

# Advocacy Strategies for Family Groups

What works when advocating for change in the community?

Examples of advocacy goals that a family group might have for their community

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Make local cultural hubs accessible for and inclusive of children with disabilities

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Get 3 local schools to adopt a zero rejection policy for enrolment of children with disabilities

3

Expand local social protection systems to include support for families

After building a shared vision of inclusion and identifying key messages to advocate for, family groups can use a variety of advocacy strategies to push for change.

These strategies have helped Inclusion International members be heard in their communities.



## Building Allies and Partners

For family groups at the local level, connecting with other groups in the community is a good way to spread a message and amplify voices. These could be groups of parents at local schools, women's groups, religious groups, other groups of persons with disabilities and any other community groups that share similar values. Coming together to form coalitions, do joint advocacy work, and share key messages for change in the community helps to build more allies for inclusion of people with intellectual disabilities and their families, and increases the chances of family voices being heard. In some cases, there may already be community platforms that exist that family groups can join.

## Monitoring for Accountability

Family groups can play an important role in holding communities accountable for the promises they make, or holding communities accountable for meeting the standards that are set by the national government. Governments and public bodies are sensitive to criticism, especially when these are based on strong evidence and analysis, come from a credible source, and are widely published and disseminated. This often looks like investigations, doing studies to collect data on the impact of policies and decisions, or creating and publishing monitoring reports. These same strategies can be used at the local level by family groups, who can use the stories and experiences of members of their group to paint a clear picture of the impact of policy decisions on people's lives and the need for change.

## Joining Policy Conversations

Joining policy conversations is an effective way for family groups to have their voices heard and directly influence decision-makers. When family groups have clear messages and have set their goals for the change they would like to see, they can be prepared to get into policy conversations at the earliest stages. Being part of policy conversations as an advocacy strategy is a step further than going to public forums such as town hall meetings, it means having direct contact and conversations with decision-makers. At the community level, this might look like joining a committee or working group within a local council or other governance structure or family groups having meetings with local leaders to raise their issues and propose solutions.

## Contributing to Global Reporting

Families can influence not only decision-makers in their own community, but decision-makers at the national and international level by contributing to global reporting to the CRPD Committee or other global mechanisms about the rights of persons with disabilities in practice in communities. Family groups at the local level can do this through their national federation, and their experiences at the community level can help influence national change.

## Strengthening Self-Advocate Voices

Including people with intellectual disabilities themselves in advocacy is important so that families and self-advocates can speak up together. With advocacy work, hearing from people with intellectual disabilities directly about change that needs to happen is impactful for the person hearing their message. For family groups at the local level, this might mean introducing people with intellectual disabilities to self-advocacy for the first time and giving good support so that self-advocates can be in the lead of communications and advocacy activities.

### Campaigns

Campaigning is one of the most common advocacy strategies used by family groups. Campaigns do not usually have fast results and require patience from campaigners, but are a great way to reach entire communities. Family groups can create successful campaigns by having clear messages that the community can relate to, an achievable goal, and a specific “call to action” that the community members are being asked to do. Teaming up with other groups in the community can also be helpful for building support for the campaign, and also helps groups find common goals. With campaigning, it is important to reach people on the platforms they use to connect - in some communities this could be radio and newspapers, in others it might be social media and WhatsApp, and in others it could look like in-person campaigning at community gathering spaces.

### Using the Media

Family groups can tap into local television, radio, or print media to help spread their messages. Family groups often use the media as a way to get more attention for special events or advocacy-focused days such as the International Day of Persons with Disabilities or World Down Syndrome Day, and local television stations or community newspapers are often open to covering awareness events. Spokespersons from family groups doing on-air radio interviews is also a great way to spread your message and to help new families who may not be part of the group to find a community, and publishing an article that tells the story of the experiences of people with intellectual disabilities and their families and the change that is needed is a great way to make the broader community aware of your calls to action.

### Creating Spaces for Families

While bringing families together to share experiences is the core of what family groups do, these activities can also be part of an advocacy strategy! By expanding these spaces from just places for connection and peer support into advocacy tools, family groups have an opportunity to consult other family members on key messages and advocacy actions, to collect information and experiences to help build an evidence base, to share knowledge about what is happening in the community and identify new opportunities, and to strategize together and set collective advocacy goals.

## Your turn: Advocacy Strategies for Family Groups

**What other strategies have helped your organisation be heard in your communities?**

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