

# International Review of Parent Advocacy in Child Welfare

STRENGTHENING CHILDREN'S CARE AND PROTECTION THROUGH PARENT PARTICIPATION

## WHY PROMOTE PARENT ADVOCACY?

- Essential for human rights including children's rights
- Improved parent and family engagement
- Directly benefits children, families and parents
- Creates a better child welfare system

## LESSONS FROM RESEARCH: OUTCOMES OF PROGRAM ADVOCACY IN HIGH INCOME COUNTRIES

- **Less maltreatment**
- **Prevent unnecessary separation and increase reunification**
- **Strengthens parental resilience and sobriety**
- **Better connection with services**
- **Stronger families and empowered parents**
- **Improved culture in social welfare**

## WHAT IS PARENT ADVOCACY?

Parent advocacy in child welfare occurs when parents with child welfare experience promote parent participation and the rights of parents and children. It involves case, program and policy advocacy

### CASE ADVOCACY

Promoting parent participation in decisions regarding their own involvement with child welfare systems

### PROGRAM ADVOCACY

Working as trained parent advocates to design, plan, evaluate and strengthen programs and assist parents

### POLICY ADVOCACY

Acting politically to change policy; advising and influencing within agencies; and grassroots and community organizing

## LESSONS FROM RESEARCH: EFFECTIVE IMPLEMENTATION OF PROGRAM ADVOCACY IN HIGH INCOME COUNTRIES

- **Strengths based approach** – Agency uses strengths-based practice and addresses power imbalance between social workers and parents
- **Training for parent advocates** – Training covering: overview of child welfare and how it operates, communication skills, self-care, and crisis management
- **Parent recruitment/retention** – Consider: eligibility criteria, how to reach parents, fair and consistent selection, fair payment & support
- **Prepare your agency** – Ensure adequate resources, infrastructure, knowledge and skills, culture & climate, and engagement & partnership
- **Training agency staff** – Prepare for a new approach and partnership with parents. Parent leadership in the training and co-training are important
- **Supervision and support** – Promote an emotionally safe environment where questions can be asked, struggles openly examined, and new skills tried out
- **Leadership** – Strong collaborative leadership to promote change and support innovation in parent participation
- **Clear roles** – Parents' roles are well defined and understood by parents and staff. Roles should include case, program and policy advocacy
- **Funding parent advocacy** – Adequate and secure long-term funding for parent advocacy programs is key to success. Includes fair pay for advocates

“ We must uplift and center parents’ voices. We must really listen to them. As we work to transform this system, parents’ stories and solutions must drive this effort. We must recognize the structural forces at work in the child welfare system. We must not forget the historical context of child welfare and the long-lasting impact it has had on poor communities, particularly communities of color. We must see the institutional racism in this system, and work to undo it every day. We must remember that no parent, in any community, is perfect. And that parents have intrinsic value to their children. Those bonds must be respected in communities like mine, just as they are in more privileged communities. We must look to parents as the experts on their children. ”

– **DINAH ORTIZ-ADAMES**  
PARENT ADVOCATE

## IDEAS FOR DEVELOPING A STRATEGY TO PROMOTE PARENT ADVOCACY

- Identify existing parents’ groups
- Identify entry points
- Support engagement in care and protection system reforms
- Create a locally relevant parent leadership curriculum and training
- Parent councils in municipalities
- Develop national networks for parent advocacy
- Develop pilot projects, work with parents who might become active. These include parents:
  - of children in institutions / alternative care
  - of children with a disability
  - of minority and excluded groups
  - involved in child protection
  - who themselves have been in institutions/ alternative care

## RESOURCES

- For more details and examples see the full report: <https://bettercarenetwork.org/IRPACW-Report>
- Better Care Network link for this practice brief: <https://bettercarenetwork.org/IRPACW-Brief>
- IPAN - International Parent Advocacy Network: <https://www.parentadvocacy.net/>
- IPAN and RISE training toolkit: <https://toolkit.parentadvocacy.net/>
- Rise magazine: <https://www.risemagazine.org/>