

25 Tips to be an Effective Youth Advocate

PREPARE

1. **Stay informed** – determine issues that affect young people in your local area, state and the nation.
 2. **Identify key policymakers** at all levels – establish relationships and introduce your programs. Visit www.house.gov for links to U.S. House of Representatives members; www.senate.gov for links to U.S. senators; and www.ncls.org for links to the legislatures of all states and territories.
 3. **Know the agenda** of key membership organizations – i.e. National Network for Youth (www.nn4youth.org), National Safe Place (www.nationalsafeplace.org), and state and local child and youth advocacy organizations (www.voices.org) and homelessness advocacy organizations (www.nationalhomeless.org).
 4. **Understand key legislation** and its impact – follow federal legislation at <http://thomas.loc.gov>
 5. **Clearly identify the problem** you're attempting to solve and the positive impact that change could bring.
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BUILD AN ADVOCATE TEAM

6. **Build and utilize advocacy allies** – staff and administration, Board members, youth, previous clients, affiliate organizations and volunteers can all be ambassadors for your efforts.
 7. **Make it easy for your advocates to help.** Draft letters for them to model and provide them with appropriate information.
 8. **Engage national, state, and local** advocacy organizations to promote, support and enhance your efforts.
 9. **Identify other organizations** that provide similar services – ask for their assistance during your efforts and offer your advocacy team when they are in need.
 10. **Mobilize your advocacy team** through phone trees, e-mail blasts, rallies, letter-writing campaigns, or banners on your agency's website that reflect your views on the issue; and by writing letters to the editor of your local newspaper.
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COMMUNICATE

11. **Keep the lines of communication open** with policymakers. Include elected and appointed officials on your mailing list. Stay in contact as staff to policymakers can frequently change.
12. **Communicate using the best method** for the message to be received. It should be A) personalized B) from a constituent voice C) in a form that gets through. Email can easily get discarded or lost when contacting policymakers at the federal level. Send fax letters instead.
13. **Share the results of your efforts** with your advocacy allies and other partners. Strong internal communication between likeminded groups is essential in advancing your shared agenda.
14. **Include a request in your communication.** Don't just complain, but ask for something. Recommend a specific action and request a response.
15. **Follow-up with a thank you** any time policymakers, community leaders, or your advocacy team members offer assistance.

INVOLVE MEDIA

16. **Identify members of the media** that cover your issues in your local and regional outlets. Include them in your communications.
17. **Introduce yourself and your agency** to local editorial boards, metro editors, social service beat reporters and television news directors.
18. **Establish yourself as a resource/expert** on youth issues in your community.
19. **Work in advance.** Give a week's notice, when possible, when seeking media attention, and follow up with a reminder the day before your event.
20. **Seize moments when they're in the press** – make phone contact and send letters in response to something that was written or broadcast.

TAKE ACTION

21. **Take a firm stand** on issues that may positively or negatively impact youth.
22. **Participate in public forums** that address youth issues.
23. **Invite key community members** (policymakers, business leaders, activists) to visit your agency.
24. **Visit city, state and federal policymakers** and establish yourself as an asset to them.
25. **Testify on behalf or against a measure** before your state legislature or local jurisdiction council.



“Safety Net For Youth Top 25” is a part of National Safe Place’s 25th anniversary celebration, “Building A Safety Net For Youth.” Each month during 2008, National Safe Place and a national partner will highlight tips, resources and concerns related to major youth service issues. For more information about the campaign, visit www.safetynetforyouth.org.

National Safe Place, founded in 1983 in Louisville, Ky. and headquartered there, provides training and technical assistance for youth service agencies and businesses interested in developing a Safe Place program. Safe Places provide access to immediate help and safety for all young people in crisis. A public-private network of more than 16,000 sites across the country extends the doors of local youth shelters by displaying the Safe Place sign. Business partners and community locations that appeal to youth -- such as fast food restaurants, convenience stores, fire stations, public buses and libraries -- connect kids looking for help with the youth service agency. More than 107,000 youth have received immediate help at Safe Place location since the program’s inception. For additional information, visit <http://www.nationalsafeplace.org>.

The National Network for Youth (NN4Y), founded in 1974, is a nonprofit membership organization that champions the needs of runaway, homeless, and other disconnected youth through advocacy, innovation and member services. NN4Y provides its members and the general public education, networking, training, materials and policy advocacy with federal, state, and local lawmakers. NN4Y is committed to ensuring that opportunities for development and permanence be made available to youth who face greater odds due to abuse, neglect, exploitation, homelessness, lack of resources, community prejudice, differing abilities, barriers to learning, and other life challenges.