

Take Action!

Advocating for Social Justice

by MARCIA J. WEISS

Social justice involves promoting equality and equal opportunity in society. A cornerstone of a just society is support for human rights. NA'AMAT strongly supports issues that help achieve social justice in women's rights, reproductive freedom, children's welfare, employment and health.

Advocacy is the act of speaking or writing in support of an issue or proposal. The strength of advocacy lies primarily in its ability to bring about long-term change by influencing policymakers. Advocacy may inspire and motivate a community to work together on a common cause in a set time frame. It offers an opportunity to partner with other groups, developing new relationships, drawing on specialized skills, and providing opportunities for professionals to share their expertise.

Before becoming advocates, specific steps must be taken.

First, education is an integral part of advocacy. Before speaking out on a particular subject, we must educate ourselves on the issues through mainstream media and specialized periodicals, the Internet, radio and television news, as well as information from nonpartisan groups.

Second, know your audience. Familiarize yourself with the person or people you will be speaking to

as well as their political activities or leanings. Be prepared for the positive, anticipate the negative and have the ability to respond to whatever questions you may encounter. Know your allies and opponents.

Third, build coalitions with elected officials and community leaders in local Jewish and secular organizations. Use the news media to promote your issue or event. Town hall meetings can be key to achieving community collaboration and outreach. These are important tools in educating the public about your activities on the local, national and international levels.

Contact elected officials to request their affirmative or negative vote on a bill pending in the legislature. Letters, emails, phone calls and faxes are effective in informing legislators of their constituents' positions on issues.

Fourth, keep abreast of vital topics. The Take Action column in each issue of *Na'amat Woman* is one educational resource informing readers about issues of particular interest to women and families. Take Action covers pending legislation and vital subjects of everyday relevance, providing steps that can be taken to make our voices heard. Check back issues of the magazine for columns on sex trafficking, gender equity in medical research,

bullying, domestic violence, sexual harassment in the workplace and child care. You can also find advocacy material on the NA'AMAT USA website (www.naamat.org).

We can become grassroots advocates by becoming involved in issues with the potential to impact and transform the status quo. Let's work to excite organization and community members and establish coalitions among diverse groups. Training sessions using role playing in timely scenarios permit members to develop their skills as advocates. These sessions can generate a genuine buy-in from participants while gaining the interest of others. Personal stories also ignite a spark that theory alone does not.

Our work is a powerful expression of our Jewish value of tikkun olam (repairing the world) combined with our civic duty to become informed participants in American democracy and government decisionmaking. Through advocacy we can actively support issues of importance to our goal of social justice. Together our voices can be strong. We can impact our legislators to set priorities on a broad set of issues essential to us, our families and our communities.

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