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Reach Out

There are several pro-choice groups across Aotearoa New Zealand. The main national organisation is ALRANZ, the Abortion Law Reform Association of New Zealand. Info, membership details and links to its Facebook page and Twitter feed are at www.alranz.org.

Lobby Your MP

This is one of the most important things pro-choice advocates can do, and it's easier than you might think. First, call your local electorate office and explain that you'd like to see your MP about reproductive rights issues, like the need for more funding for contraception or why our abortion laws need changing.

It can be helpful to send your MP some background information ahead of the meeting. ALRANZ has some fact sheets and activist information at its site or you can write to ALRANZ for help. During the meeting, if the MP asks something you don't know the answer to, just say you'll find out and send it on in a follow-up letter.

While you're there, try to find out the MP's position on reproductive rights, especially decriminalization of abortion, and let ALRANZ know what you learn. This is incredibly helpful information for the national campaign, and particularly at election time.

Pre-Election Survey

A follow-on from general lobbying is the pre-election survey of candidates, including sitting MPs. You can simply phone or email their campaigns to find out where they stand on the issues. Again, ALRANZ would very much welcome any information you can gather.

A Get-Together

You can organise an informal get-together to meet up with like-minded people in your area, and then perhaps move on to a public meeting, a movie showing, a pot-luck dinner. ALRANZ is happy to help with speakers and info, and can reach out via Facebook, Twitter and its membership for local allies.

Letters to the Editor/Op-eds

These are important avenues for getting the message out, particularly if reproductive rights issues are in the news. Letters to the ed are usually 150-200 words and details are on most newspapers' 'contact us' links online. Op-eds are opinion articles traditionally on the page opposite the editorial (hence 'op-ed'). They are usually around 600-800 words, but it's wise to check with the paper before starting to write: Just phone up and ask to speak to the person in charge of the op-ed page. Have an idea or angle in mind to pitch when you call.

Social Media

Where to start? Maybe by connecting with pro-choice groups (like @alranztweets and ALRANZ on Facebook). Most groups are always on the lookout for good local links, bloggers and newsletter contributions. Organising via social media builds a sense of community that comes from tapping into networks of like-minded people.

'Hot and Cold' Files

How about doing a survey of where local healthcare providers stand on prescribing contraception and referring for abortion? And what about pharmacies' position on emergency contraception? (Some pharmacists won't prescribe it, and under the law, they have a right not to do so.) Pass the info around, write a blog post, and perhaps suggest that any providers who do limit their reproductive healthcare services advertise that fact clearly in their rooms and offices. A group of reproductive rights supporters is working on a database of providers, so email what you find out to them at mydecision@gmail.com



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Stalls, Leafleting

Fairs and other events are good place to spread the message by setting up a stall or handing out leaflets. You can get paraphernalia (posters, leaflets, badges, etc.) from ALRANZ or make your own. It can be fun, especially if you take a friend or two along.

Postering

This is a longstanding activist tradition. And it's also quite easy. All you need are the posters, a bucket, brush, rag and some wallpaper glue. Or you can use tape. There are a lot of good downloadable posters on the web (just check copyright and other permissions), you can get some from ALRANZ or make your own. They can be as simple as an A4/letter size photocopied design, perhaps using coloured paper for a bit more impact. If you make your own, it's a good idea to have a web address or other contact detail somewhere on the the poster just in case someone wants to follow up.

Generally, paste-up where others have gone before, and not on obviously private spaces or shop walls/windows. If challenged, apologise and move on.

Chalking

Writing prochoice messages, or making prochoice artwork on the footpath in coloured chalk is eye-catching. It can also be a good way of advertising an event or a meeting.

Press Statements/Comments

Local media are always on the lookout for people who will speak out on issues like reproductive rights, though usually only when a story blows up. Consider becoming a spokesperson or putting out a media release. For example, when the abortion statistics come out each June/July, you could write a press statement about the stats in your region, and use that as a vehicle for making the case for better services or decriminalisation. ALRANZ has media types who can help with that if you're uncertain. (And ALRANZ is often called by the media when they want someone in a particular area willing to comment.) Take a look at some of ALRANZ's media releases for some ideas. They're on the blog at www.alranz.wordpress.com select the category "media releases".

Safety and Security

If you're doing prochoice work in public, have someone with you, and carry a mobile phone. If you feel unsafe or insecure, withdraw from the situation, and say you don't wish to speak to or engage with the person any more. You don't have to and should not put up with harassment.