

OASIS · AT A GLANCE

Advocacy without burnout: pacing, paper trails, choosing battles

The advocate who wins in year fifteen is not the advocate who fought hardest in year three. It is the one who built the paper trail, chose six battles a year, and stopped being the whole engine. Paper. Pace. People. Here is how.

BY JIM PALASTY · 13 MIN READ · SUSTAINABLE ADVOCACY

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SUSTAINABLE PILLARS

Paper. Pace. People. The advocate who has all three is still advocating in year fifteen. The advocate who has none is not.

How it works

THREE STEPS

STEP 1

Paper



STEP 2

Pace



STEP 3

People

The advocacy paper stack (year one)

Meeting log	Date, attendees, decisions, timeline. One page each.
Incident log	What happened, who was there, dated photos.
Correspondence	Every email, dated, subject-lined, printed.
Denial letters	Every no in writing, appealed on time.
Appeal letters	Grounds, evidence, requested remedy.
FOIA / records	Requests and responses, timestamped.
Coalition roster	Every ally family, agency, attorney, journalist.
Personal calendar	Meetings, deadlines, plus one day off a week.

A STORY WE KNOW

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Denise fought the county for four years single-handedly after her son's day program closed. She won six times. She burned out the seventh. She quit for eighteen months. When she came back she asked three families to fight alongside her, agreed to lead only two campaigns a year, and started sending meeting summary emails within 24 hours. She has been advocating for eleven years since. The county now returns her calls the same day. So do three other counties.

THE STRONGEST ADVOCATE IS THE ONE STILL STANDING

What matters, at a glance

Meeting summary email

Three paragraphs. Sent within 24 hours. To everyone in the room. Becomes the record of what was agreed.

Escalation ladder

Case manager. Supervisor. Director. Regional office. State ombudsman. Attorney. Written at each step.

The martyr trap

The advocate who is the whole engine burns out and takes the advocacy down with her. Coalition is not weakness. It is durability.

Choose six

Six critical fights a year. Write them down in January. Everything else is a distraction. Everything.

Reply window

Reply to agency emails within 24 hours in business days. Wait longer for your own advocacy work. Speed on the intake, patience on the campaign.

Named allies

Every agency has someone on your side. Find them. Protect them. Do not burn their credit on small things.

BRING THESE · CHECK AS YOU GO

☐ Meeting-summary email template

☐ Denial letter and appeal templates

☐ Coalition roster with three other families

☐ Attorney on retainer or on standby

☐ Escalation ladder for your county / state

☐ FOIA request template for your state

☐ Named ally list inside each agency

☐ Weekly day off, protected

YOUR MOVE

When you feel yourself becoming the whole engine, here is how you become the coach

- 1 List the fights you are currently in. Circle the six that matter most this year.
- 2 Draft the meeting-summary email template. Use it after every meeting.
- 3 Identify three other families in your county fighting for the same things.
- 4 Trade a task each. You take theirs. They take one of yours.
- 5 Name one internal ally inside the agency. Buy them coffee.
- 6 Book a full day off every week. Nothing about services. No exceptions.

The person who quits in year three did not lose the fight. She lost the pace.

RESOURCES NAMED IN THIS POST

thearc.org · <https://thearc.org/>

familyvoices.org · <https://familyvoices.org/>

wrightslaw.com · <https://www.wrightslaw.com/>

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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