Grassroots Advocacy Training:
“Building Legislative Champions”

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Training Overview

- “Current Political Climate”
- “Florida ARF Legislative Advocacy Plan”
- “Grassroots Advocacy”
- “Legislative Committees”
- “Organizing Constituents”
- “Contacting Legislators”
- “Developing Media Contacts”
- “Press Conference Tips”
- “Grassroots Plan of Action”
Current Political Climate: Economic Outlook

- Florida growth continues to decline. The State Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is 48th in the nation. We were 2nd in 2005.

- Florida unemployment is above the national average at approximately 10.5 percent. There are 33 of 67 counties with double digit unemployment.

- The housing market recovery is not anticipated until the latter half of 2010.

*Presented by Kelly Mallette*
Current Political Climate: Budget Outlook

• Revenue collections are exceeding projections, but numbers are largely irrelevant as estimators set estimates artificially low (i.e. June collections $50 million above estimate).

• The stimulus funds paid for health programs through December 31, 2010 and the Legislature held some stimulus funds to bridge the gap next Session.

• The overall budget is still is decline.

Presented by Kelly Mallette
Current Political Climate: Florida Senate

- Senators Haridopolos, Gaetz and Diaz de la Portilla are the leadership in the Senate with Sen. Rich leading the Democrats.

- Sen. Jim King, powerful, long time Senator, passed away. Former Speaker John Thrasher and former State Representative Stan Jordan are in a race to replace him.

- Sen. Ken Pruitt, former Senate President, resigned after the end of Session. Senator Joe Negron will replace him.

*Presented by Kelly Mallette*
Current Political Climate: Florida House

- Speaker Cretul announces changes to committees/councils in the House.


- House Health Care Appropriations will be chaired by Rep. Denise Grimsley.

- Health Care Appropriations will oversee all health and human services issues.

Presented by Kelly Mallette
Current Political Climate: Overall 2010

- The 2010 election year is filled with many hotly contested races.

- The Legislature is unlikely to raise taxes/fees in an election year.

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Florida ARF Legislative Advocacy Plan

Florida ARF must develop a plan that will overcome the challenges to be faced during the 2010 session.
Legislative Advocacy Plan: Six-Prong Approach

Grassroots Advocacy
- Public Relations
- Government Collaboration
- Legal Advocacy
- Staff Support
- Professional Lobbying
- Stakeholder Collaboration
Florida ARF represents 60+ community agencies in the State of Florida, many of which were founded more than 50 years ago by families to provide critical care to their loved ones. These agencies and others provide services to more than 110,000 individuals with disabilities and collectively provide jobs to more than 20,000 Floridians.
Legislative Advocacy Plan: Platform Issues

- Advocate for no funding reductions for services to individuals with disabilities including waiver services, ICF/DDs, Department of Education and VR resources.

- Support legislative approval of additional revenue sources and strategies to fund health and social services for individuals with disabilities.

- Advocate for removal of the tiered waivers within the DD Act.
Legislative Advocacy Plan: Platform Issues

• Advocate for a Social Services Protection Act that recognizes community nonprofit agencies provide services on behalf of the state and should be subject to the insurance provisions afforded to the state and its agencies and subdivisions.

• Increase job opportunities for individuals with disabilities by supporting efforts at the national and state levels that promote employment such as Medicaid Buy In coverage.

• Safeguard the availability of necessary services for individuals on the Medicaid Home and Community-Based Waiver to ensure the unique needs of each individual are met.
Legislative Advocacy Plan: Watch and Act Issues

• Strengthen state policy that promotes gainful employment through state purchasing of products and services offered by RESPECT of Florida.

• Oppose language that mandates competitive bidding for VR services.

• Continue the “carve out” from Medicaid Reform (managed care) for Developmental Disability (DD) Medicaid Waivers and ICFDD funded services to ensure that state and federal resources are used to serve individuals with disabilities.

• Oppose elimination of behavior services from the Medicaid Home and Community Based Waiver.
Legislative Advocacy Plan: Track and Report Issues

Legislative activity will be monitored and all pending legislation that affects Florida ARF members and the individuals they serve will be addressed. Bills that require more than “Tracking and Reporting” will be moved to the “Watch and Act” status as appropriate.
Grassroots Advocacy

• Primary membership involvement will be in Grassroots Advocacy.

• Participation will be requested from ALL members.

• Intensive efforts are needed between August and December 2009.

• Florida ARF will provide needed support.
Grassroots Advocacy: What Influences Legislators?

- Voters
- Families
- Supporters: including friends, campaign contributors, and volunteers.
- Media: especially local

- Colleagues
- Political Parties
- Public Opinion Polls
- Life Experiences
- Staff
- Lobbyists
Focusing Efforts: Interacting with Legislative Committees

• The opportunity to develop and amend a bill is much greater while it is being considered by committees.

• Substantive Committees: All legislation that changes the law must be heard at the committee level.

• Budget Committees (Appropriations Committees):
  – They are powerful in that any law having a fiscal impact must be implemented by these committees.
  – Appropriations bills will determine funding available to implement programs and services.
Focusing Efforts: Interacting with Legislative Committees

Key Senate Committees and Chairs:

• Senate Health and Human Services Appropriations – Durell Peaden (Crestview)

• Senate Children, Families, and Elder Affairs – Ronda Storms (Brandon)
Focusing Efforts: Interacting with Legislative Committees

Key House Committees and Chairs:

• House Healthcare Appropriations – Denise Grimsley (Sebring)

• House Health and Family Services Policy Council – Ed Homan (Temple Terrace)

• Education Policy Council – Will Weatherford (Wesley Chapel)

• Full Appropriations Council on General Government and Health Care – David Rivera (Miami)
Keeping in Touch During Legislative Session

- Florida ARF *Capital Breaking News*
- Florida ARF Grassroots Website: [www.floridaarf.org](http://www.floridaarf.org)
- The Florida Channel - [www.wfsu.org/tfc](http://www.wfsu.org/tfc)
- Florida Senate: [www.flsenate.gov](http://www.flsenate.gov)
- Florida House of Representatives: [www.myfloridahouse.gov](http://www.myfloridahouse.gov)
Organizing Constituents: Self-Advocates and Families

• Create a Government Affairs Committee to educate and build relationships with legislators
  – Select members based on who they know & how well they present.
  – Keep them informed so they have a context when you need them.
  – Schedule meetings and invite a different legislator to each meeting.

• Provide families with a one-page fact sheet highlighting your agency needs.
Organizing Constituents: Self-Advocates and Families

• Create ways of rapidly mobilizing your constituency.
  – Telephone tree
  – Email database
  – Create a blog or e-group – YouTube, Facebook, Yahoo Groups, and Twitter.

• Arrange to have one family visit your local legislator in his/her district office every week.
Organizing Constituents: Board of Directors

• Invite a different local legislator to each Board Meeting.

• Rotate Board members to have lunch each week with local legislators.
Communicating with Legislators

• Find out if they have connections to people with disabilities.

• Educate them on your issues.
  – Arrange meetings with parents/Board members.
  – Aides can be influential, don’t hesitate to speak with an aide, or leave a message
  – Invite legislators to visit and learn more about your program or organization – you can be a valuable resource to them!
Communicating with Legislators

• Create a candidate questionnaire.

• Write letters.

• Hold non-partisan forums and invite all candidates to present their views.

(See “Legislative Campaign Dos and DON’Ts” Handout)
Developing Media Contacts

• Write letters to the editor frequently to:
  – Keep your name in front of the public
  – Build or maintain a high profile
  – Set the record straight when a story written about you is inaccurate
  – Get your share of ink when a newspaper or magazine writes about your competitor and never calls you

• Invite members of the press to events
  (See “Media Advisory for Special Events” Handout)
Developing Media Contacts

• Get your point across:
  – Determine your key messages.
  – Develop your own “sound bytes.”
  – Practice how you will deflect negative questions so you sound positive.
  – Make sure reporters quote you accurately and identify you properly.
  – Provide reporters with your key contact information.

• Hold a press conference
When to Hold a Press Conference

• Is the story newsworthy, timely and of interest to news reporters?
(see “Press Conference Information” Handout)

• Are there alternative means of delivering the message that are equally or more effective?

• Does the press conference offer reporters special advantages, for example, interesting visuals, expert testimony, local interest?
Grassroots Action Plan: On-Going Activities

• Regularly provide reports, articles and stories about the industry to your legislators and take the time to highlight key points and include a personal note.

• Thank your legislators! Ask them to host an annual agency event and present them with an award.

• Work the local press (Legislators read local news).
Grassroots Action Plan: On-Going Activities

• Always localize the message! Put agency information on local stationary.

• Form local alliances. Increase chances of success by joining with other like minded groups, including business.

• Produce at least one real life story per month and distribute to all targeted audiences.

• Publish legislator’s responses to your surveys in newsletters.
Grassroots Action Plan: Off-Season Activities

- **September/October**
  - Identify local forums and participate
  - Send a letter of thanks for DD Champions
  - Add legislators to agency newsletter distribution list
  - Provide a one-page fact sheet to Board members and ask them to write a letter to each Local legislator on personal stationary requesting that the legislator familiarize themselves with concerns of your agency
Grassroots Action Plan: Off-Season Activities

- November – January
  - Meet with legislators in his/her office
  - Ask legislators to write a column for your newsletter on the results of last session on your issues
  - Invite local legislators to visit your agency and have Board and Family members present
  - Survey constituency to determine who has existing relationships with local legislators
  - Organize Board of Directors as an Advocacy Board
Grassroots Action Plan: In-Season Activities

• Be involved. Call in and participate in government relations conference calls.

• Participate in legislative breakfast and fly-in.

• Communicate with legislators.

• Watch legislative alerts and respond.
Summary

• Current Political Climate
  • Economic Recession
  • Budget on the Decline
  • Legislature Unlikely to Raise Taxes/Fees

• In order to combat these obstacles Florida ARF will implement a 6-prong legislative advocacy plan with grassroots advocacy being the primary avenue for membership involvement.

• Members must continue to develop legislative champions for DD issues through:
  • Organizing Constituents and Educating Legislators
  • Interacting with Appropriations and Substantive Legislative Committees
  • Developing media contacts