

# Advocacy 101

## What is advocacy?

Advocacy is the act or process of supporting a cause or proposal. It is targeted towards those who have the power and ability to make the necessary decisions or change the rules and policies. What is sometimes misunderstood is what advocacy is **NOT**; advocacy is not speaking in the place of others or suggesting what we think is a solution to their problem. Rather, advocacy is **actively** seeking to **amplify the voices** of those who are facing a problem or challenge. The people we advocate for **already have voices**, and our job as advocates is to help make that voice heard.

*"Advocacy is speaking up for people facing a problem or challenge and making sure their voices are heard."*

## Why should youth get involved?

According to Statistics Canada, youth aged 15 to 29 take up almost a fifth (19%) of Canada's population. Why do youth often feel so removed from politics, both home and abroad? Experts in the field call this issue **the vicious cycle of political alienation**. This describes the many barriers that youth face when trying to enter politics - barriers such as lack of civic education in school, societal tendencies, and changes in political socialization. What does this mean? Since politics and politicians are not very accessible to youth, this causes a few problems for us;

- Youth voting is lower than other age groups
- Parties aren't hearing youth voices and therefore tend not to address them in their platforms
- There is less of an incentive for parties to specifically nominate younger candidates



## How can I get started?

Advocacy is a journey that is different for everyone, and it is always growing and evolving. A great way to get started on your advocacy journey is;

1. **Learn more**; knowledge truly is power! In the field of advocacy, being armed with information is essential. Look into the facts and truths of the problem at hand, and learn about the systems and policies in place that have the power to make a change
2. **Expand your frame of mind**; we are often in situations where our own personal perspective guides us in making the best decisions in our lives. When we become advocates, we need to look inside ourselves and recognize our own biases and opinions so that we can best support the priorities of those we are advocating for
3. **Take action**; Use these new tools to your advantage and advocate for change! Each one of us has a unique vantage point, and advocacy will look different from one person to the next. What will your advocacy journey look like?





# 1. Learn more

## Key terms:

**Global South** - what was previously referred to as "third world" or "developing" countries, the term **Global South** is a less hierarchical and more open and value free term for countries that are newly industrialized, or in the process of industrializing.

Countries that were previously referred to as "first world" or "developed" are termed **Global North**.

**Voluntourism** - the combination of "volunteer" and "tourism", voluntourism refers to travellers that participate in voluntary work, typically for charity. The critiques of this is that it causes more harm than good to the community due to; local resources being drained, inexperienced/unqualified volunteers, insufficient time, poor supervision and the local economy is disrupted.

**Non-Governmental Organization (NGO)** - an NGO is an organization that operates independently of any government involvement, usually to address social, political or humanitarian issues. NGOs can be small grass-roots organizations or large organizations with international branches. World Vision, for example, is an NGO. While they operate independently, NGOs often work very closely with governments and provide plenty of guidance, resources, and research that can help governments make informed decisions. An **INGO** is an international NGO that has branches in multiple countries.

## What's the difference between developmental aid and humanitarian aid?

**Humanitarian Aid** - this is the type of life-saving aid that is provided as a response to an immediate crisis or an emergency. This can be a short term response for an immediate crisis (ex. a tornado or hurricane) or a long-term response, to a more long-term, complex crisis (ex. political/civil conflict, or refugee crisis)

**Developmental Aid** - this is the type of aid that tackles ongoing structural issues such as systemic poverty, lack of equal access to basic rights (clean water, education, nutritious food)

- **Sustainable Development** - development that addresses the needs in the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs

## What is poverty?

Despite what initially comes to mind when we think of poverty, the reality of poverty is not just about money. Poverty is about lacking the resources that you need in life, such as food, clean water, shelter, and clothing. In practice, this is extended to include essentials such as healthcare and education. While the circumstances vary from one country to the next, the **World Bank** is a recognized authority and has established a metric for "extreme poverty": people who live on **less than \$1.90 USD** (around **\$2.43 CAD**) per day.

**Absolute poverty** - refers to those whose incomes fall below a line set by a given country. Below this line people are unable to meet their basic needs for food, water and shelter. They also have no access to social services such as health care, education and utilities.

**Relative poverty** - refers to people whose total incomes are less than a certain percentage—typically 50%—of the country's median income. Because the median income can vary as a result of economic growth, the line for relative poverty can change. When poverty is defined to include access to services and security critical to well-being—and not just income and consumption—the global poverty rate increases by 50%.



## How can I stay informed when there is so much information?

Remember that everyone is on their own journey, and it is impossible for one person to know everything. As advocates, we are committed to learning from and helping others along the way. If someone is struggling with something, you can help them by sharing your knowledge on the topic, and if you are struggling, the other advocates are there to help. Asking for and providing support for one another, without judgement, is a strength that we can be proud of!



# 2. Expand your frame of mind



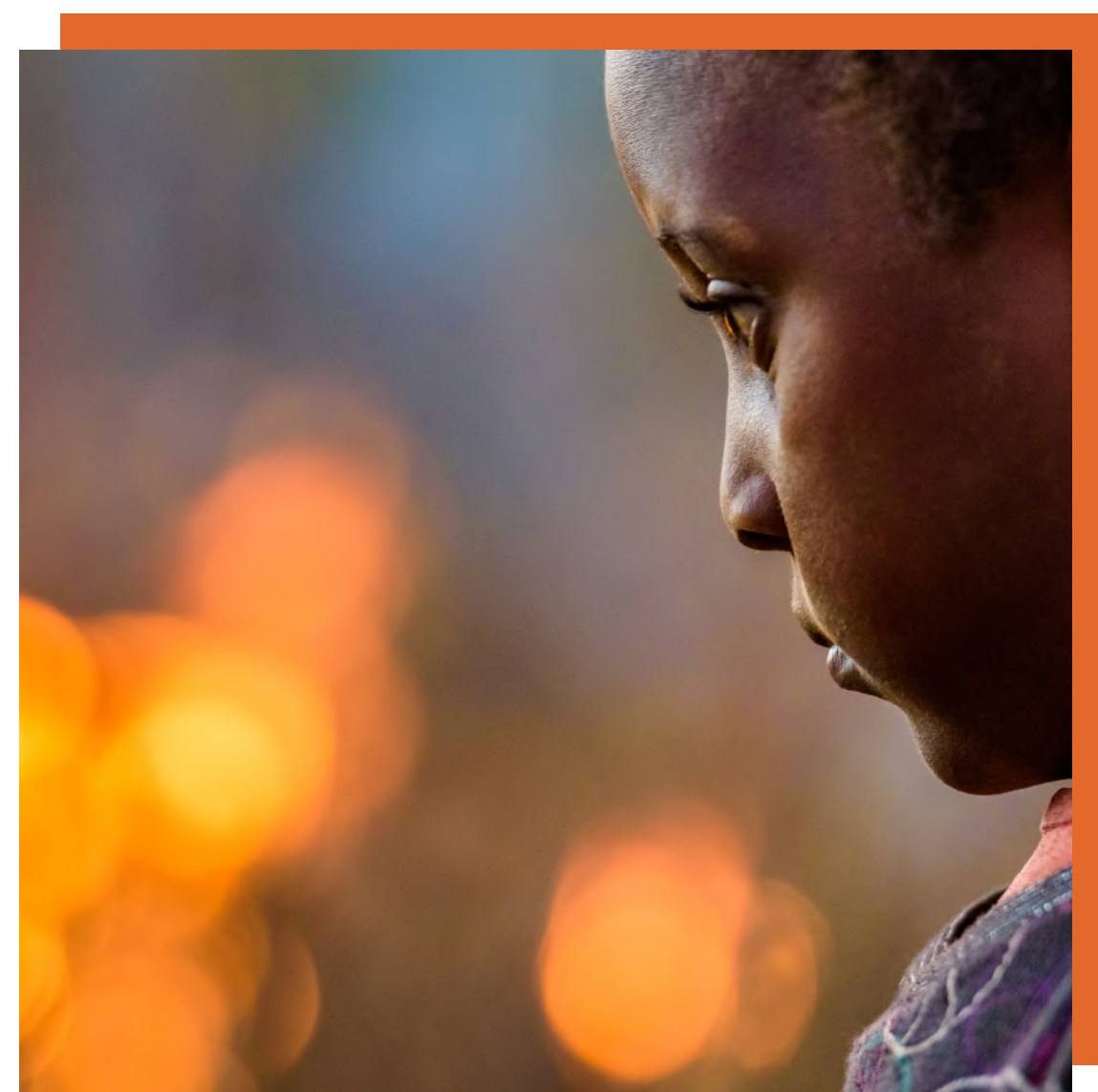
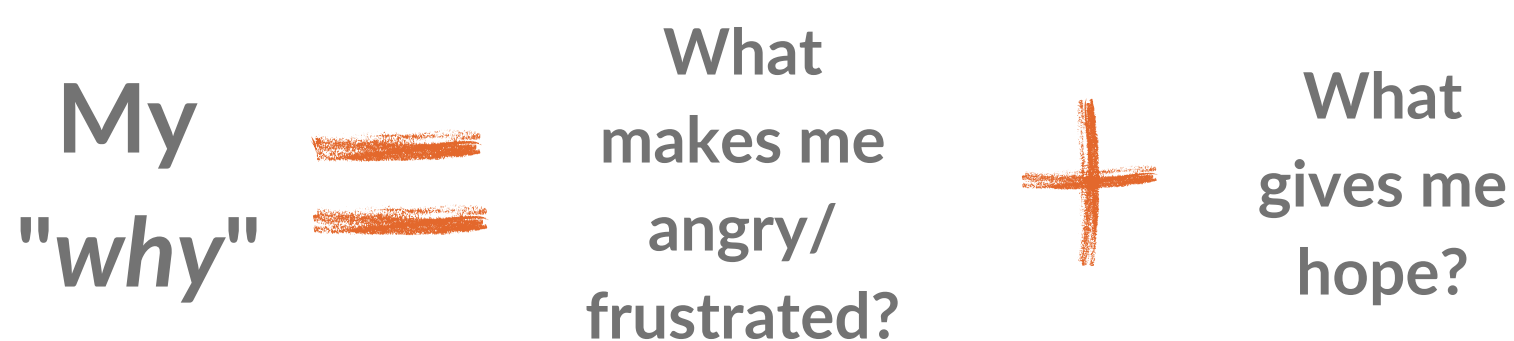
## Recognize your own perspective and biases

We often hear the phrase "walking in someone else's shoes", but first we need to take a look at our own shoes - How are they similar? How are they different? We need to ask ourselves these questions to better understand our own reality and how that might affect our perspective on others. Try asking yourself:

- "How does my gender/race/age/sexual orientation shape my point of view?"*
- "How does the environment I grew up in shape my point of view?"*
- "How is my access to basic needs and life essentials similar/different to those I'm advocating for?"*
- "How are my rights and freedoms similar/different to those I'm advocating for?"*
- "How are my privileges similar/different to those I'm advocating for?"*
- "How are the barriers that I face similar/different to those I'm advocating for?"*

## What's your "why"?

Why did you chose to become an advocate? This may sound like an obvious question, but it is really important for each of us to reflect on why we chose this journey. Our "why" is what will help ground us. If you aren't sure yet, that's ok! Try thinking about the following:



## What is "white saviourism"?

The term "white saviourism" refers to actions of white people (usually in the Global North) who attempt to "fix" the problems and issues in non-white communities (often in the Global South, but this happens here at home in Canada too) without understanding the culture, history, or needs of the community. It is a misunderstanding that is rooted in a white superiority bias. This leads us to falsely assume that a system that favours white people without representation from non-white communities, is able to address and solve issues in those non-white communities.





## 3. Take action



### What resources do you have at your disposal?

Are you part of a student body where you can join a club/group? Are there councils or groups in your community that are advocating for a cause that you are passionate about? Do you have a large social media following that are engaged with your content? Do you know how to get in touch with your local representative or Member of Parliament (MP)?

Taking action doesn't mean you have to be on the front lines of the issue. In fact, some of the most important work is done behind the scenes!

### How does raising awareness make an impact?

How does liking a facebook post create change? How does signing a petition help those in need? **Clicktivism** refers to activism that takes place on the internet or social media - activism through the click of your mouse. But how does this work?

Here are a few ways how clicktivism can be a game changer for NGO's and advocate groups;



- **Sharing information:** Often times the content that we like/share/comment on includes important facts on the issue. In today's age especially, sharing the correct information and keeping people informed on what the issue is can help light that advocate spark in someone else
- **Starting a discussion:** Sharing this information starts discussions amongst people, and raises awareness about the issue, even if it isn't always obvious. Have you ever seen something on social media that you went home and asked your friends/family about?
- **Showing change-makers that you care:** Let's think about this from a political representative/change-maker's point of view;

*"How do I know what causes my community and my constituents care about?"*

*"How can I better serve my community and constituents by responding to their concerns and calls for action?"*

Especially in today's day and age, there's a very likely chance that your representative is on social media. They can see what you are engaging in, and what people are talking about - and if you want to be sure, you can always tag them or send them an e-mail/letter directly. Online petitions are often presented to politicians/members of parliament to encourage change and so they can see just how important that cause is to the people in their communities.

### You can't pour from an empty cup

Advocacy, like any other job, has its ups and downs. You will have good days and bad, you will have great successes but also setbacks along the way, and that is **perfectly normal**. It is important to be kind to yourself, and remind yourself of why you chose to become an advocate. Take time for yourself to reignite the passion that got you started in the first place, and connect with those around you. Remember that you are not alone - what you are doing *is* important, and it *does* make a difference!