

STARTING AN ADVOCACY ISSUES STUDY GROUP

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1. It is OK to begin small, and even stay small!! As Marilou McPhedran, human rights lawyer and co-director of the International Rights Project at the Centre for Global Studies, University of Victoria, said in 2002 to those of who were at the Ontario Council AGM:

“Your clubs have a whole range of interests among the members. Usually there is only a small number of members interested in advocacy, but that is all right. This kind of thing is done better in small groups. Debate and talk through your ideas, then reach out to the larger group to take part in any campaign you come up with. This is advocacy.”
2. Familiarize your members with the rules of advocacy for CFUW. Make use of the *Nuts and Bolts of Influencing Public Policy, The OC Advocacy Primer* .
3. Meet on a regular monthly basis and in a location that is conducive to doing the business of advocacy.
4. Begin by determining the key issues of your provincial/regional level of CFUW, as well as those within your own community. Look for issues connected with the government, your city council, your local school board. For example:
 - a) CFUW Etobicoke studying the issue of garbage disposal in the City of Toronto;
 - b) CFUW Orillia researching the relationship between the high drop-out rate from secondary schools their city and the poverty level of these drop-outs. The rate found in Orillia is well above that found elsewhere in the province.
5. The Chair must be prepared for the group's monthly meetings. Jobs can be delegated to others in preparation for a meeting. *She shouldn't do the planning and organizing for meetings all by herself.*
6. Try to leave some or all members of the advocacy group with some responsibility for the next meeting.
7. Provide periodic changes in the format of your meetings. Consider a field trip, guest speakers, etc.
8. Begin by looking at issues that are easy to discuss/study, with advocacy action that will meet with success and thereby build confidence for everyone involved. You may find that you have to put them aside until another future time when they return to the headlines.
9. Consider beginning the study of an issue which was recently approved at a previous CFUW AGM. Each resolution approved comes with suggested Action Plans for advocating.

10. Then you may want to tackle other issues that require investigating more challenging method(s) of advocacy. This might include:
 - a) researching the issue using many different resources;
 - b) preparing and proposing a resolution for approval at an annual CFUW AGM, if there is no CFUW policy on these issues ;
 - c) writing a position paper of the issue in preparation for actions such as presenting a brief, discussions with elected officials, etc.
 - d) organizing panel presentations for members only, or open to the public. Look for timely issues;
 - e) organizing a seminar, workshop, conference, perhaps with the assistance of (an)other Club(s) or another organization with this issue as a common concern.
11. Have a member, serving on the National CFUW Board or the Standing Committees Chairs on the Ontario Council Executive, bring you up-to-date on issues that members across Canada, or within the Province, have indicated as the focus for advocacy in a biennium.
12. Have someone represent your advocacy group on your Club's Programme Committee.
13. Consider having a member of your advocacy group sit on the Executive of your Club to make their members aware of the issues on which your members are advocating. It can be an opportunity to get their support in what the members of your group does, and to put forward requests for financial assistance, when needed.
14. Use your newsletter on a regular basis to inform your Club members about the existence of your advocacy group, what it does, and to update them on issues that are currently being addressed.
15. Become a part of the CFUW business portion of your General Meetings. Never apologize for doing CFUW business at these meetings. This is yet another means to increase the profile of your advocacy group and, keep members apprised of the issues and actions your group is working on. If you need their participation in the future, they may be more willing to assist.
16. Attend and participate at your Regional Gathering. Learn more from other Club members involved in advocacy. Share your successes and your problems.
17. Remember: no matter what you do as a member, or leader of an advocacy group, your President is ultimately responsible for all that occurs in the Club during her term. Always go to her before you consider organizing an event, visiting an elected official, etc. All letters written must be read and approved by her and go out under your Club's letterhead with her signature on it.

There is a quote by Eleanor Roosevelt when she referred to human rights as "*Beginning in the small places close to home, and unless they have meaning there, they do not have meaning anywhere.*"