

PRESENTATION TO CHILDREN YOUTH AND FAMILIES FORUM FOR YR IN MAY 2011 AT THEIR ADVOCACY PLANNING DAY

– I PRESENTED OUR AAA PROJECT AT THAT TIME.

- What was your message? what were you trying to achieve, your goal? what was your core message?
- What was your strategy? What was most effective? What was your biggest challenge?

The presentations are only examples to help launch the group into small group discussions. We want to set the tone and also support understanding for some agencies that might not fully grasp these advocacy components.

I want to touch briefly on two Advocacy Campaigns at the provincial and local level that we have been involved in over the past two years. One has led naturally in to the other.

The **Do the Math York Region Working Group** is a local group advocating for increased rates for social assistance, beginning with a \$100 Healthy Food Supplement for all Adults on OW and ODSP The group began in June 2009 and we were part of the larger provincial Coalition – PUT FOOD IN THE BUDGET.

- **The goal** was to have the provincial government immediately introduce the Healthy Food Supplement for individuals on SA
- **The message** was that the Social Assistance Rates were outdated and , inadequate; they keep people in poverty and ill health and are actually costing Ontarions more money in the long run in lost productivity and costs related to chronic disease.

The first strategy - Do the Math Budget Survey on line at www.putfoodinthebudget.ca has been successful in broadening general public awareness and also bringing more attention to senior levels of government as 15,000 people have been on-line to complete the survey and submit to the Premier as well as other Ministers involved. Meilleur, Matthews, Broten and Duncan in particular

Our second strategy was to meet with educate and bring on board, MPPs from across York Region (and in the case of the PFIB - across Ontario); we requested that they complete **the Do the Math Budget Survey** of the monthly costs of living for a person on SA, and speak to the inadequate rates which are 40% lower when cost of living is taken into account, than they were pre-1995.

- This was a successful strategy in terms of RAISING AWARENESS among MPPs – 45 were met with across Ontario, the majority of which agreed the rates were insufficient (from all parties)
- We met with all 7 MPPs in York Region and were able to ascertain quotes from several to this effect that we've been able to use in subsequent media pieces and to leverage other supporters

A third strategy - The Do the Math Challenge across Ontario was also very successful in bringing awareness to the issue and helping to begin the dialogue with people who are not usually involved in these types of issues.

- 1,000 people took the Diet Challenge, of living on primarily items from a food bank; 12 people in York Region completed it and spoke to it in a variety of ways, newspaper, facebook, twitter, public events. **We gained a strong Ally in Debora Kelly** editor of the Era Banner with this strategy.

Raising Awareness and bringing new advocates and champions on side has been quite successful due to these main strategies

However, we continued to hear from MPPs that despite their awareness, they were not prepared to make the HFS an issue until the general public was on board with this kind of approach to reducing poverty.

At the same time, during the **York Region Social Audit in April 2010**, we were hearing from individuals with lived experience of poverty and agency staff who indicated a wish to be involved in more advocacy efforts if leadership and a mechanism were in place to make participation more do-able and effective.

At that point **YRFN and the Do the Math Working Group applied for Advocacy Development Funding from the Heart and Stroke Foundation of Ontario** to pilot an advocacy project in York Region that would involve more individuals with experience of poverty and a broader participation of agencies and individuals already working in this field. Heart and Stroke has provided us funding for this year, and potentially next year, to develop these action steps, to mobilize the community to make this a voting issue and in turn increase the pressure on our MPPs to make this an issue in the election and in the house.

Our strong sense was that while Awareness was growing each day of the need to address the social assistance rates which were keeping individuals and families in poverty, we knew that the political will was not there and we had been told quite clearly until the public will was there for something to be done, that things would not progress.

So we named our project: **ADVOCACY: Awareness to Action** with the emphasis on Action and developing strategies to engage more people in the general public (not the usual suspects) as well as to engage people who were already on side with the issues but weren't clear on what they could do to effect change in their small corner of the world. (poverty advocates, agency board members, volunteers)

There is often a huge gap between awareness of issues and awareness of the types of action that people can take to effect change – **1.) ways to get involved, 2.) resources to aid advocacy efforts and 3.) processes that are most effective.**

- **So the Goal of this project** was to develop strategies and mobilize people with actions that they could employ to put the Healthy Food Supplement specifically, and the need to address poverty more broadly, on the public agenda as we head into the October Provincial Election.

Here are some of the strategies we are Currently working on to make this happen. Bear in mind that we are in the 5th month of the first year of funding, so the strategies are being developed and utilized as we speak. As a Pilot, we are planning to share our findings with other communities and groups as we develop them.

STRATEGIES

- a.) MPP Letter writing Campaign - 100 letters for \$100 Campaign (100 letters to 7 MPPs in YR)**
- b.) Development of Advocate Teams in the north and south end of the Region:** Training of individuals on outreach, advocacy, speaking to the issues, going out to groups, and working with a peer training model
- c.) Development of a Video Production Working Group** to produce a video to take out to communities, groups, MPPs speaking to the importance of Healthy Communities and working to eradicate poverty.
- d.) Do the Math Working Group as Advocacy Planning Group for the AAA Project – inviting additional agencies and individuals to join and include representation from different areas and sectors across the Region.** This Group continues into Year two of funding beyond the election to develop an ongoing and sustainable Advocacy Group and Strategy focussed on issues of poverty in York Region. An Advocacy

Calendar that individuals, groups and agencies can plug into monthly will be a strategy to promote continuous advocacy with broader involvement.

An advocacy plan that organizations, groups, and individuals can plug into that will involve letter writing campaigns, social marketing strategies, presentations to groups/boards and a media strategy.

- e.) **Teams to visit MPPs to be developed over the summer.** Teams will include 1 or 2 members with lived experience and 1 or 2 staff persons or volunteer with knowledge of poverty issues.

- f.) **Placing the HFS in the broader context of other initiatives for Change that are presently taking place**
 - As part of the *ISARC Social Audit Report in YR*, one recommendation was for the Region to endorse and support the HFS to the Province. ON January 27th they adopted the recommendations and forwarded their endorsement to the Minister of C and SS.
 - Other *Advocacy and Action Related Events such as the screening of POOR NO MORE* that speaks to how poverty has taken a stranglehold in Canada and what options in other countries look like.
 - **Participating in the SPNO- PFO Campaign** – we invited them to present the Poverty Free Ontario Agenda in YR on June 7th and have coordinated with the SPC YR, Heart and Stroke, and John Taylor in his role as the Co-Chair of the HSPB to conduct this event in Aurora and get as many people out for it as possible. HOPING TO SEE ALL of YOU THERE. A good way to dovetail with what your ONE VOICE SUMMIT comes up with today.

- c.) **Specific Campaign to Engage Volunteers from the Emergency Food Sector to support adequate incomes as an alternative to charity - And have a voice at the provincial level. This strategy originated with us and is being utilized across Ontario. - VOLUNTEERS ARE VOTERS TOO...**

Picking a Target Group: In terms of Constituent Groups that the Government is more likely to listen to and feel the pressure from, it is the Volunteer Sector in this case, primarily the Volunteer Sector responsible for emergency food in the food banks and meal programs. 28% increase in food bank use from 2008-2010 and a 25% increase in the provision of meal programs across Ontario alone in 2010 and that is only meal programs associated with known food banks. They are feeling the pinch and are worried about their capacity to meet growing needs. Many also realize that this is not the best way of meeting people's basic needs, and that the government continues to download our collective responsibility to charitable groups and rely on haphazard charitable responses. It is irresponsible and does not even meet the needs of hunger let alone do anything to eliminate hunger.

TOOLS

- 1.) Letter Writing Kit
- 2.) Contacts / Networks Action Sheet
- 3.) Do the Math Budget Survey
- 4.) Video with Facilitator's Guide and Resources ** (in progress)
- 5.) YRFN website will host an AAA section for all resources, upcoming events and opportunities**(in progress)
- 6.) Resources pertaining to the Volunteers are Voters Too! Campaign Strategy

Two of the biggest Challenges have been:

- **Engaging individuals with Lived Experience and establishing meaningful involvement opportunities.**
- **Finding the right language in which to talk to the larger public about issues of poverty that doesn't turn them off immediately.**

To address the first challenge we decided to invest a fair amount of time in reaching out to and working with individuals who were really interested in talking about the issues and working to bring others on board. We've brought together 2 Advocates Groups in the north and south of YR to meet and strategize regularly, work to educate the public about what they can do to inform their elected officials about the HFS. These groups operate on a peer to peer basis, assisting others to write letters of support and also going out their community, boards of agencies, etc. to ask for their support where the HFS is concerned.

- **The second challenge was to find language that allowed us to promote a conscious understanding and appeal to people in a rational way that allowed them to see that creating a healthy community and working on eradicating poverty, goes hand in hand.**

As I've already mentioned, one aspect of the project is to develop a video that carries this message and will be used as both an awareness and advocacy tool throughout July – Election time and beyond. We have had to come to terms with the fact that "our language" is not palatable for most people in the general community and when we're talking about conveying our messages to the least converted, its important to realize what kind of statements lead to people closing down their minds even before we get to our main message. The message and how we communicate it is everything. We've relied largely on a document called: "A New Way to Talk about the Social Determinants of Health." Developed by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation in the US. Very applicable to what we're trying to do right now in Canada around these issues.

OPPORTUNITIES I SEE

For the AAA Advocacy Project and the Children and Youth Summit ONE VOICE to collaborate and support our advocacy efforts.

For ongoing Advocacy efforts to be maintained post – election; what we do afterward to hold our government accountable and continue creating awareness and mobilizing people is as important as what we can do in the next 4 months. Maybe more so. Our project will extend to 2012.

For working more closely with the Human Services Planning Board and advocate together to the province, on behalf of York Region.

Utilize all of sources at our disposal, social networking, for example, to its fullest potential and our capacity, to get message out and multiply the numbers of people we can bring on board.

For reaching out to people who are already supportive and onside, who can take a stand and advocate in ways they hadn't realized before. ie. Members of Boards of Directors who as individuals are Voters and can approach their own MPPs.

To reach out to the Volunteer Sector who are familiar with the increasing needs and who have not only the respect of the larger community but also our elected officials. Imagine them standing up and announcing Enough is Enough! Volunteers are Voters Too.....

Several opportunities to Plug into the larger Working for a Poverty Free Ontario Campaign which you'll learn more about on June 7th in Aurora.

LESSONS LEARNED SO FAR.....

The importance of language

The importance of being connected and aware of other groups that are advocating on larger issues

The importance of identifying and creating meaningful ways for involvement for everyone.

The importance of creating momentum, staying passionate and not waste people's time; make sure every meeting has goals, energy and people leave feeling that they're accomplishing something important.

The importance of getting out of the mindset that we only talk about these issues before a pending election. These issues and our advocacy for them must be part of the language and fabric of what we do ongoing.

The importance of taking the time to have conversations with people about the issues— one conversation at a time will build the revolution of change.

The importance of taking every opportunity when you have people's attention, to make your ASK of them. **Seize the moment when they want to Do Something. Be ready to ASK THEM and Be Specific.**

Case in Point: A little advocacy demonstration in Action.

I am going to ask each one of you hear today to take away an Endorsement form for the Healthy Food Supplement and Return it to me by the end of today.

When I meet with groups, I ask for commitments to write a letter to your MPP, wherever you live, and send me a copy of the letter. I take people's names who commit and contact information so I can follow-up with them. **So for my 2nd ASK I will send around a clipboard** for those of you to give me your names and contact information if you are interested in writing a letter to your MPP, or if you would like to know more about our AAA Advocacy Project.

My third ASK is that each of you also take 2 flyers today and put them somewhere visible in your agency. Plan to attend the screening of POOR NO MORE, and also the JUNE 7th Presentation of Wrokign for a Poverty Free Ontario, and bring at least one additional person with you. These promise to be great events that are even better opportunities for you to take your ONE VOICE message after today.