



An Advocate's Agenda



Youth
Ambassadors
Across Canada

Active Living Alliance
for Canadians with
a Disability



The Youth Ambassador Advocacy Kit is designed to enable young Canadians to become more active—both physically and as advocates for change in their communities.

Book 1, *Accent on Active Living*, focuses on what we mean by *active living*. It tells you what this approach to life involves, and how you can benefit from learning more about it.

Book 2, *Advocacy in Action*, shows how you can contribute to your goal of an active lifestyle by learning how to change or remove the barriers to active living that might keep you from realizing your dreams.

Book 3, *Taking the Path: Planning Alternative Tomorrows with Hope*, helps you plan your life and reach your goals. Although this process is designed to help you become an advocate for active living, you can also use it to help you plan your career, your education, and the rest of your life's goals.

Book 4, *An Advocate's Agenda*, is your personal advocacy manual. It is designed to help you track the people you contact, the activities you pursue, and the results you achieve as you move through your active life.

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This Youth Ambassador Advocacy Kit has been developed as part of the Active Living Alliance for Canadians with a Disability's Youth Ambassador Program (www.youthambassadors.ca). The Active Living Alliance is a national network of organizations and individuals dedicated to promoting full community participation through active, healthy living. For more information, please visit www.ala.ca or call us toll free: 1-800-771-0663 (TTY 1-888-771-0663).

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Introduction

Congratulations! You are about to become a co-author! Of what? Your very own **Advocate's Agenda**, the fourth and final booklet of a four-booklet series, the *Youth Ambassador Advocacy Kit*. This kit has been developed to enable young people with disabilities to pursue "active living".

We say that you will be a "co-author" because:

- Parts of this booklet have been written by workshop leaders from the Active Living Alliance and
- Parts of it will be written by you.

We wrote the parts that give you tips, sample letters, and other materials that you will use to advocate for change.

You are going to write the parts that describe who you have contacted, **what their reactions were to your requests, and what the results were.** By recording that kind of information here, you'll have a valuable record of:

- The contacts that were (or weren't) helpful
- Their addresses
- The various meetings you attended
- What happened as a result of those meetings

And you'll have a ready-made database for the next time you want to make a change or help others make changes.

Bonus: The best thing about this booklet is that it will show you how effective you have been in introducing changes for yourself or for whole groups of people. It will be a book to be proud of. It could be the start of a whole new way of organizing your life!



Advocacy tips

You can bring about change or remove barriers to active living in many different ways. This booklet includes information, tips, and samples for some of the more common ways of speaking up and speaking out, such as:

- Making presentations
- Writing letters
- Speaking with adult decision makers
- Persuading your local newspapers, radio and television to spread the word
- Overcoming roadblocks
- Developing basic messages that you can use over and over again (we call those “core messages”)



What are core messages? How can they help me advocate?

Core messages are the ones people in your community need to know. No matter where you live in Canada, these messages can be useful.

If these messages are going to be successful, you have to be very comfortable presenting them. The best way to do that is to become so familiar with them that you can then say them in your own words.

Using your own words will:

- Make you less nervous as a speaker.
- Make people **really** listen to you—because they'll know that you are speaking from your deepest beliefs—and from your own experience.

It's important to be clear about the issues

That's why we've prepared a few points that you can use again and again with different audiences.

Remember: learn the messages so well that you can give them in your own words.

The core messages are on pages 4, 5 and 6.



Core messages

Here are the facts that make people sit up and listen.

Message 1

Physical activity is important—especially for young people with disabilities

We know there are very significant health risks from a sedentary lifestyle. For example, as early as 2000, a joint report from Health Canada and the Canadian Society for Exercise Physiology said that being physically inactive is as dangerous as smoking.

Following an active-living lifestyle leads to improvements in:

- Energy and ability to take part in both daily and leisure activities
- Quality of life and relaxation
- Self-esteem, coping skills, mood and psychological well-being
- Personal health practices and weight control
- Muscle, joint and bone strength

An active lifestyle also reduces the risk of:

- Heart disease, high blood pressure and stroke
- Colon cancer
- Diabetes
- Depression or stress
- Mental and physical fatigue
- Pain and falls

In fact, active living helps everyone (not just people with disabilities) reduce the risk of disease and chronic conditions, maintain a healthy weight, and increase resistance to stress and depression.



Message 2

Often, people with disabilities are not physically active enough to gain health benefits

- Establishing active and healthy lifestyle habits early in childhood and adolescence greatly improves the quality of the rest of a person's life.
- Although active living is especially important for youth with disabilities, their communities may, without realizing it, be making it hard for them to take part in the activities offered to everyone else.
- 50 percent of Canadians with disabilities (1.35 million people) are not physically active.
- Approximately 535,000 Canadians under the age of 20 have a disability. In a survey, almost half said they would like to be more physically active.

Message 3

Inclusion builds confidence in young people with disabilities

“Inclusion”—being able to use community's and school's active living opportunities—makes it easier for young people with disabilities to:

- Feel a sense of self-esteem
- Develop friendships
- Feel that they belong
- Develop skills
- Improve health and well-being



Message 4

People with disabilities face many barriers

- The smallest barrier is the disability itself.
- The bigger barriers come from attitudes and lack of opportunity to participate—with a little help.
- There are still community buildings, equipment, programs and activities that make it impossible for people with disabilities to take part.

Message 5

People with disabilities have the right to be included

- The right is spelled out under Section 15 (1) of the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*.
- The *Charter* includes the right to accommodations that provide equal access and opportunity.
- It also includes the right to take part fully in the social and economic mainstream of Canadian life.

Message 6

It's easy to include people with disabilities

- Communities can remove barriers by installing ramps, wider doors, and accessible bathrooms.
- Organizations like the Active Living Alliance can help. For example, the Alliance provides advice on how to make your community's organizations and programs more inclusive.
- Communities can include a person with a disability on their planning committees. It's a great way to make sure there are fewer barriers from the beginning.

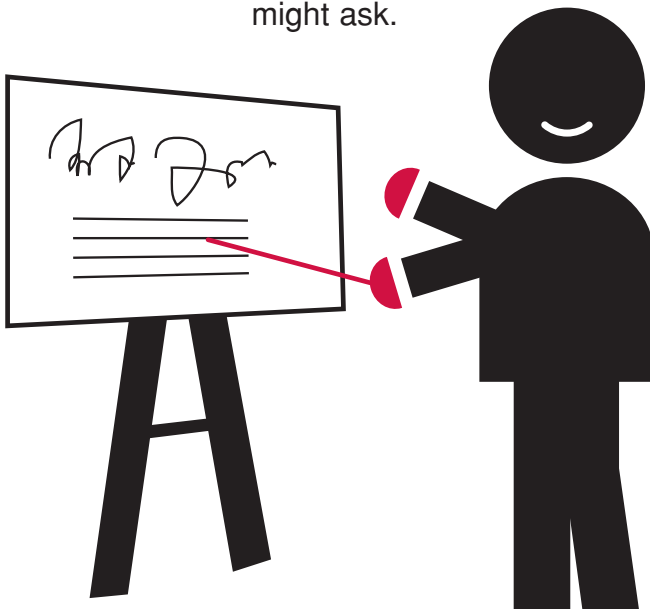


Tips for presentations

Presentations are a great way to reach a large number of people at once.

They work best, however, if you prepare them ahead of time. To help you get started, here are a few tips to make sure everything goes smoothly.

1. **Keep It simple.** If people leave with just one new idea or thought, you'll have made a difference! But if you drown your audience with too many issues, you might lose them.
2. **Add a little “you.”** People are interested in other people: they want to hear about you. Win them over by including a story from your own experience. People came to the presentation to hear what *you* had to say.
3. **Inspire your audience.** If you want others to *really* listen, you have to *inspire* them! For example, if you are talking about barriers, show how they can be broken down. People are more likely to take action or change their attitude if you can show them what they can do.
4. **Practise.** A presentation is a performance, so you need to know your lines. Rehearse in front of friends or family. Ask for their feedback—and don't be hurt if they make suggestions for improvement. Practising gives you a “sneak preview” of questions your audience might ask.



One or two days before you give the presentation

- Go over the material to see if you can manage without reading every line. Don't worry if you can't—even professional speakers sometimes check their cue cards during a speech.
- Ask the organization about what equipment it can provide (extension cords, a projector, a screen, a microphone).
- If possible, visit the room where you will be speaking so you'll know what to expect (such as size, distractions, lighting). Then make a checklist of what you need to bring with you, such as coloured markers for flip charts.
- Audiences love handouts. For example, you could give your audience a list of the names and telephone numbers of people they could call to help you remove a barrier.

But remember, if you bring handouts:

- Be sure you have enough copies, and check to see if some of these copies should be written in a language that meets your audience's needs.
- For help with language translation, contact the Active Living Alliance. They also have lots of other types of handouts to share.



Now relax!

Being nervous before a presentation is normal. Remember: the people you are presenting to *want to like you*. If they ask questions or disagree with some of your points, it means they've been listening!

Say thanks

- Always thank your audience. Tell them how much you appreciate that they took the time to come.
- Tell them that without their help, change won't be possible.

Take stock

- Afterwards, make notes about what went well and what you would change next time.
- Write your notes in this booklet to remind you for your next presentation.



Writing emails to people who could help you

Every advocate knows that an email letter to a key person or group of people can make a huge difference. Write whenever you are concerned about a certain topic or issue.

An email:

1. Shows that you are serious about your issue
2. Provides decision makers with factual, useful information for making the change you are requesting
3. Gives you a chance to make a connection and ask for a response

Learn the tricks for writing that gets results

Use the checklist on pages 12 and 13 to help you write your first email letters. After you've done a few, you'll write this way almost automatically.



Keep records of your emails and replies

This booklet includes a place to record the names of people to whom you have written. Your notes should include:

- Names and contact information of the people to whom you wrote
- The dates of each letter
- The result of the letter (whether you received an answer; whether the change you asked for was made)

Send a “thank-you” email

Very few decision makers get thanked for making a change. Whether these people were able to make the change or not, thank them for the time they took on your issue.

You can be sure that if you need help again, the people you thanked will be there for you—and you will have made a powerful connection for the future.



Checklist for writing formal email letters



Be formal but friendly

When you write to a decision maker or someone who has the power to change things, you want them to take you seriously. They will if you use a business-like but friendly tone. Remember: Decision makers get many letters every day. They'll be more likely to remember yours if you:

- ☐ Keep it short and to the point
- ☐ Deal with one issue per email

The opening

Get off to a good start by making sure your email includes:

- ☐ Your full name and address, telephone number and email address
- ☐ The date on which you are writing
- ☐ The complete name, title, organization name and address of the person you are writing to

Paragraph 1

Give a short description of who you are.

Paragraph 2

Give the background to your issue quickly.

- ☐ Most decision makers may not know a lot about disabilities or active living. This is your chance to educate them.
- ☐ Add examples from your own life—how does your disability or a barrier affect you, your lifestyle, your school experience, or your health.
- ☐ Give the facts that back up your point of view, but—don't exaggerate.





Paragraph 3

Be specific about the change you need. Clearly state what you want, in one sentence if possible.

- ☐ For example, instead of writing “There should be better accessibility to...” write “We need a ramp at the entrance to...”

Paragraph 4

Ask for something before you sign off; such as a meeting, a response, a phone call, or a date when you will follow up. This will make them understand that you expect to hear from them and you expect results.

Paragraph 5

Write a formal, respectful closing.

- ☐ Thank the decision maker for their support and for considering your request.
- ☐ Offer to provide any additional information.
- ☐ Close with “Sincerely,” and your full name and address.

See page 14 for a sample email letter that follows this advice.



Sample email

From: Johnny Woods
Sent: Sept. 30, 2006
Subject: Please make films and videos accessible for students who can't see images

Dear Mrs. Harper:

As one of several students with a visual impairment who attend school in this district, I would like to point out that students like me are unable to benefit from films or videos shown in class. Last week, our science teacher showed us a David Suzuki film. Although I could hear the words, I could not see what he was demonstrating.

I have learned about an organization called Voiceprint that provides audio-captioning for educational films or videos used in schools. I am enclosing information about them. They are not expensive.

Would the School Board recommend that all schools get this service for films they show in class? It would allow those of us who cannot see the films to hear a narrator describe what is taking place on the screen. This makes it possible to take part in the class discussion about the film.

Our teachers often use films and videos, so I hope that the Board can make this change as soon as possible, so that students with visual impairments can participate fully.

Thank you very much for looking into this issue. I appreciate your taking the time to look into my request and will follow up with you by October 30, 2006.

Sincerely,

Johnny Woods
Tel: (777) 777-7777
16 Education Ave.
High School City
Learning Province K1L 1L3





Meetings with decision makers

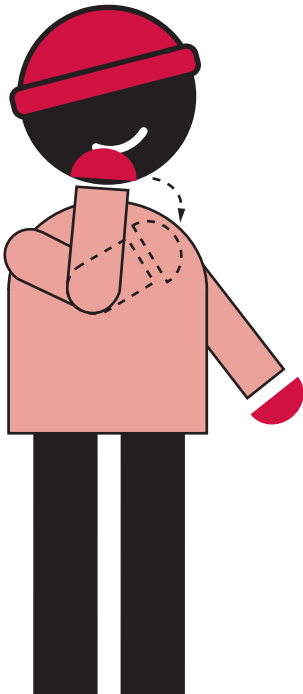
When trying to make changes in your community, you'll often have to meet with people who make decisions, such as your school principal, the manager of a community recreation centre, your Member of Parliament or a business person. These are the people who can help you.

You will want to influence them and have them on your side. While you might be nervous or wonder if they will actually listen to you, remember that most of these people like to help others and solve problems. In fact, in many cases, it's part of their job to serve you.

See page 16 for a few tips to boost your confidence and help you interact with decision makers.

“Young advocates actually have more appeal than people who are older. Journalists love to cover stories involving youths who are advocating for change.”

Fran Cutler
Former journalist, now an advocate



Tips for meetings with decision makers



1. Follow the rules.

- First, find out what the rules are!
- Usually, you need to make an appointment.
- Arrive on time and finish on time (so practise your presentation and bring some notes).
- If you are talking to a board or a committee, find out if there are any special rules you need to know.

2. Show respect.

- Use their proper titles when talking to people (Ms. Head Honcho, Sir, and Mr. Mayor).
- Give them time to respond and don't interrupt them.
- Listen to what they have to say. This is a conversation, (talk – listen – talk), not a monologue.

3. Dress neatly.

- Your appearance says a lot. If you look professional, it shows that you respect yourself.
- It also shows that you take this meeting seriously and want to put your best foot forward.





4. Be prepared.

- Hand out an agenda (a list of what you want to talk about). It'll really impress them!
- Begin with an introduction (who you are, why you wanted to meet). Move quickly to your issue. Give them the facts and your suggestions for changes.
- Invite them to ask questions and discuss solutions.
- Write down the next steps: what they'll do next (including a date for their reply) and what they would like you to do next (including deadlines for a report from you).

5. Be proud!

- Remember, you are an expert on active living and young people with disabilities. Your point of view and experience give you the right to advocate for what you believe in.

6. Listen to them.

- Show that you are interested in their points of view by looking at each person when they speak.
- Make notes about their points. You will need to think about them for your follow-up.
- Always ask how you can help them make the change.

7. Say "Thank you."

- Finish by saying how much you appreciate the time they have taken with you.
- Follow up with a thank-you that also gives a brief summary of your meeting. This will help remind them of the issue and opens the door for future meetings.



Tips for using the media



Newspapers, radio, and TV are powerful ways to reach people.

You don't have to be a pop singer, or movie or TV star to use the media. In fact, reporters like the kind of human-interest stories that young people with a message can provide.

Use the media to highlight an issue or to show that young people with disabilities are active, able and valuable community members. The media loves a story, so give them one!

Preparing the foundation.

Keep a list. Call the newspapers, radio and TV stations to find out who you should pitch your story to. Keep your list of media contacts in this booklet or on your computer.

Make an ally. Develop a relationship with specific reporters who may want to cover your issue and follow you throughout the advocacy process. These people may even advise you on how to present the story or who else to contact.

Keep up with the news. Listen to the radio, read the newspaper, watch TV. When you know what's in the news, you can spot a link between what's being covered and your issue. Then you can think of who to contact for a story or what to write in a letter to the editor.





Getting each story right

What's the hook?

A hook is what draws people in to read a story. It's the headline, the first line, the image that gets them wanting to know more. For example, if a group of youths in your girls' club wants to learn sign language so that they can talk to you, you could send a reporter this hook to get him interested in writing about the fund-raising to pay for the lessons:

- "Young teens launch fund-raising for sign-language course so they can talk with friend who has a hearing impairment."

What's the story? Have a clear story idea. It helps to write down "the 5 Ws": who, what, where, when and why.

Know your words.

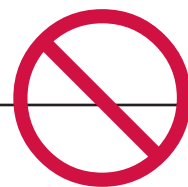
Make sure reporters know how to describe you or what you are doing. Use words with dignity when you speak (see the Words with Dignity bookmark in this kit) and give a copy to every media person you reach.

Provide feedback.

When you or your issue have been mentioned or featured in the media, follow up by giving them feedback. Let them know you really appreciate their work or gently correct them if their approach wasn't quite as positive or empowering as you would have liked.



Tips for overcoming barriers



You'll seldom overcome a barrier on your first try. Sometimes it might take as much as a year or two.

There will always be roadblocks. But that's what makes advocating so interesting!

Here are some common roadblocks and ways to get around them.

1. The denial barrier: “Problem? What Problem?”

How to deal with it:

- Present your facts and figures.
- Give real examples: people can't argue with proven facts.

2. The low-support barrier: “Who cares?”

How to deal with it:

- It is important to show community support for your project. Show how many people care by providing a list of supporters. Include as many important and well-known people as possible.
- Have people sign a petition and bring it with you.
- Offer to raise awareness and support in the community.





3. The no-money barrier: “We don’t have the money now...”

How to deal with it:

- Point out how resolving the issue will save money in the long-run.
- Offer to help with raising funds.
- Find as many sources of funding as possible.

4. The run-around barrier: “Not my responsibility!”

How to deal with it

- Show how they can help, and how you really need their support.
- Ask who is responsible so that you can contact them.
- Don’t back down if you feel you’re at the right place.
- Ask for a reason: “You can’t help us because....?” Write down their reply. People get nervous when you write their reasons down. They sometimes reconsider.
- Ask for the name of a person who can help make this happen more effectively.



Examples you can use to show decision makers what you mean by barriers

Examples of knowledge and attitude barriers

1. The house-league baseball coach doesn't want to have a boy with epilepsy on his team because he feels that the baseball field is not a place for "a kid like that."
2. Priya wants to take the hip-hop class given at her local community centre. When she goes to register, the person at the desk sees that Priya has Down Syndrome and tells her to go to a different community centre where they have a special dance class for young people with disabilities.
3. Katie has joined her school's lunchtime fitness program. She has some questions and concerns so she goes to talk to the instructor with her teaching assistant. During the discussion, the teacher looks at and speaks to the teaching assistant only—never to Katie.

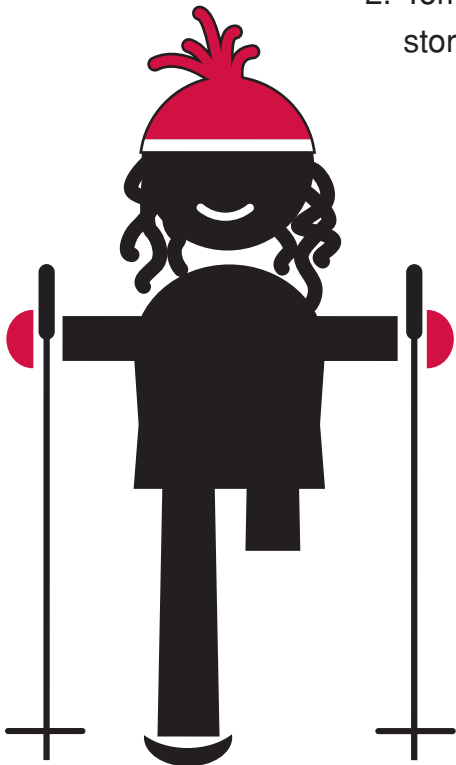


Examples of physical barriers

1. Tamika wants to cheer for her brother at his hockey tournament but there is no place for her wheelchair in the spectators' area—and there are no ramps to get to it either.
2. Alex can't read the schedules for the "free swim" in his apartment building because the print is too small.
3. Jimmy and Marie-Claire, who use crutches, can't go to the cafeteria in the basement of the building where they are attending summer daycamp because there is no elevator.

Examples of systemic barriers

1. Everyone in the class has taken a test they have to pass to qualify as a swimming instructor. Halid has passed every other part of the course and shown that he is a great swimming teacher but he has difficulty writing and spelling because of his learning disability. He probably won't finish the written test within the given time.
2. Tommy wants to see the classic Superman video but the local video store doesn't carry videos with descriptive captioning.



So many ways to be an advocate!

By now you have probably noticed: there are many ways to be an advocate. Some youths advocate mainly within their own families; some advocate for changes within their schools; and some advocate for changes in the larger communities in which they live.

In the past, if **you** fought for changes at home or at school, you probably didn't think of yourself as an advocate: you just saw that something needed to be changed, and you went ahead and made your case. Sometimes you won, sometimes you didn't, and sometimes you were able to get at least some parts of the change put into place.

That's how most advocates start. And as one issue leads to another, advocates begin to see that there will be several successes, a few failures—and many attempts to try a different approach that might improve the success rate.

ALA staffer Chris Bourne began his advocacy work by bringing his favourite sport—waterskiing—into world-class paralympic competition. He became an advocate because he wanted to share the joy of water-skiing with others who might otherwise never have dared try it.

Chris is especially upbeat about advocacy by youths with disabilities because “they are experts on their own disabilities.” Not only can they develop solutions that work, they can be powerful spokespersons “who can make something happen and have a real impact.”

Watch out—once you experience a few successes, you may find advocacy addictive!



Your Advocacy Notebook



When you need extra pages, download from our Web site www.youthambassadors.ca

Important presentations

- Date _____
- Location _____
- Who helped me to arrange it
(name, title, address, telephone number) _____

- Basic points I covered _____

- Number of people who came _____
- How it went _____

- What I would do differently next time _____



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Important email letters

- Person I wrote to _____
- Title and address _____

- Telephone number, fax number,
email address _____

- Date sent _____
- When I got an answer _____
- Result of letter _____

- Date I sent a thank you note _____
- Whether I need to send a second email letter _____



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Decision makers I have reached

- Name, title, address, telephone, fax, email _____

- Why I contacted this person _____

- Date I first contacted them _____
- What we talked about _____

- What we decided to do _____

- When I sent a thank you note _____
- Results of our meeting and discussions _____



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Media contacts I have developed

- Name of reporter or editor _____

- Address, telephone number, fax, email _____

- Organization reporter works for _____

- Helpful or not helpful _____

- Resulting stories, radio spots or TV spots (when; where) _____

- Whether the stories helped our cause _____



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PATH Dreams!!!!

Remember that section in Book 3 where we talked about ideas for dreams you might want to pursue in the future?

We suggested that if something ‘comes to you’ at an odd time, you should write it down. So, this is the page for recording those great ideas for future action.

And, whatever PATHs you set out on—Bon Voyage!

A stylized illustration of a person in a black silhouette climbing a set of red stairs. The person is holding a red and white striped object, possibly a flag or a piece of paper. Above the person's head are several red stars of varying sizes, suggesting a path of achievement or a goal. The background is white with horizontal lines, and the stairs are red.