

Empowering, Supporting, Sustaining:

Lessons from New York on Embedding Parent Advocates in Child Protection Systems

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“Slowly, the agency is getting on board. It’s a process, especially if the agency is new to working with advocates. But there are supporters who have created avenues for us to be heard, and I do feel welcome.”

— Parent Advocate
Parents Empowering Parents (PEP) Initiative
New York City Administration for Children’s Services

What does it take to build a system where advocates genuinely feel welcome, supported, and empowered?

Four Pillars for Empowering, Supporting, and Sustaining Parent Advocates in Child Protection Systems

Weakness in any one pillar undermines the others

01

HIRING & TRAINING

- Careful selection + lived experience
- Community org employer (not public agency)
- Paid, full-time employees
- Classroom + on-the-job learning
- Cross-training with CPS staff

02

CO-DESIGN

- Community orgs as equal partners
- Embedded in design, implementation & evaluation
- Dedicated time + meeting infrastructure
- Genuine openness to changes

03

LEADERSHIP

- Visible commitment at all levels
- Supervisory buy-in cultivated explicitly
- Inclusive structures + info-sharing protocols

04

SUPERVISION & SUPPORTS

- Dedicated supervisory structures
- Trauma-informed clinical supervision
- Peer support circles + external networks
- Career pathways + mentorship



There isn't enough books in this world to prepare you for that family conference. You could read, you could train, but once you get into that conference — it's a whole new ball game. That's where you get your true lessons.

— Parent Advocate, NYC Parent Advocacy Initiative

Implication: On-the-job learning is a deliberate program design feature.



“The way this [advocacy program] has been implemented—with the management, from the senior levels to the case planning teams, involved at every step, has been key to setting the stage for change.”

— Supervisor
Parents Empowering Parents (PEP) Initiative
New York City Administration for Children’s Services

Senior Leadership and Middle Managements & Supervisors
play a critical role in promoting and supporting advocates’ inclusion in the system

The **Parent Advocacy movement** in New York began 30 years ago.

It started with parents who refused to be invisible.

It took decades of persistence, evidence-building, and iteration to be where we are today.

Progress is real but it is still a process — and the work is far from finished.

We leave this forum with eagerness to keep learning from each other and keep building.

The movement continues.

Thank You

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