* Sometimes you can waste a lot of time in the legal process but sometimes it is worth it.

- When Drina Joubert froze to death in a truck in the 1980s, the coalition that called for an inquest won big things including a provincial program called '3000'

which was 3,000 units of affordable housing. It is all still standing and full to capacity. As well, it was the first time that singles became eligible for subsidized housing!

- Margaret Sumadh, an Out of the Cold volunteer provided emotional and powerful evidence at the inquest into the recent tuberculosis outbreak which killed at least 3 homeless men. As a result, we will likely see enhanced public health funding.
- And there is supporting legal challenges such as the one to the Safe Streets Act which is necessary to challenge bad laws that target vulnerable groups of people.

9. Research which must work to influence public policy. It can't just sit on a shelf. It must have a pulse.

- For instance, a document called Death on the streets of Canada did just that. This report by Professor David Hulchanski went to the United Nations and put the problem of homelessness in Canada in plain view.
- And there is TB or not TB – the results of a public inquiry by the Tuberculosis Action Group (or as we call it TBAG) also put that problem in plain view.
- And, the monthly addition of names of homeless deaths for the Homeless memorial at the Church of the Holy Trinity is both powerful and tragic.

10. Popular panels and public forums. These types of events allow an issue to be teased out, they allow public involvement and are a basic component of community organizing.

- For example the public inquiry TB or not TB heard evidence from a huge range of people, some of whom went on to be expert witnesses at the inquest.
- When Metro Toronto planned to cut PNA (Personal Needs Allowance) we organized a public display on a table on a street corner for the media demonstrating what PNA bought: diapers, feminine hygiene products, over the counter medications, bus tickets, etc. The City backed off on the cut!
- Just last August, our public phoning of the federal parties in Ottawa allowed homeless people to call directly on a cell phone attached to a sound system. This was done outside of City Hall where other homeless people could have a meal and watch and listen to the responses.

11. Supporting targeted campaigns. Focused and time specific campaigns on an issue are very rewarding because they are often successful.

- Our history in this city of winning the opening of emergency shelters has included **one** at Doctors Hospital, **two times** at the old Princess Margaret Hospital, **two or three times** at the Fort York Armoury, and **twice** at the Moss Park Armoury. Many, many individuals participated by phoning, faxing, emailing our targeted politicians and this has saved lives.
- Our most recent “faxathon for housing”, during the federal election, which was the first faxathon in Canadian history, helped to put the issue on the federal agenda and again this was an easy way for individuals to participate.
- Now, we are moving to target Queen’s park in the next

few months demanding that they free up the \$344 million dollars they have promised for housing.

Now I've given you some of the tools I've come to learn over the years and now I'd like to give you some concrete ways that you can make a difference.

These are some of the ways you can help:

- Make a decision to prioritize upstream work: on housing, social assistance rates, refugee issues or other needs.
- Can you support local projects that are struggling for funding that deal with long-term solutions? I'm involved with the Furniture Bank which is planning to submit a proposal for affordable housing above a new warehouse for its operations. We need to raise a lot of money. To date we have raised \$130,000 of the \$1.2 million capital for this campaign.
- Sign on to the TDRC list serve to keep up to date with information. Just send us an email.
- Do you have something planned for National Housing Day on November 22 (this is the day that the Big City Mayors signed on to the declaration that homelessness is a national disaster) and as I mentioned it is the day we are doing a 48-hour sleep out at City Hall and Queen's Park. In particular we need tents.
- Consider ordering some 1% buttons from TDRC for your congregation, your friends and family.
- Maybe your church can sponsor the Homeless Vigil at the Church of the Holy Trinity. Monies are always useful for the meal, for flowers or candles.
- **If you do one thing, this is the most important** The provincial and federal housing ministers are meeting

in November. As soon as possible, create a delegation to meet with your MP and MPP and tell them as graphically as you can what your situation is and why we need monies for housing, and increased social assistance rates.

In closing, I'm grateful to be here speaking with you. I believe you have the potential and the power to make great inroads in this province, at this time, on the issues that you will be addressing in your workshops. I look forward to seeing the power of your prayers and your political influence in truly making a difference in our world.

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