

A Further Comment on the 1990 Formulation of Citizen Advocacy by the International Citizen Advocacy Safeguards Group

by Wolf Wolfensberger

Several parties have referred to the 1990 formulation of Citizen Advocacy by the International Citizen Advocacy Safeguards Group as a "definition" (e.g., the national Citizen Advocacy coordinator's group in Britain, January-March issue of *Citizen Advocacy Forum*, p. 14, and Glenda Davis' letter in the July-September 1992 issue). It is correct that the Safeguards Group applied the term "definition" to its formulation. However, speaking only as one member of that group, I want to offer what I hope is a clarifying perspective on this "definition."

It is my understanding that the purpose of the Safeguards Group's formulation of Citizen Advocacy was mostly as a reference statement to be used within Citizen Advocacy circles so as to avoid, or reverse, certain misconceptions or misinterpretations. It would probably be better to think of this statement as a "circumscription" or "elaborated definition," since the statement consists of a series of sentences that add up to an entire paragraph that tries to clear up a number of confusions or disagreements which might occur even among people who might agree on a definition that is shorter, and more like other definitions. After all, definitions are ordinarily succinct statements that are rarely longer than a sentence. The Safeguards Group statement is certainly not what one would ordinarily offer to an audience of ordinary citizens who are not informed on Citizen Advocacy. Also, it is quite customary to formulate more than one definition and almost always briefer formulations when I try to explain Citizen Advocacy. Which definition or formulation I use may depend on the group I am trying to address and the purpose and length of my address.

However, having said this about the length and carefulness of the Safeguards Group formulation, another issue keeps coming up that needs to be addressed, namely, that many critics do not like the frank revelation of who Citizen Advocacy is for. To this, I reply (and hope that other members of the Safeguards Group agree) that human beings, human service workers, people in Citizen Advocacy, and people who are handicapped, impaired, afflicted or devalued by society should never use language that denies, disguises, or euphemizes these facts—which is not the same as conveying these facts where they are not relevant. Citizen Advocacy is for people who are disadvantaged by handicap, impairment, affliction, devaluation, or isolation, and interpreters of Citizen Advocacy *must* convey this in order to be honest and to avoid joining the contemporary degradation of language that is going on in society which leaves one bombarded and confused by messages with no or little content or substance, or which even uses phrases that on their face contain the opposite message to the real one, as in the phrase "differently abled," or "saving a village" when one means destroying it.

Thus, when one describes Citizen Advocacy, one should be crystal clear for whom Citizen Advocacy is meant to recruit advocates. Even more specifically, in the publicity material of a Citizen Advocacy office, one should convey, in language that virtually all members of the public can understand without being privy to politically correct or in-culture idiom, whom one is recruiting advocates for.