



# ADVOCACY FOR CHANGE 2021: A VIRTUAL CONFERENCE



**Each family has a voice**  
Together, our voices will be heard

[familyvoiceswi.org](http://familyvoiceswi.org)



## Advocacy for Change 2021: A Virtual Conference

### Attendee Evaluation Summary

This year Family Voices of Wisconsin held its annual Advocacy for Change Conference (AFC) on March 30 and 31. Due to the COVID pandemic, it is the first year that the entire event was virtual, using Zoom video conferencing and providing attendees' materials and presenter video recordings via the Family Voices website.

The intent of AFC remained the same as past years: to increase attendee advocacy skills, increase knowledge of budget and policy priorities, and facilitate connections with state legislators. The scope of this conference, however, was slightly more refined. This year attendees selected from three policy areas (*below*) to develop their message to legislators. They were also asked to complete as much of the pre-work of reading and viewing videos as possible before the conference so the group's time could be allocated to educating attendees on current issues and crafting individual messages.

1. Children's Long-Term Supports
2. Special Education Funding
3. School-Based Mental Health Services

Attendance for the virtual conference was smaller than in past in-person AFC conferences; 34 people registered, and of this number 17 participated. Fifteen attendees identified as parents and were provided full scholarships to participate, two identified as professionals and were asked to pay \$30 to cover costs.

This group was highly engaged in the process, actively listening and availing themselves for coaching and question-and-answer sessions outside of conference hours. Twelve participants submitted electronic evaluations for the conference. Their replies to evaluations follow.

Overall, AFC attendees indicated that this event was extremely useful, had helpful materials, and increased their understanding of advocacy and policy. Families told us they appreciated the virtual platform that was flexible and allowed them to participate without travel or the need for childcare. During the coaching sessions, as well as on the evaluation, attendees reported that the afternoon one-on-one coaching sessions were extremely helpful and increased their confidence to speak with legislators.

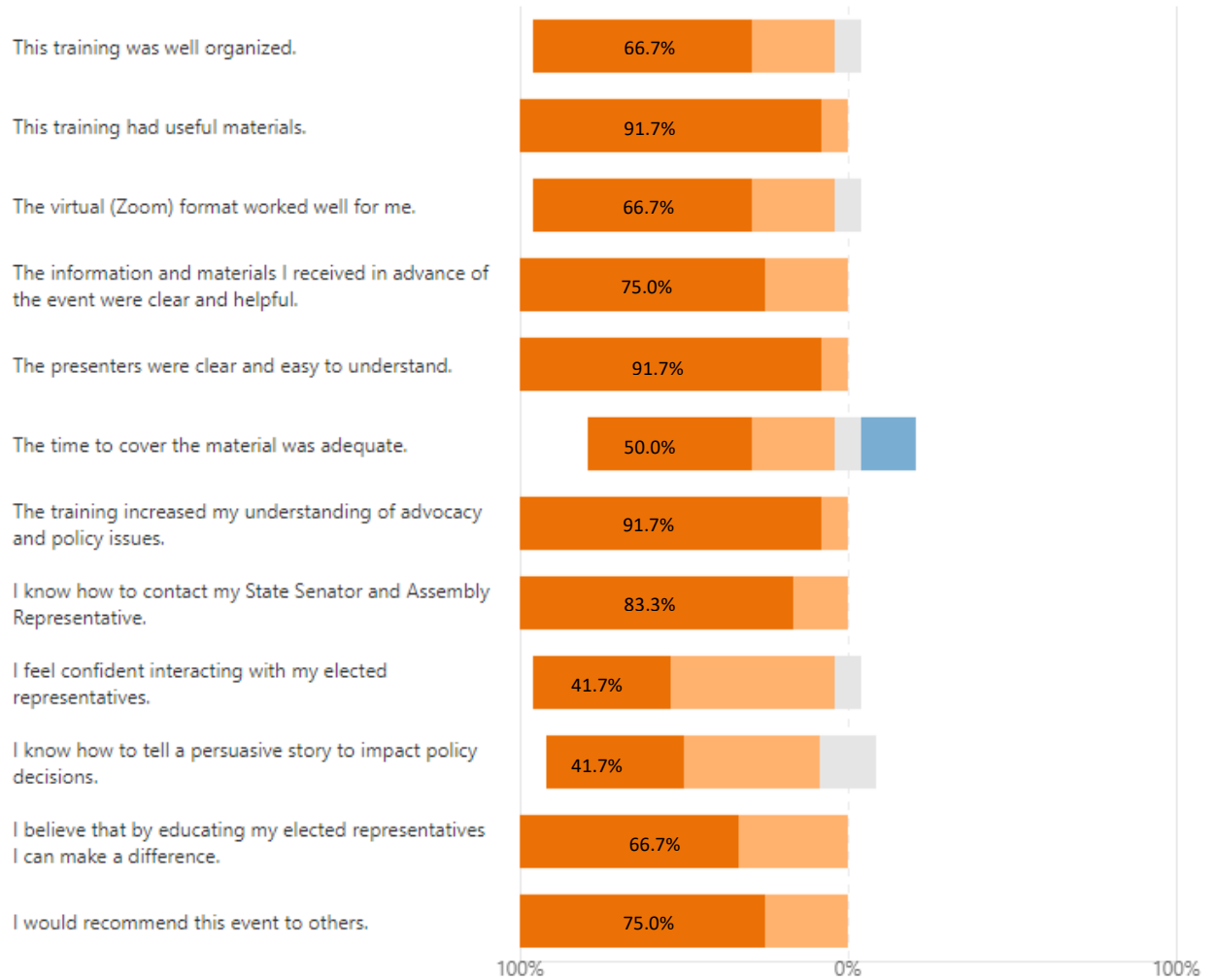
We look forward to hosting Advocacy for Change next year and will consider a virtual format again due to the positive feedback we received.

For additional information about AFC please contact Family Voices of Wisconsin Co-Directors Barbara Katz [barb@fvofwi.org](mailto:barb@fvofwi.org), and Liz Hecht [liz@fvofwi.org](mailto:liz@fvofwi.org).

1. Please rate your satisfaction with the following aspects of the training:

[More Details](#)

■ Strongly Agree ■ Agree ■ Neither Agree nor Disagree ■ Disagree ■ Strongly disagree



**91.7%** of attendees Strongly Agreed:

- This training had **useful materials**.
- Had presenters who **were clear and easy to understand**.
- **Increased their understanding** of advocacy and policy issues.

(n = 12)

## What is one thing you will do as a result of this training? (n = 11)

- I will encourage more Spanish speaking families to be more active in educating their legislators on issues that impact their children.
- I will follow up with the Joint Finance Committee to share my story.
- To advocate to reps and senators, and joint finance
- Establish an ongoing relationship with my elected officials
- I will be more involved in this type of work; be more aware of who represents my districts.
- Try to do more with Family Voices.
- I will reach out to others who have children with disabilities to help advocate for changes to help our children.
- Reach out to my legislators personally
- Create a better relationship with my elected representatives over the next couple of months
- Continue following up with representatives
- Contact my representatives

## What did you like best about Advocacy for Change? (n = 10)

- Not having to travel to Madison during construction season. I am a people's person and enjoy the informal networking and chatting with purpose. The zoom was very well done and no technical problems. Excellent communication by Lynn.
- The virtual format worked really well for me because it allowed flexibility I need. Additionally, the information and resources were absolutely fantastic.
- working with the experts - thanks Liz and Barb for making these experiences less scary and more useful
- I liked hearing everyone's story and passion.
- Help from tutoring sessions to learn how to do this.
- Being able to attend via Zoom. Had it needed to be an in-person conference I would not been able to attend as I have no care for my son.
- Very encouraging and helpful atmosphere
- I loved all the information provided!! This was a brand-new process for me and I learned SO much.
- The encouragement to make a difference!
- Tools to be able to learn about advocating

Is there anything about Advocacy for Change that you would change? (n = 7)

- No particular comments on Zoom meeting because it is a first for everyone.
- Not that comes to mind. Please consider a virtual event in the future as it allows more flexibility for our lives.
- No - other than maybe allow for a bit more time for 1:1 coaching for those who want it. :)
- There was a lot of pre work that was challenging to get done due to my crazy schedule. I don't know that there was a way around this. Maybe offer times later in the day?
- I would like to discuss more topics that parents are coming forth stating are issues.
- I think more time for questions and discussion would have been helpful. It felt a bit rushed.
- Being new it was hard to follow a timeline of when the information was going to come, and what to expect from the group session and training. in the end it all made sense though

Please write any additional comments, suggestions or feedback you had about this event. (n = 5)

- Maybe add an ASL interpreter if needed. The interpreters are in high demand so it is not easy to get one, but it may help to increase disability diversity. Resource table, how do you do a table virtually? I have no answer, but it is always good to walk out with materials.
- Thank you so much for your support!
- Really appreciated the handouts to be able to refer to before and during visits and to send as leave behinds
- I am excited to work with your agency.
- I would like to further explore how we can implement a paid parent program in the state of WI for people in situations like mine being a single mom and zero support from family and friends due to my son's medical complexities.