

# 8

## Putting the Guiding Principles into Action

### The Advocacy and Empowerment Project

with Willi Horner-Johnson and Charles E. Drum

---

#### **Anti-crime workshop works with disabled**

*written by David Heinzmann,  
Chicago Tribune, Chicago, Illinois, November 10, 1999, p. 4*

This newspaper story is about abuse of people with disabilities and one project developed to address the problem. The story tells about a workshop that was held in Chicago's Beverly neighborhood at CARC, a developmental disability service provider agency. Through discussion, role playing, and video presentations, workshop participants, including people with disabilities, learned ways to identify and prevent abuse. The workshop was one of 20 that organizers from University of Illinois at Chicago (UIC), Institute of Disability and Human Development planned to hold throughout the year. According to Nancy Fitzsimons-Cova, research assistant professor at UIC, "the program is long overdue." Fitzsimons-Cova stated that "the project should reach about 600 people" with the hope that service agencies such as CARC "will incorporate the program into their work" (p. 4).

The newspaper story you just read discussed the Advocacy and Empowerment Project ("the Project" for short). By the end of the Project, 22 workshops were conducted by 28 community trainers throughout Illinois with 465 people participating in the training. When the 41 members of the Regional Workgroups are added in, over 500 people with and without disabilities were directly affected by the Project.

The goal of this chapter is to show how the guiding principles can be used in a collective action to combat violence and abuse of people with disabilities. You now know that many of the barriers to preventing violence and abuse are systemic barriers. The Advocacy and Empowerment Project is an example of one strategy

to promote systems change. In addition to information about the Project, general tips for organizing to promote change are embedded throughout this chapter to increase your understanding of how to promote systems change. It is our hope that learning about the Project will get you thinking about what you can do in your own community to combat violence and abuse. This chapter is about planting a seed from which your ideas for individual and collective action will grow. Let's begin with a brief overview of the Project.

## OVERVIEW OF THE ADVOCACY AND EMPOWERMENT PROJECT

The idea for the Project came from the members of the Illinois Coalition on Disability and Abuse (CODA), who felt strongly that training was needed to educate and empower people with disabilities to address the abuse in their own lives. A **coalition** is an organization made up of many organizations (Homan, 2004). See Table 8.1 to learn about the benefits of working in a coalition and Table 8.2 for steps in forming your coalition. Dr. Charles E. Drum, the original Project Director, wrote and was awarded a grant from the U.S. Department of Education, National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research (NIDRR) to fund the Project. The primary goal of the Project was

To provide knowledge, skills, and resources to people with disabilities, family members, and advocates that would empower them to prevent abuse and enforce the rights of adults with disabilities who have been abused. (Fitzsimons-Cova & Horner-Johnson, 2000, p. 1)

This goal was achieved through development of a curriculum called *Taking Charge: Responding to Abuse, Neglect, and Financial Exploitation* (Fitzsimons-Cova et al., 2000) that was used to conduct *Taking Charge* workshops for advocates and self-advocates.

### Project Highlights

Let's review some of the major steps taken to achieve the Project's goal.

- *Expanding the Advisory Board.* The CODA Steering Committee (or Advisory Board) was expanded to include people with disabilities, people from minority racial/ethnic groups, and representatives from the criminal justice, adult protection, and victim service systems. The purpose of CODA was to provide guidance and feedback on the Project. See Tip Box 8.1 for tips on how to identify **stakeholders**.

**Table 8.1.** Benefits of coalitions

Broaden the support for your issue
Provide greater access to resources (e.g., volunteers, money, space, technology, expertise, relationships with people in positions of power)
Can inform and put into action large numbers of people in a short time
Help to gain acceptance from community leaders
Enhance your credibility in the community
Provide greater legitimacy for your issue

Source: Homan (2004, pp. 381–382).

**Table 8.2.** Steps in forming a coalition

1. Decide whom you want to get involved.
2. Contact people and explain why joining is in their self-interest—how joining will benefit them or their organization.
3. Get a firm commitment from each organization, including the names of the person or people from the organization who will be involved in your coalition.
4. Actively involve representatives from each coalition organization.

Source: Homan (2004, p. 383).

### Tips for identifying stakeholders

Begin the process of identifying your stakeholders by asking

- Who is experiencing the problem?
- Who is benefiting from the situation staying as it is?
- Who would benefit from change?
- Who makes decisions about the issue?
- Who needs to behave in a different way to solve the problem?
- Who is likely to oppose a change?
- Who is likely to support a change?

Source: Homan (2004, p. 220).

#### TIP BOX 8.1

- *Forming Regional Workgroups.* Two Regional Workgroups were formed to collaborate on the creation of the *Taking Charge* curriculum. A total of 41 people served on the workgroups, including one in Northern Illinois and one in South Central Illinois. Each workgroup included people with disabilities and representatives from disability services and the criminal justice, adult protection, and victim service systems. See Tip Box 8.2 for tips on how to get people involved in your collective action.
- *Creating the curriculum.* The first draft of the curriculum was created over the period of about 1 year using the facilitated conversation method, a collaborative process between Project staff and Regional Workgroup members. The **facilitated (or focused) conversation method** was developed by the Institute on Cultural Affairs USA, and involves a multistep process of planning and discussion. See Table 8.3 to learn about how we used the facilitated conversation method. The method was used by the Project as a way to obtain a high level of involvement, interaction, and input from Regional Workgroup members. Changes were made to the curriculum over the next 2 years of the Project, based on feedback from our collaborators.
- *Recruiting community trainers.* Project staff made presentations to disability advocacy groups and collaborated with CODA and the Regional Workgroups

### Tips for getting people involved

- ▶ *Contact people.* Start with contacting people you know. Expand to contacting people that others in your effort know. Personally invite people to join your effort in a one-to-one conversation.
- ▶ *Give people a reason to join.* People are motivated by their own self-interest. The reasons people join include belief in your issue or project, liking the people involved, and enjoying the activities your group engages in.
- ▶ *Ask for participation.* Not everyone will say “yes.” But people often say “yes” when asked directly. Be enthusiastic. Talk about the ways they can contribute and how their contribution will help achieve the group’s goal.
- ▶ *Maintain involvement.* Once you get people to say “yes” and show up, you need to keep them involved. Make special efforts to welcome new members and give people something to do right away.

Source: Homan (2004, pp. 247–252).

#### TIP BOX 8.2

**Table 8.3.** How we used the facilitated conversation method

During a year-long process, the Regional Workgroups

1. Identified general topic areas to consider for inclusion in the curriculum
2. Selected three major topic areas to include in the curriculum
3. Formed smaller workgroups to focus on each topic area
4. Developed outlines of the specific issues to cover under each topic
5. Discussed the best methods for presenting each issue during the workshop
6. Identified resource materials needed to develop and present the curriculum
7. Mapped out the order and way that information would be presented

to recruit community trainers. A total of 45 people applied, and 40 were accepted as potential trainers.

- *Training community trainers.* Training sessions consisted of a 1-day introduction to the curriculum, a 2-day practice session, and a follow-up meeting to prepare trainers to plan and conduct a workshop in their community. Twenty-eight community trainers completed the training.
- *Pilot workshops.* Project staff and community trainers conducted 8 pilot (trial run or practice) workshops throughout Illinois. A total of 241 people participated in the workshops.
- *Community trainer facilitated workshops.* During the third year of the Project, community trainers collaborated with Project staff to plan and conduct 14 workshops throughout Illinois (see Figure 8.1). A total of 212 people



**Figure 8.1.** Year 3 *Taking Charge* workshop participants. (From Fitzsimons-Cova, N., & Horner-Johnson, W. [2000]. *Illinois joint training initiative on disability and abuse: Advocacy and empowerment through knowledge dissemination project. Final report*. Chicago: Institute on Disability and Human Development, Department of Disability and Human Development, University of Illinois at Chicago. Reprinted with permission.)

participated in the workshops. Half of the participants were people with disabilities.

- *Evaluating the curriculum.* Three methods were used to get information about whether the Project was making a difference: Workshop Evaluation Form, Before and After Training Assessment, and Follow-up Survey. See Table 8.4 for a summary of feedback obtained from workshop participants. The results of the evaluation are presented in the final Project report (Fitzsimons-Cova & Horner-Johnson, 2000).
- *Dissemination of the curriculum.* A total of 215 free copies of the curriculum were mailed to a variety of organizations, including one for each CIL and P & A agency, and to chapters of the Coalition of Citizens with Disabilities throughout the United States. The curriculum was also available for purchase through the Institute on Disability and Human Development (IDHD) at the University of Illinois at Chicago (UIC).

**Table 8.4.** Feedback from participants at the Taking Charge workshops

As a result of attending a <i>Taking Charge</i> workshop, participants reported that they
Learned new information about violence and abuse
Were more confident that they had adequate information and skills to prevent violence and abuse
Had more positive attitudes about people with disabilities
Learned new information that actually helped them prevent violence and abuse

Source: Fitzsimons-Cova & Horner-Johnson (2000).

Refer to the Resources section at the end of the chapter to learn how you can get the Advocacy and Empowerment Final Project Report. Let's move on to looking at how each guiding principle was used to achieve the Project's goals.

## Collaboration in Practice

One of the major successes of the Project was the collaboration that occurred between people with disabilities, family members, and professionals from the university and from state and community-based organizations. The purpose of expanding CODA, forming Regional Workgroups, and recruiting community trainers was to build collaboration between **stakeholders**—meaning people with disabilities, family members, and professionals involved (or who should be involved) in preventing violence and abuse of people with disabilities. The important new stakeholders that joined the Project were people with disabilities and professionals from the criminal justice, adult protection, and victim service systems. (See Tip Box 8.1 for tips on identifying your stakeholders).



### Ask Yourself...

*Who are the key stakeholders in my community who should be involved in combating violence and abuse of people with disabilities?*

*What can I do to build collaboration between these stakeholders?*

It is not enough to just bring people together to work on a task force, committee, or workgroup. As you have probably experienced, just because people are sitting in the same room does not mean that they are collaborating with one another. The reason the Project staff used the facilitated conversation method to create the curriculum was to make sure that all Regional Workgroup members were actively involved and had equal input. Using this method is very time consuming. However, the benefits outweigh the drawbacks. One of the most important benefits for the Project was the increased exchange of ideas among all participants. Using this process created a unique and empowering collaboration between people with very different views on how to combat violence and abuse of people with disabilities.

Another way that collaboration was put into practice was through the team approach to conducting the workshops. All of the pilot workshops were conducted by Project staff in partnership with community trainers. All of the year 3 workshops were conducted by teams of community trainers. All of the teams included people with disabilities and professionals, and some of the professionals were also people with disabilities. Usually professionals from different parts of the service system worked together. The collaborative team approach also provided workshop participants with a model for how they could collaborate with people from different walks of life to combat violence and abuse of people with disabilities.

The final year's workshops were planned and conducted in partnership with Project staff, the trainers, and co-sponsors (local disability, advocacy, or victim services organizations). Collaboration was the key principle affecting the decision to conduct the workshops in partnership with community trainers and co-sponsors.

### **Tips for spreading the word about your collective action**

- Word of mouth—you tell one person, they tell another person, and so forth
- Fliers and posters
- Billboards
- Newsletters
- Brochures
- Speaker's bureau—present to local groups in your community
- Newspapers—community announcements, letters to the editor, featured stories
- Radio and television public service announcements (PSAs)
- Internet and online resources (e.g., web site, electronic newsletter, Listserv, discussion group)

#### **TIP BOX 8.3**

Co-sponsors provided resources and helped publicize the workshops in their communities. Trainers, with the support of co-sponsors, took the lead in planning, publicizing, and conducting the workshops in their communities. As Project staff, we provided guidance, support, and assistance as needed throughout the planning process. See Tip Box 8.3 for tips on how you can spread the word about your collective action.

Collaboration on the Project did not just magically happen. Making collaboration one of the guiding principles was intentional. Using a collaborative approach was the only way that the Project would achieve its goal (see Tip Box 8.4). Creating true collaboration between all of the Project's stakeholders took work. It certainly meant that the Project staff and other professionals had to put away the idea that they were the experts or that they had all the answers. The Project was a success because of collaboration.

### **Strengths Perspective in Practice**

Everyone connected with the Project was committed to upholding a strengths perspective, meaning maintaining a focus on what people could do and how they could contribute. One way that the Project lived up to this principle was through our collaboration with community trainers. The *Taking Charge* workshops covered a lot of information, but because we used a team approach to conducting the workshops, no one person had to know all of the information. We were able to tap into the strengths of our community trainers. Some trainers were better at presenting information, others were better at facilitating a discussion, and some people were



### Tips for making collaboration work

- ▶ Provide opportunities for creating a sense of ownership in the group or project.
- ▶ Privately and publicly acknowledge the good work that collaborators are doing.
- ▶ Act in a trustworthy manner to build trust.
- ▶ Maintain clear, open lines of communication. When possible, use personal face-to-face communication.
- ▶ Decide on the way that decisions are going to be made. Consensus (agreement upon by all members of the group) decision making is preferred but it can be time consuming to get a consensus. Majority decision making is another option.
- ▶ Decide on the leadership of your group, including the roles and authority of the leaders.
- ▶ Put decisions made by the group in writing.

Source: Homan (2004, pp. 420–422).

#### TIP BOX 8.4

good at conducting the group activities. Project staff worked with community trainers to help them identify their strengths as individuals and as teams.

We also created a support trainer role. The idea for the support trainer came from people interested in being involved in the Project, but who did not feel comfortable presenting the information to an audience. It is important to remember that people's level of participation may vary—this is normal for any group or project (see Table 8.5). By creating the support trainer position we were able to keep more people involved (see Table 8.6). We also increased the chances that one day someone who was a support trainer would feel empowered enough to become a presenter of the *Taking Charge* curriculum.

Another way that we used a strengths perspective was in our collaboration with the community trainers who took the lead in planning workshops during the third year of the Project. Each lead trainer was responsible for doing most of the

**Table 8.5.** Levels of participation

*Leadership level:* The core group of participants who are actively involved in making decisions, providing direction, and doing the work of the group or project

*Worker level:* Ongoing active participants who follow the lead of the leadership of the group or project

*Assister level:* Occasional active participants who periodically lend a hand when asked

*One-shot participant level:* Do something for the group or project once or for a short period of time and then disappear

*Advisor level:* Provide expert advice as needed

*Inactive general supporter level:* Provide public endorsement (support for) the efforts of the group or project

Source: Homan (2004, pp. 235–238).



**Table 8.6.** Role of support trainers

---

Set up before and clean up after the workshop
Register workshop participants
Answer questions and assist participants as needed
Assist trainers with equipment (e.g., TV/VCR/DVD player, projector)
Work with participants in small group activities
Provide emotional support to participants

---

planning of a workshop in their community, including finding a co-sponsor. Dr. Willi Horner-Johnson (graduate student on the Project at the time) was the main contact with all of our lead trainers. In some cases, lead trainers needed very little support and guidance from Project staff. In other cases, Project staff were very involved in helping lead trainers put together their workshops. Imagine how rewarding it was for Project staff and lead trainers when a lead trainer was unsure about her or his planning abilities, but succeeded in planning the workshop with less help than he or she anticipated. This is an example of the strengths perspective in action.

### Self-Advocacy in Practice

It is no accident that the name of the curriculum and workshop is *Taking Charge*.



#### **Ask Yourself...**

*What comes to my mind when I think of the words "taking charge"?*

You will recall that self-advocacy is the action part of empowerment. The vision for the Project was to provide people with disabilities with the information and skills that they needed to prevent violence and abuse and to enforce their rights. *Taking charge* is about taking action. And taking action is what self-advocates do. Self-advocates speak up for themselves.

While the term *self-advocacy* is not part of the formal goal statement of the Project, promotion of self-advocacy was definitely the intention of everyone involved. People with disabilities were purposely recruited to participate in all aspects of the Project. As members of CODA and/or Regional Workgroups, people with disabilities used self-advocacy to make sure that the curriculum reflected the experiences and needs of people with disabilities. As community trainers, people with disabilities modeled self-advocacy to workshop participants. The contents of the *Taking Charge* curriculum reflected the principle of self-advocacy (see Table 8.7). As workshop participants, people with disabilities learned information and self-advocacy skills to help them take charge by advocating for themselves and others with disabilities.

### Self-Determination in Practice

You already know that self-determination is very closely associated with self-advocacy. The primary way that the Project applied the principle of self-

**Table 8.7.** Overview of the *Taking Charge* curriculum

---

<i>Module 1—Disability and Maltreatment.</i>	Presents different ways to define disability, with an emphasis on the social approach to disability. The social approach is applied to abuse of people with disabilities.
<i>Module 2—Your Safety, Your Rights.</i>	A video shows people with disabilities in situations that could lead to abuse. The actors show how to take charge in each situation.
<i>Module 3—Recognizing Abuse, Neglect, and Financial Exploitation.</i>	Definitions of different types of abuse, described in terms of a continuum from subtle to obvious.
<i>Module 4—External Barriers to Action.</i>	Discussion of myths about people with disabilities and how these myths make it difficult to stop abuse. Physical barriers and the ADA are also briefly mentioned.
<i>Module 5—Internal Barriers to Action.</i>	Describes various internal barriers and emphasizes that the longer the abuse continues, the greater the impact on the victim.
<i>Module 6—Taking Charge!</i>	Participants learn how to be assertive, to move from being a victim to being a survivor, and put their knowledge into action during a small group activity.
<i>Module 7—Understanding the System.</i>	Participants learn about community resources, the administrative (adult protection services) and criminal justice systems.
<i>Module 8—Self-Advocacy and Empowerment: Putting It All Together!</i>	Participants engage in role playing to use all the information learned during the day and practice skills for stopping abuse.

---

determination is through the information presented at the *Taking Charge* workshops. One of the ways to promote self-determination is through an understanding of systemic and personal barriers. Some of the same kinds of barriers were discussed in the *Taking Charge* workshop as external and internal barriers. In the workshops, participants learned about the obstacles to getting out of abusive relationships and situations. Another way to promote self-determination is by understanding the systems that are supposed to protect and service people with disabilities who have been abused. At each of the workshops, participants were provided with a list of their local resources. Family members and professionals attending the workshops were encouraged to support the self-determination of victims by recognizing the power of the barriers, by clearly explaining available resources and options, and to the greatest degree possible, by supporting the self-determination of people with disabilities who have been abused.

## Empowerment in Practice

You know that empowerment is a value that guides how people practice, a process of increasing power, and an outcome. You are now pretty familiar with the Project.



### Ask Yourself...

*In what ways do I think the Project was guided by the principle of empowerment?*

*How do I think the Project promoted the empowerment of people with disabilities?*

Let's look at a few of the ways that the Project promoted the principle of empowerment. The Project was guided by the value of empowerment. You will recall that an empowerment approach focuses on strengths and works in partnership with people with disabilities (see Tip Box 8.5). The Project focused on strengths and collaborated with people with disabilities.

Through the experience of being a Regional Workgroup member and/or a community trainer, people with disabilities participated in an ongoing collaborative

### Tips for empowering others

- ▶ *Ask questions of and ask for input from others.* Recognize good ideas. Allow other people to have better ideas than your own.
- ▶ *Reroute questions.* Ask others in the group to answer questions. In response to a question that you are asked say something such as, “I’m not sure. Jane, I wonder what you think about...” Be careful about putting people on the spot.
- ▶ *Share the decision making.* Make sure that decisions are made by many, not just a few people or the same people all of the time.
- ▶ *Recognize the ideas and accomplishments of others.* Give people credit and recognition for their ideas and efforts on a regular basis.
- ▶ *Rarely accept statements of “I can’t” or “I don’t know.”* These are statements of inability. Focus on abilities and ask people “What can you do?” or “How can you help?”
- ▶ *Share the responsibility and authority.* Spread the tasks around so that everyone is contributing.
- ▶ *Promote the acceptance of mistakes and acknowledge your own.* We all make mistakes. A lot of learning comes from the mistakes that are made. Don’t make a big deal about your own and others’ mistakes.
- ▶ *Recognize your successes.* “Empowerment occurs through success” (p. 201). Pay attention and celebrate the minor and major successes to keep people engaged, committed, and energized.

Source: Homan (2004, pp. 200–201).

#### TIP BOX 8.5

process with the goal of increasing personal power. The Project also provided a process for people with disabilities who participated in the workshops to increase their personal power. You will recall that in order for people to have control over their lives, they need

- To be aware of barriers
- Knowledge and skills to make a change in their lives
- Supports and opportunities to practice skills in making change

At the *Taking Charge* workshops participants discussed barriers, were provided knowledge and skills to prevent violence and abuse, and were given the opportunity to practice what they learned. Empowerment as a process was clearly used to guide the Project.

The goal of using an empowerment approach and the empowerment process is helping people to become empowered. Think about all of the ways that the Project worked to uphold the principles of collaboration, strengths, self-advocacy, and self-determination. The same examples demonstrate how the Project achieved its goal of empowering people with disabilities, family members, and advocates to prevent violence and abuse and enforce the rights of people with disabilities. Unfortunately, we never formally asked the Regional Workgroup members or community trainers how participation contributed to their own empowerment. We did get feedback from a small group of workshop participants who told us that the information and skills helped them prevent and stop abuse of people with disabilities (Fitzsimons-Cova & Horner-Johnson, 2000).

### **Final Thoughts About Guiding Principles**

It is important to think about the guiding principles that are important to you up front—at the beginning of any collective action to combat violence and abuse. It will be easier for you to collaborate with others when you share similar values. The guiding principles determine how people interact and treat one another. Practicing the guiding principles can help to minimize conflicts and help to resolve disagreements when they occur. Having shared values can help to bring people to the table, but not necessarily keep people involved. Throughout the Project we learned many valuable lessons on how to maximize the participation of our stakeholders (see Tip Boxes 8.4 and 8.5), particularly people with disabilities. Let's move on to thinking about some of the simple but very important ways that we supported our collaborators.

## **LESSONS LEARNED FROM THE ADVOCACY AND EMPOWERMENT PROJECT**

We used a number of strategies to make it as easy as possible for people with disabilities (and others) to actively participate. Keep these tips in mind as you think about how you might involve people with disabilities and others in collective action to combat violence and abuse in your community.

### **Location, Location, Location**

To allow participation of people with disabilities, finding an accessible meeting location is very important. Unfortunately, when people from the site assure you that the facilities are accessible, you cannot always take their word for it. Whenever possible, check out the space for yourself. When selecting a location, you should also think about the acceptability of the site. Ask yourself if there are any reasons people with disabilities would not want to go to a meeting at the location. Look into effective and reliable ways to have people participate without having to physically come to the meeting location (e.g., audio conference, video conference).

### **Meeting Times**

Think about possible conflicts you may encounter, and try to find a time that works well for the largest number of people possible. People with disabilities may use

paratransit and buses as a means of transportation. It is important to find out when these transit services are available when determining your meeting times.

### **Reasonable Accommodations**

Another key to including people with disabilities is providing reasonable accommodations. For events like meetings and workshops, you may need to provide qualified sign language interpreters for people who are deaf or hard of hearing. If the meeting is long, you will need two interpreters who can trade off. Interpreters often need to be booked well in advance, so be sure to plan ahead. People who are blind or have a visual impairment may need written material in an alternate format. Other types of reasonable accommodations may be needed by your collaborators or participants. Ask everyone in advance what accommodations they need in order to participate fully.

### **Refreshments**

Providing food and beverages is a small way of thanking people who are sharing their time with you. If your meeting or event is during a meal time, and it is financially feasible, providing a full meal will be appreciated. If it is at another time of the day, light refreshments will be enough. Do not forget to accommodate the special dietary needs of participants, such as vegetarians, people with diabetes, and people who eat kosher.

### **Dealing with the Emotional Well-Being of People**

Meetings, events, or projects dealing with violence and abuse require extra attention to the emotional well-being of participants. Discussing violence and abuse can be very painful, particularly when some of the participants may have been abused in the past, may currently be in an abusive situation, or may know someone who has been or is being abused. This applies to people with and without disabilities. Some people may have buried thoughts and feelings from past experiences that are triggered during the discussion. Other people may realize for the very first time that the way they are being treated by family, friends, professionals, or others is wrong—and may in fact be criminal. It is important to pay attention to people's emotions, and be sensitive and respectful if issues arise. It may help to designate a quiet space where people can go to take a break. Some people may prefer to be alone, while others may wish to talk to someone for support and potential referral to local resources. Keep in mind your responsibilities as a mandated reporter if someone who is considered a vulnerable adult in your state discloses abuse. Refer back to Chapter 3 for details on making a report while respecting the rights and self-determination of the person with disabilities who disclosed the abuse to you.

### **Keeping in Touch**

If you are including people in an ongoing project that will involve multiple meetings, stay in touch between meetings. Project staff contacted each Regional Workgroup member at least once between meetings via mail, e-mail, or telephone.

We used these contacts to provide additional information and updates, obtain feedback, and remind people of the next meeting (see Tip Box 8.6). Contact between meetings is an opportunity to check in to make sure you are meeting people's needs and find out how future meetings can be improved.

It has been 8 years since we finished the Project. All of the Project staff have moved on to other universities and opportunities. All of us have been involved in various projects to empower and improve the lives of people with disabilities in our communities. Some of us have continued working on projects to combat violence and abuse of people with disabilities. The experience working on the Advocacy and Empowerment Project had a profound impact on all of us. None of us will forget the wonderful people that we had the privilege to collaborate with or the valuable lessons that we learned about *Taking Charge* and combating violence and abuse of people with disabilities.

### **Tips for keeping people involved**

- ▶ Pay extra attention to newcomers to your group to make sure they feel included.
- ▶ Give people something to do right away.
- ▶ Be on the lookout for what people can do and then ask them when the opportunity arises.
- ▶ Offer people a range of ways they can participate. Match tasks to people's talents and interests.
- ▶ Give people clear directions and adequate preparation to perform their assigned tasks.
- ▶ Give people the opportunity to say "no" to some tasks.
- ▶ Find ways for people to work together on specific tasks. This might increase the chances that some people who often say "no" will say "yes."
- ▶ Help people to feel a part of the group. Avoid inside jokes or stories or other actions that make some people feel like an outsider.
- ▶ Spend some time getting to know people on a personal level. "Personal relationships are the glue that holds the [group] together" (p. 249).
- ▶ Ask for everyone's ideas and opinions on a regular basis. Incorporate the ideas into the work of the group, as appropriate.
- ▶ Keep in regular contact. "Out of sight, out of mind—out of action" (p. 250).

*Source:* Homan (2004, pp. 247–252).

## FINAL THOUGHTS

Now it's time for you to think about how you can combat violence and abuse in your community.



### **Ask Yourself...**

*What kind of approach to combating violence and abuse of people with disabilities would work well in my community?*

*Who are the stakeholders in my community? Who should be included, considering both individual people and organizations?*

*Who would I want to collaborate with on a project to combat violence and abuse?*

*What strengths can I contribute to a project to combat violence and abuse?*

*What can I do to create the right mind-set or way of thinking needed to combat violence and abuse?*

These and many more questions are for you to answer. You have been given many of the tools (information and resources to learn more) that you need to

- Prevent violence and abuse in your own life
- Empower people with disabilities whom you know
- Educate others, including family members, friends, professionals, community leaders, and legislators
- Begin to change systems (disability services, victims services, vulnerable adult advocacy and protection, and criminal justice)

Learn about the supports and services for crime victims in your community. Find out how responsive these systems are to people with disabilities. Identify the systemic barriers and take action to eliminate these barriers. Read your local newspaper on a regular basis to discover what is being written about people with disabilities. In a recent edition of the author's local newspaper there was a story about people with autism who engage in disruptive behavior while in a public setting. A man in the story was quoted as saying, "When we got away from the concept of institutionalization in America, we lost an important element of trying to maintain civility. There is a place for mental institutions" (Associated Press, 2008, p. B3). The horrors of institutional abuse have been well documented. Yet segregating some people with disabilities, the ultimate form of abuse, is an acceptable practice in the minds of some people in our society. Institutionalization of people with disabilities is *not* reflective of a civilized society. Violence and abuse in all of its many forms must not be tolerated.

We must be steadfast in our efforts to combat violence and abuse of people with disabilities. No one should have to suffer in silence. No one should have to live with violence and abuse because they do not know where to get help or because people and systems are unwilling to help. Each action, no matter how big or small, can make a difference. I hope that this book has inspired and empowered



178 Fitzsimons, Horner-Johnson, and Drum

you to take individual and collective action to break the silence and stop the violence and abuse of people with disabilities in your community.

## RESOURCES

### Web Sites

Judge David L. Bazelon Center for Mental Health and Disability Law, <http://www.bazelon.org>. Click on *About* and then click on *links* to connect to many helpful advocacy and activism resources.

Partners in Policy Making, Minnesota Governor's Council on Developmental Disabilities, <http://www.partnersinpolicymaking.com>

The Center for Capacity Building on Minorities with Disabilities Research, Institute on Disability and Human Development, University of Illinois at Chicago, <http://www.disabilityempowerment.org>

The Community Toolbox, University of Kansas, <http://ctb.ku.edu/en>

The Institute of Cultural Affairs USA, <http://www.ica-usa.org>

For more information about the Project or to request a copy of the *Advocacy and Empowerment Final Report*, contact Nancy M. Fitzsimons at [nancy.fitzsimons@mnsu.edu](mailto:nancy.fitzsimons@mnsu.edu) or 507-389-1287/800-627-3529 (MRS/TTY) or send a written request to Nancy M. Fitzsimons, Ph.D., MSW, Department of Social Work, Minnesota State University, Mankato, 358 Trafton Science Center North, Mankato, MN 56001.

### Curriculum

Blue Tower Training Center. (2007). *Speaking in front of groups*. Decatur, IL: Blue Tower Training, <http://www.bluetowertraining.com>

### Suggested Reading

Homan, M.S. (2004). *Promoting community change: Making it happen in the real world*, <http://www.brookescole.com>