

We Are Our Own Best Advocates: Developing Our Own Resources

Advocates and other helping professionals are aware of many community resources that may prove helpful. Many, themselves, have had to rely on such support in the past. One evening the women at New Beginnings Wednesday Night Support Group realized they were experts on the systems they were using. Looking through a resource list provided by an advocate, a group member said, “That’s out of date. You need to go here now.” Another looking at the list said, “Oh, I would not go there, I would try this first.”

The women began exchanging tips and making a list of “personal referrals.” The group decided to develop their own resource book and began by making a list of legal resources. One member of the group asked for paper and pen. Another asked for a binder. Over time the binder grew and more meaningful resources were listed under different headings: Health Care, Recovery, Children’s Services, Public Transportation, Affordable Mechanics, Counselors, Job Opportunities, Housing, Groceries, Law Enforcement, you name it.

The women not only listed the resources. They wrote what kind of response you could expect, who could help you if things got snagged, where to turn if a helper turned into a hindrance, tips to try if you met a roadblock, options, alternatives, who could be trusted, who and what could cause problems. They wrote it all in their own words. The book got bigger and bigger as more and more group members shared options. They said, “We are our own advocates now. And who better than us? We are out there every day and this is life or death for us.”

One day the women decided they wanted to give their book a name. They narrowed their choices down to three names they liked and split the book into three sections, each reflecting an area of concern. The women decorated the cover of the book with artistic drawings, sparkles and seals and continued to add, edit and change referrals as needed. Many a New Beginnings Wednesday Night support group meeting began and ended with “The Book.”

Today you and the other people in this group are navigating helping systems. You are experts on your own lives and your own experience. Who knows more about what you are facing than each of you? You can share your experience, strength and hope with each other and with those to come, by creating your own book, one resource at a time. Begin today by sharing one resource that has worked well for you or by asking for a referral from someone in this group who may know what it’s really like to access the help you need. Tell each other what you are doing right and who can help when more options are needed. Remember, you are your own best advocates.