An Introduction to Advocacy

Advocacy means actively supporting a cause by *taking action*. Friends can be effective advocates by offering support when the library requires people in the community to highlight specific issues or concerns in a coordinated way.

A consistent message will be delivered if everyone is kept informed. The same information will come from the Friends, library staff and the Library Board Trustees.

Advocacy may be formal, such as an email or letter writing campaign to municipal or provincial politicians, or writing letters to the editor in local newspapers. Advocacy may also be more informal, such as when a Friend talks to someone else about how much a particular library service means to them.

Friends of Libraries are invaluable advocates when library branches are about to be closed, or if much needed funds might be decreased, instead of increased. They can be the reason libraries are saved or the reason new libraries are built to replace old, outmoded buildings.

Your Friends are very passionate about the intrinsic value of their library. Since Friends are library patrons and have their own important reasons for caring about their library, they have individual and often moving stories to tell about why their library means so much to them.

They are willing to put aside other commitments to give untold hours, often at short notice, to make phone calls, to write and to spread the word that the library needs community advocates to make a difference to the final outcome of budget deliberations.

A well organized, informative advocacy campaign can inform the public about the issues. Friends can often sway public opinion in favour of retaining libraries or library services. With the possibility of almost instant communication with anyone in your district, no matter how geographically isolated some smaller, outlying communities may be, your Friends volunteers can garner a great deal of support quickly and effectively.

For tips on using social media to advocate for your library see the OLA Advocacy Toolkit.