Voices

FOR AMERICA'S CHILDREN

# Child Advocacy Primer:

## Tips and Tools for Improving Your Child Advocacy Skills

**Third Edition: December 2006**

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# Foreword: What is Child Advocacy?

Advocacy means "speaking up". Child advocacy is speaking up for children who cannot speak for themselves. It is about speaking out on children's issues in public and working with policymakers behind closed doors, about introducing bold proposals to address long-standing challenges and monitoring health and safety regulations, about ensuring that the tax base is adequate to meet the community's needs and finding a technical solution to an administrative issue. It is about compiling data, understanding research, devising strategies, crafting messages, joining voices, and using every tool possible to improve the lives of children and families. If you dedicate your voice, time, skills, and energy to working to improve the laws and programs which affect children in your community, you are a child advocate.

Child advocacy thrives in a multitude of forms. Whether it's a few committed parents in a housing project circulating petitions for a safe playground, a city-wide coalition of teachers and social workers seeking approval for comprehensive school health services, a professional staff of lobbyists, analysts and organizers working statewide to reform the child welfare system, a coalition of organizations identifying state priorities for improving children's lives, or any other group of people struggling to make life better for the children around them, it's child advocacy.

Over the last two decades, the country has witnessed the emergence, growth, and unprecedented impact of professional, independent child advocacy organizations – non-profit organizations dedicated to making policy and system changes for children. Formal child advocacy organizations may focus on children in their neighborhoods, in their city, in their region, in their state, or in their nation. They advocate for legislative changes, challenge unjust policies that harm children, and inform parents and other members of the public about children's needs. These child advocates work to improve the life of the whole child, turning their energies to issues such as health care, poverty, hunger, child protection, education, juvenile justice, child care, and youth development.

A child advocate is motivated by a fierce belief that we, as a society, can do better for our children. And every day, every year, across America, child advocates make a difference.

# Introduction:
## *The Purpose of this Manual and How to Use it*

There is little or no formal training for those individuals who want to be child advocates. Child advocates enter the profession from all walks of life – as attorneys, social workers, child care administrators, teachers, and community members who want to get involved. Each brings a wide range of knowledge and experiences to the job. However, they may not have been exposed to the skills that child advocates rely upon in their work. There are many opportunities for child advocates to learn substantive policy issues around which they advocate, but very few opportunities for them to learn advocacy skills and strategies.

With this in mind, Voices for America's Children, a nonpartisan, national organization speaking out for the well-being of children at the federal, state and local levels of government, has developed the *Child Advocacy Primer* to provide you with materials designed to build a range of basic skills that child advocates use to reach their goals. Each chapter includes a basic overview of an advocacy skill and examples of how Voices member organizations have used that skill to improve the lives of children in the United States. Additionally, we include, as appropriate, brief Voices publications that offer specific examples of successful strategies. (In 2003, the organization was renamed Voices for America's Children so older featured publications written before that date may refer to the organization as the National Association of Child Advocates or NACA). At the end of the Primer, we have also included a list of additional advocacy resources as well as information on how to contact Voices staff and your child advocacy colleagues around the country.

The *Child Advocacy Primer* is targeted at child advocates, both veterans and newcomers, who are working to make a difference in the lives of children. It is intended to be an introduction to key advocacy skills, so that those who are new to the field can refer to it in their work. However, we hope that even experienced advocates will find the materials and strategies used by their colleagues provide innovative approaches and ideas for their work. Voices has also produced an online advocacy training course that supplements the information in this primer. To find out more about this course or about other Voices services, please send an email with your request to voices@voices.org.

Copies of the *Child Advocacy Primer* are available on our website at www.voices.org.

# Chapter 1: Setting an Advocacy Agenda

*Advocacy Agenda: The plan that determines how an organization spends its time and resources and what initiatives it chooses to pursue.*

For multi-issue child advocacy organizations, one of the most fundamental and important practices is setting an advocacy agenda. It is this plan that determines how you spend your time and resources, and what advocacy activities you initiate and engage in. For any advocate or organization, deciding what issues should be top priorities can be challenging, but for multi-issue child advocacy organizations the decision can feel overwhelming. This section will give you an overview of how an organization can go about the process and includes materials that outline some of the many approaches that Voices members have taken.

Child advocacy organizations have developed a wide range of processes for setting their agendas. Some set their agendas through informal processes such as internal discussions and decisions, while others have formal processes that involve multiple steps, clearly laid out criteria, and detailed documentation. Many organizations engage their coalition partners and communities in developing their advocacy agendas, sometimes even having them vote on the agenda, as a way of engaging the community in their advocacy work. Oklahoma Institute for Child Advocacy, Maryland Advocates for Children and Youth, and Action for Children North Carolina (formerly the North Carolina Child Advocacy Institute) are examples of Voices member organizations that operate in this way. Many organizations have processes that are collaborations between the organization and the community, with the child advocacy organization sharing its data and information before soliciting input from the community. Philadelphia Citizens for Children and Youth has developed such an approach. Other organizations keep the development of their agenda a strictly internal process in order to be free to raise critical issues for children that no one else is addressing or to take unpopular positions when necessary.

Despite the wide range of processes, most organizations consider several common criteria as they select their agenda. Many use a process that includes:

- a review of current research on the status and needs of children, youth, and families
- a review of data on multiple indicators of child well-being
- analyses of factors that contribute to trends affecting children, youth, and families (including funding and budget trends)
- a review of strategies that have been proven effective in correcting negative trends
- a review of the potential for successful action given the state or local political environment and the work of other advocacy groups
- analysis of the resources and capacity of the organization

A number of Voices members, including the Association for the Children of New Jersey and Voices for Illinois Children,[1] have developed checklists to help them decide whether to include an item on their agenda.  Some of the questions they consider include:

Get to know the issue:

- What is the problem?
- How widespread is the problem?  Does it have a local, statewide, or national impact?  Does it have an urban, suburban, or rural impact?
- Does it seem that the problem is getting worse, better, or remaining the same without intervention?
- Does it affect certain groups of children and/or families more than others?
- Is it crucial that the problem be addressed immediately?

Determine how the issue is connected to your organization and other organizations:

- Has your or any other organization already tackled this problem?
- If other organizations have, what were the results?  Were they successful in their attempts?  If so, why?  If not, why not?
- Does it appear that your organization would be able to more effectively address this problem?
- Have data been collected or reports produced by credible sources on this issue?
- Does it fit into your advocacy approach?
- Is it related to any of your other projects or objectives?
- Does your operational capacity allow you to address this issue?
- Who are your conceivable allies and opponents?
- Could involvement provide an opportunity for coalition building with partners that could assist you in the future?
- Could you use your involvement to increase your revenues or membership, to enhance your reputation or power, or to expand your community outreach?

Assess costs and considerations and anticipate necessary resources:

- Will involvement be costly?  (Consider both tangible and opportunity costs)
- What available resources will be needed?
- Will additional resources be needed?  If so can you get these resources?
- Does the solution require government assistance or state funding?  If so, how will this be acquired?

[1] This section draws upon "Some Criteria for Program Selection", developed by the Association for Children of New Jersey and "Selection Process for Child Advocacy Issues and Strategies" developed by Voices for Illinois Children. For more information on these materials contact Voices for America's Children.

- Does the solution require alterations to current state executive agencies? If so, how will this be achieved?

Assess the probability of public support

- Does the public already find the issue important?
- Can the public identify with the targeted population?
- Can you express the issues in such a way as to evoke public interest and concern? How?
- How will your strategy be perceived given the current political climate?
- Are there racial or ethnic implications that must be considered? If so, how will you do this?
- Is it likely that the media will be receptive to your efforts?

Devise a remedy:

- Which children do you want to impact?
- What changes/outcomes do you hope to see?
- Is it more likely to expect long-term results or short-term success?
- What is the most straightforward, simple, and cost efficient approach to address the problem?

Most Voices members set their agendas annually, but some have chosen to set multi-year agendas, recognizing that some advocacy efforts are very lengthy undertakings. For example, it can often take years to get legislation introduced, passed, and implemented. However, most retain the flexibility to respond to new and unanticipated opportunities or threats.

Having set your agenda, what are the next steps? As part of setting the organization's agenda, organizations usually also identify advocacy strategies and targets. The Advocacy Institute[2] suggests that you ask yourself the following questions to help develop an effective strategy and identify targets once you have established your priorities:

- What do you want? For example, once the organization has determined that a priority is expanding access to Medicaid and Food Stamps for welfare leavers, it needs to consider whether this requires a legislative solution because the law restricts eligibility, an administrative solution because the problem lies in how welfare cases are closed, or a public education solution because the problem is that most welfare leavers do not understand that they remain eligible (see Chapter 4 on community engagement for more information on public education).

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[2] Shultz, Jim. "Strategy Development: Key Questions for Developing an Advocacy Strategy." Innovation Network. Dec. 2004. Democracy Center. 9 Nov. 2006 http://www.democracyctr.org/resources/strategy.html . (available upon request to Voices.)

- Who can give it to you?  You will want to identify both primary and secondary targets—those with the formal authority to enact your proposal and those who can influence those with the formal authority.  For example, if your agenda calls for administrative changes to expand access to benefits, you might decide that the governor and agency head are primary targets, but legislators and the media are secondary targets that can influence your primary targets.

- What do they need to hear?  (For information on message framing see Chapter 2)  How can you get them to hear it?

- What do you need to do to move this strategy?

- How do you tell if it's working?

Once your organization has set an agenda, you need to disseminate it to your advocacy targets: policymakers, the media and your network of coalitions and community supporters.  Many organizations have an annual event at which they release their agenda.  The organization also should keep a record of its agenda positions and share them with new staff and new Board members.

By setting an agenda for your organization from the beginning you help to keep it efficient and to make sure that all your goals are being met.  For more information on how to reach these goals read on!

# A Great Idea

Strategies that work from the members of the National Association of Child Advocates

October 1997

Community Mobilization:

## The Oklahoma State Child Advocacy Conference: Building an Agenda and a Political Majority for Children

*Summary*

The Oklahoma Institute for Child Advocacy has effectively utilized its annual statewide conference to develop a children's agenda that is supported by a broad spectrum of advocates. During the 1997 legislative session, the entire agenda was passed by the legislature and signed by the governor.

*Background*

In 1990, the common practice in Oklahoma was to have busloads of single-issue child advocates – teachers lobbying for education, physicians for health care, etc. – travel to the state capitol, hold a rally, lobby their state legislators, and then go home. The challenge was how to create a mechanism that focused on child advocacy from different sectors and presented an interrelated approach that retained the interest and enthusiasm of the activists. The additional challenge for the Institute was how to coordinate these activities with only one full time staff member.

In the fall of 1990, the Institute sponsored its first statewide conference attracting 200 participants from around the state. The group brainstormed issues and developed priorities. Every year the annual conference has been modified and fine tuned. The 1996 conference attracted 400 participants to its two-day meeting.

*Key Elements*

- ✦ The first day of the conference is Advocacy Day. Participants receive a keynote address, issue updates from a national perspective, trend analysis, and advocacy training. The training includes information on elections, use of media, how public employees can be advocates, and effective lobbying. Since many people are intimidated at the prospect of speaking with a legislator, tips are provided.
- ✦ The most successful presentations are by the children affected by a specific policy. By calling key contacts, it has not been a problem to recruit children willing and able to speak on a panel or later to the media.
- ✦ The second day is Issues Day. Participants self-select one of the five to eight available sessions to attend. The topics are selected by staff according to what issues are hot. The panel for each session has a state legislator, a resource person, and a trained facilitator (often from the League of Women Voters or the Junior League). A good facilitator is crucial. Each session concludes with the selection of two priority issues. The issues are quickly written up into a ballot and photocopied to allow all conference participants to vote during lunch. Each participant has five votes. The top issues become the Agenda for Children that the Institute works on for the upcoming session.
- ✦ Since the Institute knew from the beginning that they wanted to have an annual conference, they

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selected a hotel that would work with them over time. They now book the entire hotel for the conference and whittle down the numbers as needed. The hotel knows the routine thereby minimizing glitches.
- ✦ On January 31, there was a follow up meeting of 300 plus participants where task forces had work sessions with House and Senate staffers. Each participant had the same, brightly colored folder with the Institute's logo. Legislators easily identified people by their folders. This visual messaging proved to be effective.

*Planning Required*
- ✦ The planning process has become yearlong, although it did not start out that way.
- ✦ The Institute's staff always is encouraged to brainstorm new ideas. There is an ongoing file for suggestions. The evaluations play a critical role in the planning for the next year.
- ✦ There is a board committee assigned to work on the conference. The level of their involvement varies from year to year depending on the leadership of the committee.

*Unanticipated Outcomes*
- ✦ Following the 1996 conference, the Oklahoma Commission on Children and Youth, the state planning and coordinating body, asked the Institute to conduct eight regional training sessions for the district planning boards. All eight sessions played to packed houses.
- ✦ Sometimes the conference can also make money.

*Involvement*
- ✦ Executive Director — Half-time for the three to four months prior to the conference
- ✦ Other Staff - Heavy duty for most of the staff for the month leading up to the conference with logistical details — name tags, a printed program, registration, etc.
- ✦ Board — Varies

*Barriers/Concerns*
- ✦ Turf battles — With so many groups, the Institute often is accused of focusing too heavily on some issues and not enough on others. The final decision on what the legislative agenda will be is determined by who attends the conference and votes. There was recent criticism that the agenda did not focus enough on juvenile justice. With a concerted effort, the 1997 conference will have a large contingent of juvenile justice activists.

*Lessons Learned*
- ✦ The statewide conference has been a great process for getting and keeping people involved. Over the years, the Institute can point to how they have nurtured the growth of child advocates. With proven success, more people want to be part of the effort.
- ✦ It is important to take time to celebrate victories. The 1997 conference, for example, will start with a celebration of last session's 100% success, including a high school marching band.
- ✦ By building the process over the years, there truly is a statewide movement for children. Physicians are now supporting education issues as teachers actively support the health agenda.

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# A Great Idea

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April 1999


Community Mobilization

## Maryland's Children's Action Network


*Summary*

Maryland's Advocates for Children and Youth (ACY) and 34 other organizations from around the state comprise the Maryland's Children's Action Network (MD CAN). MD CAN's mission is to garner support for children's issues by informing and empowering the public. In addition, they participate in setting an annual legislative agenda. MD CAN members receive publications and information on specific issues and are encouraged to call their legislators to make their voices heard. MD CAN is recognized by legislators and the Governor as a strong, visible force in Maryland and has had a number of successes since its inception.


MD CAN consists of seven issue coalitions which focus on issues such as child welfare, after school, juvenile justice, health, education, early childhood, and child poverty. One representative from each of the issue coalitions sits on a steering committee with voting members that also include an individual from ACY and eight at-large members representing the state's geographic, ethnic, and racial diversity.

*Background*

ACY was Maryland's lead organization on the first annual Stand for Children rally in Washington, DC. Two weeks prior to the Stand for Children rally, ACY was informed that $4200 was necessary to cover the cost of the tent and tables. With no funds available, ACY began calling organizations around the state to solicit donations. In four days, organizations had generously contributed the funds necessary to pay for the space at the event. Most of the organizations that gave money and/or resources took part in the rally.

The organizations that contributed to the success of the rally formed Take a Stand for Maryland's Children partnership. They included churches, temples, summer job programs, and family support programs. The partners continued to meet every few months after the rally and decided to combine their policy agendas for the next legislative session. After the 1997 session, when there were very few successes and welfare reform issues were becoming more salient, the partners formed MD CAN. Each partner organization agreed to cosponsor a common agenda and activate their respective constituencies around that agenda. They decided to work together on five primary issues and mobilize citizens across Maryland.

*Key Elements*

- ✦MD CAN members include both organizations and individuals. They are recruited by word of mouth, at conferences, fairs and other public events and are asked to pay what they can to become a MD CAN member based on a suggested scale.
- ✦Two issues are identified by each issue coalition; however only five lead issues for each legislative session are chosen at the annual MD CAN convention held in July. In June, ACY mails a MD CAN policy book with information on the identified issues to all convention attendees to inform them of the topics that will be considered for inclusion in next year's legislative agenda. Three-person panels present each issue at the

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convention and attendees are invited to ask questions. After all issues have been presented, MD CAN convention attendees use five dots to vote for their top five issues for the coming legislative session. If a legislative opportunity arises after the MD CAN convention, the steering committee has the power to add the legislative initiative by a 2/3 vote.

- ✦MD CAN monitors many issues that affect children's well-being, regardless of whether it is a lead issue or not.
- ✦Legislators are invited to a MD CAN sponsored annual Legislative Agenda Day reception to meet with children's advocates and discuss MD CAN's lead issues.
- ✦ ACY disseminates advocacy information through each of its members. Member organizations are asked to forward the information to their members and individual members are asked to post the information. Advocacy alerts are disseminated via fax, e-mail and mail and take various forms. Some information is descriptive of substantial policy information while other alerts recommend action steps or declare successes. All alerts are sent out as needed.

### *Involvement*

The ACY Executive Director contributes approximately 10 percent of her time to MD CAN. ACY's Government Relations and Outreach Director spends approximately one-third of her time on MD CAN. MD CAN coalitions and steering committee meet monthly. Some coalitions may have weekly meetings during the legislative sessions.

### *Outcomes*

Advocates for children have had a number of victories in health care, child welfare, and juvenile justice since the inception of MD CAN. One of the best CHIP programs in the country was passed in 1998 with the assistance of MD CAN advocacy. The Maryland Earned Income Tax Credit is now partially refundable. In addition, MD CAN advocacy was successful in improving the state's child welfare workforce by eliminating contract workers and increasing both the number of permanent workers and their pay.

### *Barriers/Concerns*

- ✦ Most of the administrative work for MD CAN is done by ACY. Legislative alerts stem from much of the work ACY and its partners are already doing. However, staffing MD CAN coalitions, organizing the annual convention and the Legislative Action Day involves an additional investment of resources by ACY. Nevertheless, ACY finds that the benefits outweigh the costs because MD CAN effectively mobilizes Marylanders in support of a focused legislative agenda.
- ✦ As the administrator of MD CAN, ACY incurs printing and mailing expenses. ACY applies for grants to cover added expenses of MD CAN. They have received pro bono design and reduced printing costs for some of their MD CAN brochures.
- ✦ Although recruitment of MD CAN members is time consuming, ACY and its partners are committed to increasing citizen participation in children's advocacy. Change is a slow process but MD CAN has proven effective in informing legislators about Maryland citizens' concerns for the well-being of children.

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# A Great Idea

Strategies that work from the members of the National Association of Child Advocates

April 1999


Community Mobilization

## The Covenant with North Carolina's Children

*Summary*


The North Carolina Child Advocacy Institute (NCCAI) helped to initiate the Covenant with North Carolina's Children, a state-level public policy coalition of organizations advancing the interests and protecting the rights of North Carolina's children. The Covenant now develops and lobbies for an annual, fourteen-item legislative agenda for children. The coalition quickly has become the "children's lobby" in the state and has played a major role in the passage of numerous laws and appropriations benefiting young North Carolinians.


*Background*

In 1995, NCCAI joined together with the North Carolina Council of Churches and the North Carolina Justice and Community Development Center to form a coalition to safeguard the interests of children as welfare reform was being designed and implemented in the state. Recognizing that fragmented advocacy efforts had limited effectiveness in changing laws, the leaders of a number of key child-related organizations saw the need for greater unity. Over the past two years, membership has snowballed. Currently, there are over ninety member organizations involved in the Covenant, representing one-half million individuals across North Carolina. The members range from broad-based, statewide civic groups (such as United Way and Junior League) to child-related professional organizations and associations (such as the NC Association of Educators and NC Child Care Coalition).

*Key Elements*

✦NCCAI and the other Covenant founders had to forego some of their organizational autonomy in order to build the coalition and advance the best interests of children.

✦Covenant member organizations pay annual dues based on a sliding scale ranging from $100 to $1000 per year. Members also agree to ten "promises to keep" for NC's children and to actively support the Covenant's full legislative agenda.

✦The Covenant is directed by an Executive Committee, which includes officers elected by the membership and the chairs of each of its seven permanent work groups. The Executive Committee supervises the work of the Chief Lobbyist, is empowered to make urgent decisions between Covenant meetings and is expected to make recommendations to the full Covenant on all significant matters.

✦The Covenant hired a full-time lobbyist, Paula A. Wolf, whose salary, benefits and office space are entirely subsidized by the NC Child Advocacy Institute. The Chief Lobbyist writes a weekly Legislative Update, acts as the communication liaison among the members, and coordinates the Covenant-related lobbying efforts of all member organizations.

✦The Covenant's seven permanent work groups are organized around policy issue areas: Child Welfare and Protection, Early Childhood, Economic Security and Welfare Reform, Education, Health, Juvenile Justice and Safety. Each work group is responsible for electing its Chair and meeting regularly. Each work group nominates two priority issues the Covenant as a whole will lobby for that year. Member organizations may have representatives in any or all work groups.

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*Timeline*

✦The Covenant has grown quickly and established itself as a powerful lobbying force in North Carolina. Within a year of its founding, the Covenant represented more than forty organizations and hired a full-time Chief Lobbyist. As success was achieved and respect gained, more organizations committed to the Covenant.

*Involvement*

It is estimated that each member organization spends an average of 8 hours a month on Covenant-related work and attending monthly full Covenant meetings. The Covenant's Chairperson (Pamela Seamans of the NC Social Services Consortium) and Executive Committee members (including NCCAI President, Jonathan Sher, an elected Vice Chair) average at least that much time each week.

*Outcomes*

The Covenant's effect on child advocacy and child well-being in North Carolina has been both far-reaching and profound. Organizations now have an extensive agenda, with all the force of the Covenant behind their shared ideas. The Covenant has made significant contributions to numerous victories for children:

✦A graduated driver license law was passed to address the high number of young drivers involved in serious car crashes in North Carolina. The newly increased requirements for behind the wheel experience and adult supervision before driving alone are among the most stringent in the country.

✦A new program, NC Health Choice, has passed the North Carolina General Assembly and is being implemented to fill the insurance gap for the 71,000 previously uninsured children in working class families making too much for Medicaid but not enough to sustain private medical insurance.

✦Important appropriations have been made enabling many additional child protection and foster care/adoption social workers to be hired, thereby reducing previously far-too-high caseloads.

✦The General Assembly passed a juvenile justice reform package that has greatly improved the balance among punishment, intermediate sanctions/treatment, and early intervention/prevention initiatives.

✦Appropriations have been made to dramatically expand both Smart Start and T.E.A.C.H (Teacher Education and Compensation Helps), two nationally-recognized model early childhood initiatives.

*Lessons Learned*

✦Unifying ninety individual organizations into one coalition requires compromise and commitment. Any single organization must put aside ego, turf, and individual agenda to work for the benefit of the whole.

✦Each organization must provide whatever resources possible without expecting to dominate the coalition. For example, an equal partnership among members mandates that although NCCAI pays the Chief Lobbyist's salary, it still only is granted one vote within the Covenant.

*Unanticipated Results*

✦While the Covenant expected that a unified voice would be more powerful than any single one, the willingness of so many organizations to become so actively and cooperatively involved in that voice has been a pleasant surprise. Similarly, the speed with which the Covenant has become a major player in the public policy arena has been gratifying. For instance, both NCCAI and the Covenant have been invited by Governor James B. Hunt Jr. to the signing ceremonies for several pieces of legislation on which they lobbied in order to be presented with a pen the Governor used to sign the legislation into law.

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# Chapter 2: Communications

*Communications: Using language and media to effectively convey a message to your audience.*

Advocates can use language and media to effectively convey a message to an audience with the ultimate goal of effecting positive public policy change. The many mediums they use to convey this information can include the news media, community forums, electronic or print newsletters and action alerts, web sites, print materials including brochures, fact sheets, calendars, and postcards, videotapes and public services announcements.

The best medium for dissemination will be largely dependent on your target audience. To achieve visible impact for children, advocates must chose targets or audiences that are inclined to listen to the message and further relay that message in a manner that contributes to the goal of policy change.

When selecting targets the Advocacy Institute[3] suggests asking yourself these questions:

- What do you want?
- Who can give it to you?
- What do they need to hear?
- Who holds a stake or an interest in the issue?
- Who supports the opposition?

Consider which audiences are your primary and secondary targets. **Primary targets** will include decision-makers who have the authority to affect the outcome of an organization's stated objectives while **secondary targets** will include individuals and groups that can influence your primary targets, such as key members of a legislator's staff, community leaders who have influenced the legislator's decisions on previous issues, or a legislator's family and friends.

Now that you know who your primary and secondary targets are, a closer look at their opinions, attitudes, beliefs and operating constraints can identify the most appropriate targets for your message and the type of information they need to hear in order to form an favorable opinion regarding the issue in question. Your message should always be framed in a way that sways an undecided audience in favor of your argument or issue. Framing a message persuasively is a key skill for child advocates. A "frame" is a cognitive model used by an audience to interpret and understand the information it

[3]Questions Compiled from Speak to Inspire: Designing Effective Outreach Strategies (2005), and Key Audiences. (2005), *Advocacy Institute*. http://www.advocacy.org.

receives.[4] Strategic message frame analysis should be based on careful consideration of your current goals and target audience. The message frame should then shape every aspect of the advocacy throughout the issue campaign. Advocates must evaluate how their audience already views the issue, and should constantly develop messages to reframe the audience's perceptions of the problem and the optimum solution.

Properly framed, your message can persuade not only the undecided, but even opponents. This fundamental skill plays an important role in how effective you will be in mobilizing communities, educating the public, working with policymakers, and getting legislation passed. While the facts of the issue you are presenting remain constant, how you frame those facts may affect the support you will receive.

For child advocates, one of the key factors in framing messages around public policy solutions is the target audiences' view of governmental action.[5] Liberals typically conceive of the government as a "nurturing parent" who must fulfill the needs of its citizens and ensure equality. Conservatives, on the other hand, generally believe the government should be a "strict parent," who helps its citizens become independent and self-sufficient. Conservatives tend to hold the view that government policies should foster individual responsibility, rather than enable people to rely on government assistance. Yet the line dividing liberals and conservatives is not clear-cut, and most people waver between these two views when considering a given issue. As a child advocate, you must be able to gauge the public's sentiments on an issue and then frame your message to obtain maximum support for your initiatives.

When people hear or read about an issue that has not been framed, or placed in context, they may automatically place it in a frame of their own making.[6] This default frame may be based on insight or understanding, but is often based on misinformation or prejudices. Thus, the work of child advocates in framing issues is to build on the capacity for empathy and understanding, while combating misunderstanding or prejudice.

Sometimes, it is relatively easy to "reframe" a topic. For example, if the general public is asked about their views on children's oral health, they are likely to think about the need for parents to take their children to the dentist and to teach them to brush regularly. The default frame to which they refer is a personal responsibility frame. However, if the general public is educated about the consequences of poor oral health on whole body health, the improvements that fluoridation can make in oral health, and the growing shortage of dentists, to give just a few examples, people can quickly move to an understanding that children's oral health is a public policy concern. Based on research by the Frameworks' Institute,[7] a coalition in Washington state ran a public

[4] Frameworks Institute, *Talking Children's Issues: A Frameworks Toolkit*, "Strategic Frame Analysis Made Simple," p. 3.
[5] Frameworks Institute, *Talking Children's Issues: A Frameworks Toolkit*, Kids Count E-zine, Issue V, pp. 3-5.
[6] Ibid, 5.
[7] Frameworks Institute, *Talking Children's Issues: A Frameworks Toolkit*, Kids Count E-zine, Issue II.

education campaign that laid out the public policy aspects of oral health resulted in significant shifts of public opinion on children's oral health (as assessed by before and after polls). The coalition was then able to move forward to seek specific policy changes to improve oral health. This coalition included Voices member The Children's Alliance,

Another example of reframing the message can be seen in the work of Voices for Illinois Children in the area of early care and education. They determined that, in Illinois, there was little recognition of the importance of school readiness. The common "frame" was simply "childcare." They developed a campaign which reframed the issue, emphasizing that "learning begins at birth," and ran a series of television and radio ads that showed that children needed mental stimulation in the early years to be able to enter school ready to learn.[8] Polling showed that, after the ads ran, public opinion had shifted significantly toward investing education funding in the 0-5 age range. By reframing childcare as early education, Voices for Illinois Children and their coalition partners were able to build public will to support their broad policy agenda on early care and education.

However, message framing does not need to be accompanied by expensive media campaigns and polling. It can be as simple as talking about childcare, health insurance, and transportation in terms of work supports instead of benefits, for example. Across the country, when states were implementing welfare reform, child advocates talked about helping working families, moving families from welfare to work, and providing work supports that would help parents stay in the work force—and were able to achieve significant expansions of these programs.

The media largely establishes the default images for social issues because it serves as the main source of public information.[9] Thus, how the media presents an issue plays a large role in how people view the issue and what they feel should be done about it. Experimental data confirms this. A study was conducted to examine the effect of how the media frames the issue of poverty on the public's perceptions of the problem and the manner in which it should be addressed.[10] Some participants viewed poverty through an individual-victim (episodic) frame, which showed specific individuals and/or families living in poverty. Others viewed the issue through a societal (thematic) frame, which presented poverty as a social problem affecting the entire nation. Those people who used the individual-victim perspective tended to blame the poor for their circumstances, while those with the societal perspective held social factors (e.g., ineffective government programs and economic factors) accountable.

[8] Information about Voices for Illinois "Start Early" campaign, including videos of both television ads, is available at http://www.voices4kids.org.

[9] Id, pp. 5-6.

[10] Iyengar, Shanto, "Framing Responsibility for Political Issues: The Case of Poverty," Iyengar and Reeves, ed., *Do the Media Govern?*, Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1997, cited in Frameworks Institute, *Talking Children's Issues: A Frameworks Toolkit*, Kids Count E-zine, Issue V, p. 5.

Unfortunately, the individual-victim perspective dominates media coverage of social issues.[11] The resulting impression that social problems are caused by individual failing may cause many people to take a “strict parent” approach to addressing most social issues. It becomes your job to reframe these issues so that people take a “nurturant parent” outlook and support the government programs and policies you present. You must always *frame* your message to *create* a positive image; but, where there is significant public misunderstanding, you must *reframe* the issue to *rectify* existing negative stereotypes.

Lessons learned from the example of discussions on poverty may be applied to any issue you address. The following are some important guidelines to remember when framing your message in order to avoid negative default images:

- **Develop a clear message for every issue priority.** Because messages are so powerful, it is critical to have a clear message for every issue that you are working on, and to make sure that message pervades everything you do on the topic.

- **Target the audience you need to persuade — not the audience who already supports your position.** Make sure you develop messages that are framed appropriately for all your audiences: policymakers, the media, your grassroots advocates, and the general public. Your messages should describe and present your position in ways that are designed to gain support from policymakers and other individuals and groups that might otherwise be undecided or opposed to the issue. Don’t forget to include your organization’s position on the issue in all of your message materials.

- **Focus on the needs of the child.** Draw upon people’s innate compassion for children. While people often view adults as responsible for their own well-being, they tend to see children as unable to help themselves and, thus, worthy of help from outside sources. Use the needs of children to emphasize the importance of helping parents. Make it clear that in order to help children, we must first support and empower parents. If you position the parents as responsible, caring, and hardworking, you will find it easier to persuade social conservatives that the government has a role in helping them meet their responsibilities. It’s important to show this explicitly, since the default assumption is that people are poor because they won’t work and aren’t responsible.

- **State your issue.** If you know that the public often falls back on negative stereotypes for the issue you are addressing, as in the case of poverty, you must avoid saying that it is the issue you are handling. Reframe the

[11] Frameworks Institute, *Talking Children’s Issues: A Frameworks Toolkit*, Kids Count E-zine, Issue V, pp. 5-6.

issue. Instead of talking about "eradicating poverty," for example, talk about "promoting economic self-sufficiency," "expanding work opportunities," and/or "stimulating the economy," because these issues do not come with negative default images in tow.[12]

- **Put a face on the issue – but be careful to connect the issue with a specific policy solution.** Show poignant cases of the issue you are addressing. People are more likely to respond to examples of specific children who are suffering, and to success stories of particular individuals who have overcome past problems. However, you must use this tool with caution. Make sure that you focus on children and highlight cases in which the solution you wish to see implemented has resulted in concrete benefits. If advocating for improved drug treatment services, for example, an ex-addict who benefited from such services and is now effectively parenting could be a persuasive voice.[13] And, while it is important to use some vivid examples, don't rely solely on this technique. Be sure to connect the issue with a specific policy solution. If people blame societal factors for a given problem, they are more likely to support social programs that will address the problem, rather than attempting to "fix" the individual.[14]

- **Base your messages on research.** Consider developing polling data and focus groups to learn more about policymakers or other audiences who are undecided or opposed to your issue. Then use the information from that research to carefully craft your messages to influence those targets. If you can't afford to conduct the research, other organizations may have already done it.

- **Use data.** Data is an important resource for advocates, but you must use it strategically in your messaging. First, interpret the data you use so that people can make sense of it and understand its significance. Social math is a way of taking a number and making it more meaningful for your audience. An example of this could be: "The alcohol industry spends more than $2 billion every year to advertise and promote consumption. This amounts to approximately $225,000 every hour of every day."[15] Choose two or three of the most compelling data points or statistics. Tie the data to the problem you're trying to solve and, even more importantly, to your solution.[16]

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[12] Id., p 6.
[13] Frameworks Institute, *Talking Children's Issues: A Frameworks Toolkit*, Kids Count E-zine, Issue V, pp 1-2.
[14] Frameworks Institute, *Talking Children's Issues: A Frameworks Toolkit*, Kids Count E-zine, Issue V, p 6; Frameworks Institute, *Talking Children's Issues: A Frameworks Toolkit*, "Stories," pp. 1-2.
[15] "Using Data Strategically: Social Math." Center for Health Improvement. 2004. Center for Health Improvement. 14 Nov. 2006 <http://www.chipolicy.org/pdf/TA5.pdf>.
[16] Frameworks Institute, *Talking Children's Issues: A Frameworks Toolkit*, "Numbers," pp. 2-6.

- **Use diversity**. For the same reasons that it's important to connect your issue to a larger system or trend, it's also important to show that the problem permeates racial, gender, and class lines to affect a variety of individuals and groups. If people think that the problem you have described or the solutions you are proposing apply to only one sector of the population, they will be less likely to understand the larger significance and thus, the importance of their support.[17]

- **Use unlikely allies to help reframe the message. Try to get individuals who would not** normally support your cause to serve as champions of it. For example, when law enforcement officials speak out in favor of early care and education programs, this helps shift the public frame around these programs from cash supports for parents who are working, to investments in children to help them grow up to be good citizens. These "unlikely allies" can bring with them new audiences willing to listen to your message and, thus, entire sectors of the population who may join forces with you and endorse your efforts. They may also convince other opponents that your cause is worthwhile.[18]

Message framing is one of the most important strategies for you to use, no matter what form of child advocacy you pursue. If you develop this skill and use it consistently in your work, you can garner widespread support for the policies and programs you promote.

### Tools

Deciding which tools to use to reach various target audiences is an important step and one which can vary with each advocacy initiative and goal. Looking for a memorable method of targeting primary audiences, Voices for Virginia's Children delivered Chinese take-out boxes filled with highlighters, coasters and bookmarks affixed with the organization's logo to policymakers. They also included business cards and a thank you letter for the policymaker's hard work on behalf of children, thereby reinforcing positive behavior and improving name recognition for their organization in a simple, direct and cost-effective manner.

Although advocates use many of the mediums of communication to reach their audiences, unsurprisingly media advocacy is often regarded as one of the most effective ways in which to garner public and policymaker support. The news media has an unparalleled ability to raise public awareness on an issue and shape public discourse surrounding that issue, ultimately affecting public policy. Advocates may communicate with the media in a variety of ways including the following:

[17] Frameworks Institute, *Talking Children's Issues: A Frameworks Toolkit*, Kids Count E-zine, Issue V, p. 7.
[18] Id.

- **The Press Release/Press Advisory.** The most basic, but often the most effective, means to secure coverage for your story is through a press release. The press release is the vehicle to coverage, while a press advisory can be a way to let the media know about an upcoming press release, such as the press conference or press event.

  Press releases and press advisories should always include the **who**, **what**, **when**, **where**, and **why** of your story. While the press advisory will be shorter, press releases should be more in-depth and include a quote from the principal of your organization and/or someone well known and respected in your community. Be sure to consult *The Associated Press Style Book* for the appropriate journalistic language to use in the press release. All of this will provide editors and reporters with the information and format necessary to run a short piece on your efforts. At the top of the press release or press advisory, include the contact information (title, name, address, phone number, fax number, and email address) of individuals who can provide additional information and/or facilitate follow-up interviews should reporters decide additional information would be beneficial to their target audience. Always fax or e-mail your press release to the appropriate editor and/or reporter and make a follow-up call to make sure it gets the attention it deserves.

  If you are addressing problems in your press release, it is important to also provide solutions. This gives the audience something to act on so they feel like they are not helpless in the situation.

- **The Press Conference.** A press conference is an especially useful tool when you are introducing a new program, releasing a report or annual statistics, or have visuals. It should take place at a location that is convenient for the press, has sufficient space for TV cameras, has easy parking, and is relevant to your message (a school for education issues, hospital for health care issues, etc.). Be sure to fax press advisories to editors and producers five business days before the event and follow-up with a phone call to make sure they were received. Keep in mind that early mornings are ideal times for these press conferences, as they give reporters time to file their reports by deadline.

  Make sure that you include a lot of visuals that emphasize your point, and have people who are affected by the policy you are addressing present at the press conference. Also, think about enlisting a local celebrity, for example, your state's first lady, a newscaster or a politician, to take part in the press conference, as it will attract more attention, but be wary of those who are controversial. The press conference should be as comprehensive as possible, with adequate space and time to enable reporters to secure individual interviews with your organization's spokesperson(s), so that the reporters have something unique to offer their audiences. Make sure that reporters receive a press kit or packet complete with the press release, background information on your issue, organization and speakers, as well as fast facts and information on where journalists can find additional information. And remember the most important thing of all, journalists like food, so make sure you have refreshments available for them!

- **The Media Event.** While a press conference is more conventional, a press event should be out of the ordinary. Think of something that will capture the attention and imagination of both the media and the public through visual images conducive to television coverage. Coleman Advocates for Children and Youth in San Francisco, for example, has done that through its Baby Brigade. The Baby Brigade is an event where children and early child care workers march around City Hall to bring attention to the early care issues. Think creatively of ways that you can grab the media's attention. Perhaps it's bringing a group of children with shirts that read "children matter" into a policymaker's press conference to convey that children are impacted by his or her decisions. Other events, such as public fundraisers, can also serve as a press platform, providing your message is consistent. One example of this is Voices for Illinois Children's Start Early Run, which raises money through an annual run while also raising awareness for early care and education.

- **The Letter to the Editor.** Tapping an individual, an organization, or a coalition to write and send letters to the editor of your state or local newspaper is an effective way to attract attention and let politicians know that a large part of their constituency supports your cause. Voices for Virginia's Children was quite successful using its e-mail network of single-issue child advocates to coordinate letter-to-the-editor campaigns during election time, which increased the chances that at least one letter or more will run. Think about networking or using your existing network to launch such an effort. Another effective way to convey to politicians the number of people weighing in on a given issue is to write one letter and have the name of your coalition or organization at the bottom

- **The Opinion Column.** An opinion column in your local newspaper is often more effective than a letter to the editor because it indicates that the issue is important to the paper. It also indicates that the author is viewed as an expert. Before you dedicate much effort to this, weigh your time and resources against the size of the news market. It will be harder to get your article published in larger markets than in smaller markets. If you do write a column, use the active voice and use both facts and analysis. If something significant relating to your issue has just occurred or is in the process of occurring, such as a major study or budget dispute, meet with editorial boards of newspapers and station management at TV stations.

Again, remember, when you address problems be sure to also provide solutions. Your information and interpretation may impact the way they address the issue in their editorials. Securing their support is easier if you have already cultivated a relationship (See Media Relations below).

However, to use these tools or mediums of communication effectively, it is crucial to position your organization as a credible source of important information and to maintain positive relationships with media contacts. To build your organization's reputation as a reliable source and to develop media relationships, it is important to understand the variety of tools available, how they impact various audiences, and how they can be developed to support the media's efforts on your behalf. Further, it is important to plan your media efforts to ensure that you are providing specific media contacts and outlets with consistent messages and information relevant to their respective audiences and in formats they find most useful. It is also vital that the information you provide is presented in ways and frames recommended above.

Developing a media advocacy strategy as part of your annual strategic communications plan can help your organization more easily and effectively deal with the media. The following are some factors you will want to take into consideration should you decide to engage in the media advocacy aspect of strategic communications planning.

- **Strategic Planning**. Be careful not to approach the media too much. They will be less likely to see prolific press hooks as newsworthy. To avoid this, look at your organization's yearly legislative priorities and pick three that are pressing. It is important to not only consider priorities that lend themselves to media advocacy, but to also consider your resources against what you want to accomplish. Be realistic. And then develop mini-plans taking into consideration your target audience and the means to reach that audience. Be creative about your approach to getting your message out on your three issues. Remember to give the media an angle that they have not yet used, and that will appeal to their audiences.

- **Crisis Communications Planning**. Make sure your communications plan includes preparation for rapid response for breaking news. Designate one spokesperson and prepare him/her and other players who will work behind the scenes. These people should be ready to work fast and smart to communicate your message during a crisis. But, it is also important even when the story is right to make certain you don't appear to be exploiting the situation. Make sure when you grant reporters interviews that you address the issue carefully. Broaden personalized stories so that they address the bigger issue at hand. For instance, if a child dies in your state's child welfare system, raise the discussion to cover systemic issues, like inadequate staffing. When you decline interviews because of sensationalism be sure to emphasize that you are always available to address overarching concerns. If you have established the all-important relationship with members of the media (see below) then they will understand your position.

- **Media Relations**. Plan to build ongoing personal relationships with members of the media. The best way to get started is to offer them a service. Call reporters who handle children's issues and offer your organization's help to them as they work toward their deadlines. Just providing them with basic information and sources can go a long way in establishing a mutually beneficial relationship.

Once you have built relationships with journalists, continue to look for ways to help them do their jobs on an ongoing basis. Oklahoma Institute of Child Advocacy (OICA), for instance, formed a partnership with its local CBS affiliate, providing the station with a list of stories that would help news producers address the needs of children. When the stations needed sources for those stories, OICA provided them with contacts. If you continue to help journalists do their jobs, you will find that they will begin to rely on you.

It is also important for advocates in large states to find creative ways to reach journalists in every section of the state. Consider enlisting the help of professionals, volunteers and parents as effective news and opinion sources for your local media and providing them with free media advocacy training to prepare them for their efforts. This is a great way to make sure every reporter has a contact in such a large state.

In the end, remember, garnering coverage for your issues depends on the tools you use and the relationships with reporters that you develop. Choosing the right tools depends on your audience. It is important to think about who you're targeting when you prepare to get coverage from the media. The relationships you forge with members of the press will better enable you to get the desired coverage.

A Great Idea
Strategies that work from the members of the National Association of Child Advocates

February 2003

Communications

# Virginia Child Advocates Improve Their Political Fortunes By Serving Up Some Chinese Carryout


### *Summary*

Voices for Virginia's Children hand delivered to key state legislators Chinese carryout boxes containing highlighters, coasters and bookmarks. All of the material was affixed with the organization's logo. The carryout box was accompanied by the organization's business card and a letter thanking policymakers for their hard work on behalf of children. Because the material all had the organization's contact information, policymakers would be able to easily reach the organization with questions. As an added benefit, the material informed policymakers of Voices recent name change from The Action Alliance for Virginia's Children and Youth.


### *Background*

Voices for Virginia's Children had worked closely with 75 key legislators to preserve funding during the 2002-2003 legislative session. Times in Virginia, like in other parts of the country, were tough financially, indicating potential cuts to much needed programs. But Voices for Virginia's Children was able to work closely with many state legislators and other advocates to secure substantive gains in the children's health insurance program, including adding mental health benefits. Moreover, many of these legislators, serving on key committees, had proven themselves open to new legislation that would positively impact children. Voices knew that, like anyone, these legislators needed to feel appreciated. And Voices needed to let the legislators know that even though the organization was operating under a new name, it was still available to policymakers. So, staff members at Voices decided the cheapest way to achieve all of this was to package some simple supplies, with its new logo, and deliver them to legislators in a cleverly-designed container: the Chinese carryout box.

### *Key Elements*

- ✦ A Voices staff member went to a local craft store that sold Chinese carryout containers. The staff member purchased 75 containers at $ .60 each. The containers came in different colors, but Voices decided on yellow since that is the organization's color.
- ✦ Voices then visited a web site to purchase the highlighters at $.23 each and the coasters at $.70 each.
- ✦ The policy director at Voices wrote a note that was printed in-house on note cards for each Legislator. The note read: *"Thank you for your hard work this session on issues affecting the children and families of Virginia! Please continue to contact us as a resource. Our name has changed,*

Continued on reverse side

*but our mission is still the same: To build a powerful voice for children and to inspire the people of Virginia to act on their behalf*

✦ Once the material arrived, an intern spent three hours placing the items and note in the Chinese carryout packages.
✦ The intern then hand delivered the material to each legislator at the state capitol.

### *Things To Think About*

✦ Mailing the Chinese carryout packet would be costly and hard to mail because of the dimensions. The best approach is to hand deliver them to legislators, which also gives it that added personal touch.
✦ It is most cost effective to be selective in who receives the material. Think about delivering it to your legislature's leadership, policymakers on key committees and those who have gone to great lengths to improve conditions for children.
✦ Because many of the materials were already ordered to publicize the name change, it was helpful and cost effective for Voices to prepare the boxes. Consider taking resources you have from other projects and using them for a project similar to this one.

### *Staff Time*

✦ The Vice President and Director of Strategic Communications at Voices spent an hour selecting supplies and ordering the material.
✦ The Policy Director spent 20 minutes drafting one note to legislators that would be copied onto note cards.
✦ One intern spent 4 hours putting the packets together and delivering them.

### *Costs*

✦ The boxes and material costs about $1.50 each. Because staff time was minimal it was not factored into the costs. Had the material been mailed, the expense would have been much greater.

### *Outcomes*

✦ The legislators, who received the box of materials, expressed their appreciation by calling, e-mailing and sending letters to Voices. They all let the organization know that they enjoyed receiving the highlighters and coasters because they are useful. They also appreciated the note of gratitude.
✦ Voices successfully informed key legislators about the organization's name change and got its contact information on the desks of legislators.

### *Contact information*

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A Great Idea
Strategies that work from the members of the National Association of Child Advocates

June 2001

Fundraising

# Advocates Run for Children and Raise Funds and Awareness In the Process

### *A Quick Rundown*

Voices for Illinois Children (Voices) hosts the annual Start Early 5K/10K Run to raise money for the organization's efforts to educate the public and policy makers about the importance of brain development during the first few years of life. The run also raises awareness for children's issues by attracting new people to the cause of child advocacy in general, and early child care in particular. The run for 2001, held during Child Abuse Prevention Month, attracted a thousand runners and raised $40,000. The organization cleared $15,000 once it paid for the expenses of the race.

### *How the Run Started*

Voices for Illinois Children launched its multi-year *Start Early: Learning Begins at Birth* campaign in 1997. The organization needed a way to raise funds for the campaign, while at the same time raising awareness of the issues surrounding early care and learning. Voices for Illinois Children decided to use the fact that so many people in Chicago take advantage of the nice spring weather to run. In 1998, the organization held its first 5K/10K Run, and its success has been phenomenal.

### *Paving a Path to Success*

- ✦ Voices for Illinois Children realized that to raise money and awareness through a special event, an organization had to first invest money. The organization invested $8,000 to hire a special events firm that handled many pre-event details and race day logistics as well as provided technical assistance to the Run Committee six months before the event. The Run Committee, consisting of 12 Associate Board volunteers and led by two seasoned volunteers, handled the overall management of the event, including volunteer recruitment, sponsorship, team outreach and community outreach.
- ✦ Voices spent an additional $17,000 on all other expenses. These expenses included event souvenirs (such as t-shirts), printing literature on the run, and securing permits, among other expenses.
- ✦ Voices for Illinois Children targeted young professionals, 20-40 years old, as its key audience. This is the age group with a large number of runners and parents of young children who identified with the issues of Voices.
- ✦ A staff member from Voices for Illinois Children approached media outlets to enlist sponsorship and to guarantee media coverage. The organization secured Chicago's ABC affiliate and a local radio station as sponsors. Voices was able to use media sponsors who provided free space and airtime which helped enlist business sponsors.
- ✦ The organization dedicated a staff member to conduct a month of research on various corporations, such as National City Bank. The staff member looked at the businesses to determine to which demographics they were appealing. Voices presented a proposal to businesses targeting young professionals.
- ✦ The organization solicited volunteers two months prior to the run. The volunteers promoted the event by distributing posters, handling logistics and assisting runners at the event. The organization typically secured 200 volunteers by partnering

*Continued on reverse side*

with other organizations, such as the Young Lawyers Association and the Chicago-area schools. Volunteers received t-shirts and posters for their efforts.

- ✦ Voices appointed a board of volunteers to oversee the volunteer effort. The board organized everything from the volunteer kickoff to individual volunteer responsibilities.
- ✦ The volunteer effort was kicked off by providing posters to volunteers to carry out into neighborhoods to distribute. These posters helped raise awareness with people in the Chicago area of the run and solicited potential participants.
- ✦ Participants were engaged in the cause by gathering pledges from friends willing to sponsor them. Each runner paid a registration fee of $20 ($10 for kids 9-14 and kids 8 and under registered for free). If they raised $50 then their registration fee was waived. If they raised $100 then their registration fee was waived, they received a Voices logo sweatshirt and they were entered into a drawing for two free airline tickets.
- ✦ Every effort was made to ensure that the event was family friendly. This included providing a free kids dash where every child received a ribbon for running in the event. Also, every registered participant received an information packet that included Voices' printed materials and promotion of other Child Abuse Prevention Month activities.

*Running the Event*

- ✦ Two staff members at Voices for Illinois Children spent approximately 20 percent of their time throughout the year planning and executing the event.
- ✦ For the event's first year, one staff member dedicated two months to researching and securing cash and in-kind corporate sponsorship.

*Potential Hurdles*

- ✦ Bad weather has hindered events, but the run has gone on.
- ✦ Voices for Illinois Children has found it is important to compare calendars with other organizations to make certain other big events are not taking place during the run. One year the March of Dimes held a walk which pulled people away from the Start Early Run.
- ✦ Each runner signed a waiver saying Voices is not liable for accidents during the run.

**Unexpected Endorphins**

- ✦ A number of people who have taken part in the Start Early Run are now dedicated child advocates, focusing their time and energy on children's causes.
- ✦ The run has worked wonders for the recruitment effort of Voices for Illinois Children. For example, the president for National City Bank joined the board of Voices for Illinois Children.
- ✦ The race has served as a vehicle to establish solid relationships with the Chicago business community.
- ✦ The run has built morale in Chicago's child advocacy community, giving people an opportunity to participate in something bigger than themselves.

*The Finish Line*

- ✦ The Start Early 5K/10K Run has a website at **www.startearlyrun.com**, which features pictures and details about the race. For the 2001 race, the event partnered with Jim Henson Productions and "Bear in the Big Blue House" attended the run. Many of the local news personalities participated in the run, which garnered even more attention for Voices for Illinois Children. Since its inception in 1998, the run has raised $125,000 and introduced Voices' Early Start campaign to thousands.

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October 2002

Community Mobilization

# Coleman Advocates Develops Baby Brigade To Secure Commitments from Politicians

*Summary*

Each June, Coleman Advocates for Children and Youth co-sponsors the Baby Brigade, a fair of sorts, at San Francisco City Hall. A coalition of child care stakeholders, led by the SF Child Care Providers Association, is responsible for a major part of overall event planning, coordination, and outreach. The purpose of the event is to get city leaders, including the mayor, to publicly commit to funding programs around child care. The Baby Brigade includes a half-day of games and entertainment at City Hall. City supervisors, the people who make up San Francisco's legislative body, and the mayor are put on the spot at the event to make promises on child care issues.

*History*

Coleman Advocates for Children and Youth needed a way to directly engage politicians on child care issues. They also needed to make the public aware of the issues, so Coleman staff decided to use City Hall as a back drop. With so many children showing up on the steps of City Hall, reporters could not resist the novelty of the story. Politicians could not resist such a backdrop and photo opportunity. And children in working families would be the ultimate winners in the effort because Coleman would secure ongoing funding commitments for child care. Over the past five years of its existence, the Baby Brigade has become a permanent staple of the San Francisco political scene. Reporters keep coming back to City Hall each year to cover the city's politicians and their new promises to children.

*Key Elements*

- ✦ Coleman engages its coalition of child care providers (which works on other issues with Coleman), and the parents they deal with day-to-day, to decide the details and logistics of the event.
- ✦ They hold the event the first week of April, which is recognized nationally as the "Week of the Young Child."
- ✦ Planning starts 8 weeks before the event, beginning with the development of a timely theme which changes each year. For example, one year Coleman Advocates played off the "Got Milk?" ads with the theme, "Got Child Care?"
- ✦ Permits are secured for $2,000 from the city for the space at City Hall.
- ✦ Entertainment is secured with $500 to $700 paying for clowns, singers and any other forms of entertainment the organization deems necessary.
- ✦ The child care providers get permission from parents to take the kids at their center on a field trip to City Hall.
- ✦ A local deli is secured to provide and deliver food to participants at the event.
- ✦ A limousine is reserved, so that an early care worker can arrive at the event with the children

*Continued on reverse side*

to communicate that children deserve the best, up to and including a ride in a luxury automobile.

- ✦ The event operates like a fair, with children, early care workers, parents and child advocates walking around between various information tables at City Hall.
- ✦ At the end of the event, in a show of solidarity, everyone involved in the Baby Brigade marches around City Hall.
- ✦ While children are having their faces painted or interacting with clowns or eating lunch, city leaders give speeches about what they will do for children. These speeches usually include support for child care initiatives and funding from the mayor and supervisors.
- ✦ While Coleman started the Baby Brigade and maintains a prominent presence in the Baby Brigade, the event's planning has been turned over to other entities within the child care community.

### *Staff Time*

- ✦ Everyone on Coleman's 8 person staff was involved to some degree in the project. Lead staff dedicated about 5-10 hours per week for 6-8 weeks planning the Baby Brigade.
- ✦ San Francisco child care workers and parents also helped Coleman with the effort, including outreach, sign-making, and lunch preparation, which reduced the amount of Coleman staff time.

### *Sticky Issues*

- ✦ Politicians sometimes give long speeches at the event without saying anything of substance. It is important to get them to make concrete commitments by asking direct, to-the-point questions in front of reporters.
- ✦ Some politicians will be reluctant to make an appearance at all. Such was the case initially in San Francisco with Mayor Willie Brown. But the organization caught him trying to sneak into his office, gathered the media — and lots of kids and parents — around him, and put him in a position to comment or look bad.
- ✦ Having children at the event can look to some like the children are being exploited for political gain. An organization should consider its motives and how things will look to the public.
- ✦ The children can get bored with the political speeches, so it's important to make sure their attention is focused on something, like the various entertainment at the event.

### *Outcomes*

- ✦ Promises that have been made at the Baby Brigade have been fulfilled — and maintained — by San Francisco policymakers. For example, in 1998, the city allocated $2 million to create a high quality child care fund after promises to do so were made at the Baby Brigade. Four years later, the fund is still in place.
- ✦ There is more awareness by city officials and the public of the need for sustained child care funding. Politicians now want to be connected to child care issues, as it helps them in their campaigns.
- ✦ The event has mobilized the child advocacy and child care communities – and strengthened engagement of parents. That makes for stronger advocacy down the road.

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A Great Idea
Strategies that work from the members of the National Association of Child Advocates

August 2000

Communications

# Oklahoma Shapes Television Coverage of Kids' Issues

*Summary*

In order to bring "greater depth, understanding and sensitivity" to news coverage of children's issues, NACA member the Oklahoma Institute of Child Advocacy (OICA) formed a partnership with their local CBS affiliate station to produce a TV news series on kids. OICA launched the series for three reasons:1) To make the public aware of the problems facing children, 2) to educate them on the possible solutions to these problems and 3) to highlight opportunities to become involved.

*Background*

In 1996, OICA approached its local CBS affiliate to suggest running a series of stories about children's issues. They wanted to facilitate a presentation of children's issues which was serious but not negative. OICA presented a list of 70 potential story ideas to representatives of the television station including the news director, marketing personnel and lead news anchor. The station initially wanted just the story ideas, but OICA refused to simply hand them over. OICA wanted a working relationship to ensure that the news stories would address the needs of children rather than simply be sensationalized stories. OICA knew that the station would want help following up on story ideas. During a month trial period, the station ran a couple of stories, under the caption *Child Watch*, relying on OICA for information. OICA responded promptly to the station's requests for families to interview, contacts and general information, thereby demonstrating themselves able to produce the essential components for production of a quality news story.

After the trial period, the station continued to run the *Child Watch* segments in collaboration with OICA. Over time the station began to do more stories on its own, only occasionally calling OICA for help.

The relationship remained active for three years. Currently it is not active for two reasons. The original reporter for *Child Watch* was reassigned and there is no OICA staff member who can focus exclusively on the project. The television station has remained committed to airing stories about children and continues to use the *Child Watch* caption, largely because it became their top rated news segment. OICA succeeded in drawing increased attention to the needs of children as well as creating additional recognition for themselves. The initial reporter involved would mention OICA's name whenever the opportunity presented itself.

*Key Elements*

- Newsworthy stories about children were presented to the local television station with the guarantee of access to the contacts needed to follow up on stories.
- The CBS affiliate station was chosen because they covered the news better and had higher visibility than the other two major network affiliates. Additionally, a former OICA staffer worked for the CBS affiliate station and facilitated the initial contact.
- After establishment of the partnership, the news show featured children's issues, initially episodically and later with regularity.

*Continued on reverse side*

- The television station aired segments that presented an issue with information about where individuals could seek help, volunteer or take steps to address the problem.
- OICA tried to provide an adequate level of staff support for the television station. OICA provided a timely response to information requests (local TV stations often have difficulty contacting local agencies for information), the ability to humanize the stories by locating real people affected, and help finding good locations to tape footage.

*Planning Required*

- OICA staff created a list of 70 newsworthy ideas. Staff members also made sure that they had contacts for every idea listed.
- OICA set up a meeting/presentation with the news station. The news station agreed to test out the relationship for a month. No formal agreement was made. The decisions on which stories to air and how many were left in the hands of the station.

*Challenges*

- The partnership required a major time investment. An individual must be assigned the task of nurturing the relationship.
- OICA would at times get a 2:30 pm call requesting a family for the 5:00 pm segment that night. OICA staff often worked together to ensure that every effort was made to meet the needs of the station.
- Unfortunately, as the relationship developed OICA was not involved in deciding which stories should be covered and how they should be covered. The station began running stories OICA considered less proactive. This might have been avoided if OICA had a media marketing staffer or even a board member, with media expertise, solely dedicated to maintaining the partnership.

*Outcomes*

- *Child Watch* ran hundreds of stories over a three year period of time.
- The series became the top rated segment for the TV station, dramatically increasing the coverage of children's issues. In fact, the two other local stations began running segments on children, though not affiliated with OICA.
- OICA's work caused a fundamental shift in the manner in which children's issues were presented by local television. It forced remedies to be presented along side problems thereby taking away the negative focus.
- OICA also worked with the CBS affiliate on a one-time segment for a local newspaper. OICA produced a list of thirty ways to become a better parent which ran in the newspaper with their logo.

*Lessons Learned*

- If a child advocacy organization wants to maintain this model over time there must be an ongoing relationship between the child advocacy organization and the T.V. station. The endeavor requires regular meetings for reassessment. If the organization does not have the staff capacity for a long term relationship, it may want to try short term partnerships.
- The organization must make an aggressive effort to ensure that its viewpoint is not misrepresented.

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# Chapter 3: Working In Advocacy Coalitions

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| *Coalition: A coalition is a group of organizations working together in pursuit of a common goal.* |

One of the best ways for child advocates to move their agendas is by working together in advocacy coalitions. Many Voices members have dramatically increased their effectiveness by working closely with other organizations to promote shared goals. As diverse groups and individuals amass resources and rally behind a common cause, the impact can be far-reaching.

Coalitions come in many different shapes and sizes depending on needs and goals. They can draw members from local communities, regions, states or from across the nation. Some advocates work in *ad hoc* coalitions, designed to be temporary and that usually disband after their goals are achieved while others are comprised of organizations that work together for many years, generally on a single topic, and often without a formal structure. Other types of coalitions bring together groups of organizations that work together in a very structured format. These coalitions might focus on a single issue or a multitude of issues over the course of many years. Some of these coalitions even become separate legal organizations with their own Executive Directors and Boards of Directors.

Many advocacy organizations participate in a number of coalitions, and Voices members often establish and lead them, sometimes for a long time and often with significant impact. The Oklahoma Institute for Child Advocacy took a leadership role in the Fit Kids Coalition, which worked to reduce childhood obesity and was successful in pushing three bills through the state legislature to keep children healthier. Organizations most often take leadership roles where the issue in question is core to their work. At other times, organizations may establish coalitions and then turn over the leadership roles to their colleague organizations. This can happen when an issue arises that is important to children but not central to the particular organization's work, but they are the best positioned organization to facilitate the coalition. It can also happen if the organization fosters a new group that turns into an independent organization. Some Voices members co-lead coalitions, perhaps because there are several influential advocacy groups that work on that issue. And sometimes they are simply coalition members who support the work of the coalition but do not invest a lot of organizational time and resources in it. It is appropriate for an advocacy organization's role in a coalition to vary from time to time, especially given changing resources, staff, and political environments.

Working together can be challenging, even when member groups have a great deal in common. Working in coalitions is inherently difficult due to the fact that each of the organizations involved has its own constituency and agenda. Difficulties inevitably arise. Discord can result from unresolved conflicts that arise between individual group agendas, from competition over leadership and credit for accomplishments, and even from the many different individual personalities involved. But the benefits that can result from coalition work far outweigh the challenges you might face. The Association for Children of New Jersey experienced some differences of opinion when working with other members of the Early Care and Education Alliance, but each coalition member recognized the importance of making changes in education and they were therefore able to compromise and reach agreements. Some of Voices members' greatest successes could only come about from collaborating with others who want to find a solution to a common problem. By working in coalition, you can:

- Demonstrate broad support for your issue. Policymakers generally pay more attention to an issue when they can see that it is important to their constituency. When many different groups and individuals join forces to support an issue, policymakers are more likely to see that what the coalition is working toward is important in his or her district.

- Create a consistent message. By working together in coalitions, advocates can make sure that they are all saying the same thing in unison. This can be especially helpful if there are many different organizations working on the issue you want to address. If many organizations, each with a different viewpoint or approach, begin to express their individual opinions and seek slightly different policy solutions, that can lead to confusion and chaos for the policymakers you are trying to reach. Creating a uniform message can be challenging as it might require compromise on the part of the organizations involved, but by doing so, you can make sure that those you are trying to reach (i.e., the public, policymakers, politicians) are all hearing the same message and know exactly what you want them to do.

- Reduce a sense of isolation. Child advocates often feel that they are alone in their work, that they are the only ones who care about a particular issue. Coalition work can help eliminate those feelings while instilling a sense of being part of a team effort, and reenergize advocates who have been working on an issue for an extended period of time.

- Multiply resources and eliminate duplication of effort. When many different organizations and individuals come together to form a coalition, each brings to the table different resources that can be utilized. Whether it be a legislative contact, a media contact, or even enhanced technological resources such as specialized software or printing capabilities, coalition members can benefit from the resources pooled when working together. Likewise, when different organizations come together, they can share information, streamline their efforts and eliminate duplication. Both of these benefits are very appealing to funders who want to be assured that their investments are used efficiently, especially in times of scarce resources due to economic downturns.

- Improve your visibility through increased access to media attention and increase your access to policymakers. Simply put, the more organizations that are involved in your coalition, the more media members and policymakers you will have access to, and the greater the likelihood that you will be heard.

Each of these benefits works toward increasing your influence and impact as advocates for children and their families.

Advocates will find, however, that there is a time and a place for coalition work. For example, imagine that legislation addressing Medicaid funding is moving forward in your state and you see the opportunity to expand coverage to youths aging out of foster care. If you are confident that you will be able to get the attention of key legislators and make sure that this opportunity is taken advantage of, it might be more efficient for you to do this on your own without taking the time to involve other organizations. Convening a coalition might take so much time that you might miss a critical moment to move your agenda. In other cases, you may find that you are the sole voice on the issue — for example, if your colleagues are afraid to speak out because they might lose state funding. On some issues, you might also find that your perspective varies from your colleagues, perhaps because they are service providers who have an institutional interest. On the other hand, if there is a hot issue that many different organizations and legislators are debating, you might need to involve other organizations to create a consistent message, increase your resources, and coordinate access to legislators. In any given issue area, advocates must contemplate the situation they are attempting to address and decide whether working in coalition is the best possible strategy with which to achieve their goals.

When coalition work is deemed the best approach, advocates should then contemplate the range of steps involved in the process of building a coalition. And while there is no sure and simple formula for success, there are guidelines which have proven useful for Voices members who have developed effective coalitions.

***Purpose.*** At the outset, advocates should explicitly identify the reason for building a coalition. What is it that you want to achieve? A coalition might be organized around a very narrow goal (for example, the passage or defeat of specific proposed legislation), or a very broad one (improving the lives of children in your state). Not uncommonly, when a very specific coalition reaches its original goal (such as the passage a specific education reform), it might be re-defined more broadly and members continue to work on a broader or altogether different issue (for example, the coalition could become the Excellence in Education Coalition and work on a range of advocacy activities to improve public education).

On the other hand, a coalition with a very broad purpose may need to annually define its agenda to focus on a few priority goals. Many effective coalitions are built around a specific service or advocacy area, and a multi-issue child advocacy organization may belong to several issue-specific coalitions. For example, Advocates for Children and Youth (ACY) in Maryland worked together with colleague organizations to form a Children's Advocacy Network, MDCAN, which included seven separate coalitions involving organizational and individual members from across the state, including one each on child health, child welfare, early learning, public education, income supports, juvenile justice, and youth development. This allowed them to work effectively with groups who have a specific shared interest, such as health or education, without expecting each to address all issues. It also helped to broaden their ability to involve groups that are not specifically child advocacy organizations, such as organizations serving the homeless, anti-poverty groups, and justice organizations. Collectively, however, the seven issue-specific coalitions constituted the Maryland Children's Action Network (MDCAN), and all members of each coalition agreed to support the three priority goals identified annually by the larger group from the top goals of each of the seven coalitions. This structure dramatically increased the overall coalition strength by bringing a broad range of partners to serve a collective child advocacy goal.

In a smaller or less populous state, where multiple coalitions might not be practical, it may make sense to broaden the overall coalition purpose. In that case, coalition committees can still be formed as needed to work on specific areas or goals.

***Membership.*** Some coalitions that Voices members work in are very large and some are smaller. Some change size over time depending on the coalition's goals and vary in the level of participation they require from their members. The "right" size is the size that works – that is, big enough to create a real impact, but not so large, and with such varied focuses, as to be unwieldy. Some coalitions change size and shape over time as goals, situations, and environments change. For instance, when Maine Children's Alliance, Voices' Maine member, wanted to make sure that legislation critical to the quality of early care and education services in its state was passed, they convened a targeted group of legislators and others interested in the same goal to form a coalition. Once the coalition began to gain momentum in educating legislators, business leaders, and the general public on the importance of the legislation, others wanted to join, including child advocates, child welfare activists, health care and mental health professionals, Head Start advocates, and parents, just to name a few.

While most child advocacy coalitions include in their membership their traditional allies – organizations that typically and unconditionally advocate for children's issues – some coalitions successfully achieve their goals by including non-traditional partners. Unlikely allies may bring with them valuable resources and unique audiences for the advocacy message. If coalition members can learn to work together, to put aside their differences, and to unite behind a shared agenda, diversity can actually work in their favor. Each entity can bring something unique to the coalition, including skills, resources, information and relationships with policymakers, creating a broad base of support and increasing the power and efficacy of the coalition as a whole. It can also show policymakers that the change you are advocating for has broad-based support among their constituency.

This strategy in coalition building has been particularly effective in Colorado. It's About Kids is a coalition spearheaded by Colorado Children's Campaign that mobilizes grassroots networks to increase the participation and voices of local communities in the legislative process and to educate local and state legislators on issues affecting children in their state. The coalition network is built around unlikely allies, someone in a local community who feels strongly about children's issues but who has not traditionally been viewed as a child advocate. These allies have ranged from a university chancellor to a bank president to a rancher. These networks are effective because their membership is diverse, drawing in concerned citizens from all walks of life.

It is always important to consider whether there are organizations not involved in your coalition that should be. When considering adding a new member, it is helpful to ask:

- Have you reached capacity on the quantity of members you can realistically use and coordinate?
- Does the current coalition need more influence and power?
- Are the current members able to mobilize and contribute necessary resources?
- Does the proposed member agree with the coalition's mission statement and philosophy?
- Can the proposed member provide needed resources?
- Can the proposed member provide something unique to the coalition, such as support from an unlikely source?

As you seek and enlist members, it is important to be clear about two issues:

- What can you offer your members? This may include the opportunity to help them meet their own advocacy goals, informational meetings, newsletters, email notices, or other services.
- What can you realistically expect from them? This may include dues, presence at meetings, announcements to their constituencies, a commitment to support shared resolutions, and other services.

***Mission Statement.*** Once several different organizations, each with its own agenda and goals, come together to form a coalition, they need to be able to decide on what they will work toward together. As with other processes involved in coalition work, the way in which the coalition's shared vision and goals are developed can vary depending on the structure and formality of the coalition. In loosely configured coalitions, especially in those made up of organizations that work together regularly or in short term or ad hoc coalitions, members might operate only with a common understanding of their shared goals.

However, other coalitions, particularly those that include organizations that are not traditional allies, might build a formal, written mission statement that is clear, concise, and that tells what the coalition is all about. In this case, Voices members try to make sure that the statement is non-partisan, positively stated, and compatible with the organizational purposes of all coalition members. Since your coalition may include a diverse group of organizations, this may mean that the mission statement will be more broadly stated than an individual group might prefer. Many times, coalition members need to simply focus on the issues and goals on which they can reach consensus. One way to ease this tension is to stress that coalition members can commit to moving the agreed upon coalition agenda, while at the same time continuing to work on their individual agendas. Each group should realize that the mission statement cannot reflect every goal of every coalition member, but is simply a direct statement of shared coalition goals.

***Leadership.*** While many coalitions successfully exist with loose commitments among its membership, other coalitions take a more formal and structured approach to their work. All coalitions need some type of leadership, and the level of leadership varies by the structure of the coalitions. More formal coalitions that Voices members participate in have a clear governance document that defines the manner in which leaders are chosen, the length of their terms, and their responsibilities. Some coalitions also have a steering committee, and if so, the structure of the committee might be formally defined, including its purpose and responsibilities, the extent of its authority, and its work schedule. Sometimes it is helpful to further define voting regulations and requirements, including which members can vote on which issues, the source of the final decision, and how the vote will be decided (majority or consensus).

At times, Voices members' coalitions do not have a separate funding base, making it necessary to draw its leadership and much of its staffing from the staff of member organizations. Thus, the leaders of prominent member organizations may also be able to serve as coalition leaders, if the coalition work complements their organizational duties. As coalitions become more established, however, it may be possible and useful to use member dues or other funding sources to establish paid staff positions.

***Communications and Public Relations.*** Effective communication is crucial to the success of coalitions. One of the first things you will want to determine is the process through which the coalition will decide on a message. The more formal and structured your coalition, the more complicated that process might be. However, once that is accomplished, effective coalitions create a framework through which all other communication occurs. Coalition members will need to decide:

- Who will communicate with the press, and according to what guidelines? Who will report on coalition activities in newsletters and other publications?

- Who will write, edit, and schedule email and other alerts?

- Who will build, monitor, and update the email and other dissemination lists?

When making decisions about the coalition's communications processes, it might be helpful to acknowledge and try to plan for situations in which you might need to respond quickly, such as when a new piece of legislation has been introduced and is rapidly being debated in your legislature. For instance, the Executive Committee of The Covenant with North Carolina's Children a formally-structured coalition initiated by Voices' North Carolina member, is permitted to make urgent decisions regarding the coalition's stances and views between meetings. Sometimes speed and flexibility to respond is more important than formal structure, especially in cases where the advocacy community works together on a regular basis and operates with some unspoken ground rules.

***Administration.*** Again, because some coalitions are formal and some are informal, the administrative structure of each might vary greatly. For informal coalitions, sometimes Voices members create and lead the coalition with an unspoken understanding about the shared vision and goals among the membership. But for more long-standing coalitions involving partners that are not traditional allies, it might help to address the coalition's administrative structure in a more formal manner. If that's the case, you might want to consider:

- Establishing the authority of the coalition chair, coalition members, committee chair and committee members in dealing with your policy director and/or program associate,

- Creating work plans identifying the roles of your staff and supervisor as well as the coalition chair and members, naming the parties responsible for the grant-writing and fundraising, and

- Coordinating and organizing letterhead and web sites.

***Avoiding Conflict of Interest.*** Because each individual participant in the coalition also represents an organization with its own goals, it is inevitable that potential conflicts of interest may arise. Addressing and resolving areas of potential conflict is essential.

Unresolved conflict can undermine group effectiveness, and can even cause a formerly effective coalition to dissolve. Many Voices members have found that a key part of working effectively and efficiently in coalitions is to agree to disagree. It is important to understand that you don't have to reach unanimous agreement on every particular part of a problem or how you want to solve it. What is necessary, however, is that you determine what you can agree on and move forward on those grounds.

Voices' New York City member, the Citizens' Committee for Children of New York (CCC), was forced to address this part of coalition building during the recession of the early 1990s, when funding for children's and other important social service programs was being cut. Working within this fiscal climate, CCC realized that single-issue organizations would end up pitted against one another if they continued to fight for funding for their issues individually. CCC convened a group of single-issue advocacy groups to form the Children's Budget Roundtable. The Roundtable identified three budget priorities, and each member of the Roundtable committed, as a member of the coalition, to taking those three budget priorities to the mayor for that particular year. Interestingly, with only three issues to advocate for during the budget advocacy session, many of the single-issue organizations found that their individual issues did not make it to the final three. However, the coalition participants were content knowing that as advocacy efforts during the budget crises were concentrated on a few critical issues, those critical issues were more likely to be successful, and their individual issues might be the focus during the next year. By participating in this particular coalition, many of the single issue organizations were forced to put aside their own interests in order to strategically work with a group of like-minded child advocates under extreme fiscal and political conditions.

However, you might find that there are times when conflicts of interest or differing points of view prevent you from working in coalition with other organizations. For instance, when the State of Pennsylvania and the City of Philadelphia committed to spending billions in public funds on two new sports stadiums in Philadelphia, Philadelphia Citizens for Children and Youth (PCCY) was forced to break with its traditional allies because of its position in the debate. PCCY, although it felt strongly that public funds should not be spent on sports stadiums, particularly when funding for children's programs was being cut, would not enter the debate over whether or not public funds should be used in this way. Instead, it chose to influence the debate by taking the stance that if public funds were to be spent on stadiums for the privileged to "play" in, then the city must find some way to increase funding for children's programs. Because of this strategic position, two professional sports teams are now contributing $1 million per year each for thirty years to a Children's Fund to support important education, child care, after school, and arts enrichment programs for Philadelphia's children and youth.

Questions you might want to consider at the start of building your coalition include:

- How will decisions be made, including ones that require quick action?

- Who do the speakers from the coalition represent in meetings with public officials (i.e., the coalition, the organization for whom the individual works, or both)?

- How will participants reconcile the desires and requests of the coalition with those of their organizational employers?

- How should an organizational member proceed if it wishes to support a policy or take an action not supported by the coalition?

- How will conflict among coalition members be resolved?

- How will credit for accomplishments be fairly recognized and allocated?

***The Opportunity Presented.*** Voices members' successes over the years are certain proof that an effective coalition can extend the reach and influence of your own organizational resources. The substantive tasks described throughout this *Primer*, such as legislative advocacy, electoral advocacy, and administrative advocacy, all can be applied not only to your individual organization, but also to your wider coalition work. Through effective coalitions, working together can truly mean working stronger.

A Great Idea

Strategies that work from the members of the National Association of Child Advocates

March 2002

Community Mobilization

# Citizens' Committee for Children of New York Convenes Single-Issue Child Advocates To Secure Budget Gains

*Summary*

Understanding there is strength in numbers, in 1996 Citizens' Committee for Children of New York (CCC) recruited single-issue child advocates to form the Children's Budget Roundtable. CCC and the Roundtable agreed upon three budget priorities and then negotiated with City Hall to win funding for those priorities. While the Children's Budget Roundtable no longer meets formally, the original member organizations work together on an informal basis as part of each year's budget process, so child advocacy organizations no longer have to work alone to persuade policymakers to better fund children's programs.

## *Background*

Times were tough in 1994. The country was in a recession and state and city budgets were getting hit the hardest. In 1995, the Mayor and City Council slashed $778 million from the Board of Education's budget and $49 million from a program for abused and neglected children. It was felt that more cuts would soon follow. It became clear that single-issue child advocates meeting with the Mayor and City Council members to discuss their one issue would no longer be enough. So CCC pulled together 19 different organizations to form the Children's Budget Roundtable.

Each year, CCC continues to coalesce with single-issue child advocates to take part in budget advocacy, and the child advocacy community has seen much success. Budgets for programs serving children have increased from year-to-year.

## *Key Elements*

**In the beginning**

✦ CCC began recruiting single-issue child advocacy organizations in 1996 to form the Roundtable.

✦ In the spring of 1996, the Roundtable chose three issues: child care, after school programs/youth services and education. Support for these issues, the reasoning went, would help determine whether New York City became a better place to live, work and raise children as the new Mayor pledged to improve the quality of life.

**On an annual basis**

✦ After the Mayor publishes his preliminary budget plan in January, CCC coalesces with other child advocacy organizations to choose priority programs to protect.

✦ CCC strategizes with colleagues regarding an action plan and message. Individually and together, CCC and colleagues hold meetings with the Mayor's staff and City Council members and testify at City Council hearings.

✦ CCC sends what has become a standardized one-pager that includes advocacy against specific budget cuts and for new program initiatives to elected and appointed officials.

✦ 10,000 colleagues and New Yorkers also receive the one-pager along with postcards containing a budget advocacy message they are urged to mail to their elected officials

✦ After the Mayor's executive budget is sent to the City Council in April and before adoption in early June, CCC produces a 20-page analysis of the impact of the Mayor's budget on children. The document identifies the Mayor's proposals to either cut, enhance or initiate programs in all of the city agencies serving children and families. This *Impact Analysis* identifies the number of children impacted positively or negatively by the budget proposal and includes recommendations.

✦ CCC then again strategizes with colleagues to determine priorities and messages for budget

*Continued on reverse side*

advocacy.

- A one-pager containing recommendations for the City Council during its budget negotiations is circulated through the mail, in meetings between Council members and CCC staff and volunteers, and at City Hall. The one-pager is included in a packet and sent to 10,000 New Yorkers with postcards containing an updated budget advocacy message.
- The one-pager is used as the basis for testimony before the City Council's five borough delegations and in speaking engagements with business, religious and civic leaders, urging them to communicate with their elected officials the need for adequate budgeting for programs important to children.
- CCC garners media attention through press releases, news stories and testimony at hearings to help educate the public on the budget process and to influence decision makers.
- CCC staff and volunteers are present inside and outside city hall during budget negotiations to advocate for children and arm negotiators with important data.
- During this period, CCC keeps in close contact with colleagues - the original members of the Children's Budget Roundtable - to ensure that there is a united front for children as the budget is negotiated.

### *Staff Involvement*

- CCC uses a communications consultant on an as needed basis. This person is contacted when CCC has questions about dealing with the media.
- During the budget season, CCC's Executive Director Gail Nayowith spends 15 percent of her time working with the media on budget issues, and coordinating her staff's efforts.
- The Director of Community and Government Relations spends about 25 percent of her time during budget season working on the budget analysis and monitoring the budget process.
- Each staff member at CCC plays a role in CCC's budget advocacy by analyzing the Mayor's budget proposals and monitoring their portfolio of agencies' needs. It takes the knowledge of everyone on staff to put together a successful budget advocacy campaign.

### *Possible Sticky Issues*

- While convening a large number of single-issue child advocates can provide a powerful voice, it can also lead to complications when picking the top budgetary issues to address. Choosing priorities enables CCC and colleagues to carry a common message for children, open doors and lay the groundwork for a broader discussion on children's needs. CCC makes certain that issues not chosen as priorities are included in all materials, and discussed in meetings and with budget negotiators.
- CCC's success in increasing budget numbers for children's programs has also paralleled a growing economy. Though it is uncertain how budget allocations would have increased for children's programs had the Roundtable not been involved, the current economic downturn will be a true gauge of the Budget Roundtable's effectiveness.

### *Outcomes*

- Since Fiscal Year 1996, the budget that directly affects children has been increased. Children and their issues have become priorities with the Mayor and City Council because of all of CCC's efforts.
- Strong and long-lasting relationships between CCC and single-issue child advocacy organizations were strengthened and in some cases formed. This allowed not only for a single voice, but also for idea sharing between the organizations.
- Members of the Budget Roundtable formed better relationships with the Mayor and City Council by providing cohesive messages around children's issues. Moreover, CCC and its coalition actually helped the Mayor fulfill his campaign pledge to improve the quality of life in New York.

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# A Great Idea

Strategies that work from the members of the National Association of Child Advocates

April 1999

Community Mobilization

## Maryland's Children's Action Network

*Summary*

Maryland's Advocates for Children and Youth (ACY) and 34 other organizations from around the state comprise the Maryland's Children's Action Network (MD CAN). MD CAN's mission is to garner support for children's issues by informing and empowering the public. In addition, they participate in setting an annual legislative agenda. MD CAN members receive publications and information on specific issues and are encouraged to call their legislators to make their voices heard. MD CAN is recognized by legislators and the Governor as a strong, visible force in Maryland and has had a number of successes since its inception.

MD CAN consists of seven issue coalitions which focus on issues such as child welfare, after school, juvenile justice, health, education, early childhood, and child poverty. One representative from each of the issue coalitions sits on a steering committee with voting members that also include an individual from ACY and eight at-large members representing the state's geographic, ethnic, and racial diversity.

*Background*

ACY was Maryland's lead organization on the first annual Stand for Children rally in Washington, DC. Two weeks prior to the Stand for Children rally, ACY was informed that $4200 was necessary to cover the cost of the tent and tables. With no funds available, ACY began calling organizations around the state to solicit donations. In four days, organizations had generously contributed the funds necessary to pay for the space at the event. Most of the organizations that gave money and/or resources took part in the rally.

The organizations that contributed to the success of the rally formed Take a Stand for Maryland's Children partnership. They included churches, temples, summer job programs, and family support programs. The partners continued to meet every few months after the rally and decided to combine their policy agendas for the next legislative session. After the 1997 session, when there were very few successes and welfare reform issues were becoming more salient, the partners formed MD CAN. Each partner organization agreed to cosponsor a common agenda and activate their respective constituencies around that agenda. They decided to work together on five primary issues and mobilize citizens across Maryland.

*Key Elements*

- ✦MD CAN members include both organizations and individuals. They are recruited by word of mouth, at conferences, fairs and other public events and are asked to pay what they can to become a MD CAN member based on a suggested scale.
- ✦Two issues are identified by each issue coalition; however only five lead issues for each legislative session are chosen at the annual MD CAN convention held in July. In June, ACY mails a MD CAN policy book with information on the identified issues to all convention attendees to inform them of the topics that will be considered for inclusion in next year's legislative agenda. Three-person panels present each issue at the

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convention and attendees are invited to ask questions. After all issues have been presented, MD CAN convention attendees use five dots to vote for their top five issues for the coming legislative session. If a legislative opportunity arises after the MD CAN convention, the steering committee has the power to add the legislative initiative by a 2/3 vote.

- ✦MD CAN monitors many issues that affect children's well-being, regardless of whether it is a lead issue or not.
- ✦Legislators are invited to a MD CAN sponsored annual Legislative Agenda Day reception to meet with children's advocates and discuss MD CAN's lead issues.
- ✦ ACY disseminates advocacy information through each of its members. Member organizations are asked to forward the information to their members and individual members are asked to post the information. Advocacy alerts are disseminated via fax, e-mail and mail and take various forms. Some information is descriptive of substantial policy information while other alerts recommend action steps or declare successes. All alerts are sent out as needed.

### *Involvement*

The ACY Executive Director contributes approximately 10 percent of her time to MD CAN. ACY's Government Relations and Outreach Director spends approximately one-third of her time on MD CAN. MD CAN coalitions and steering committee meet monthly. Some coalitions may have weekly meetings during the legislative sessions.

### *Outcomes*

Advocates for children have had a number of victories in health care, child welfare, and juvenile justice since the inception of MD CAN. One of the best CHIP programs in the country was passed in 1998 with the assistance of MD CAN advocacy. The Maryland Earned Income Tax Credit is now partially refundable. In addition, MD CAN advocacy was successful in improving the state's child welfare workforce by eliminating contract workers and increasing both the number of permanent workers and their pay.

### *Barriers/Concerns*

- ✦ Most of the administrative work for MD CAN is done by ACY. Legislative alerts stem from much of the work ACY and its partners are already doing. However, staffing MD CAN coalitions, organizing the annual convention and the Legislative Action Day involves an additional investment of resources by ACY. Nevertheless, ACY finds that the benefits outweigh the costs because MD CAN effectively mobilizes Marylanders in support of a focused legislative agenda.
- ✦ As the administrator of MD CAN, ACY incurs printing and mailing expenses. ACY applies for grants to cover added expenses of MD CAN. They have received pro bono design and reduced printing costs for some of their MD CAN brochures.
- ✦ Although recruitment of MD CAN members is time consuming, ACY and its partners are committed to increasing citizen participation in children's advocacy. Change is a slow process but MD CAN has proven effective in informing legislators about Maryland citizens' concerns for the well-being of children.

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C H I L D   A D V O C A T E S

# Making a Difference

www.Voicesforamericaschildren.org

# The Movement Toward Universal Pre-K: Child Advocates Help the Court Help Kids

The *Child Advocates Making a Difference* series profiles the extraordinary accomplishments of Voices' member organizations across the county. If you would like to receive this publication electronically, email camad@voicesforamericaschildren.org.

In 1998, the New Jersey State Supreme Court handed down a ruling requiring the development and implementation of "well-planned and high-quality" pre-kindergarten programs in the state's 30 poorest school districts. Recognizing that clear standards of quality were needed for the mandate to have true meaning, the Association for Children in New Jersey (ACNJ), a member of Voices for America's Children, sought to help shape program guidelines to ensure that at-risk three- and four-year-olds have the stimulating and enriching early childhood experiences that are the foundation for later school success.

## Addressing School Equity in New Jersey

In 1981, the Education Law Center, a team of legal advocates dedicated to school equity in New Jersey public schools, filed *Abbott v. Burke* on behalf of disadvantaged children in the state's 30 poorest public school districts. The subsequent series of landmark rulings by the New Jersey Supreme Court have constituted the most positive set of school equity reforms in the nation. The fifth ruling in 1998 mandated, among other things, "well-planned and high-quality" half-day pre-school programs for three- and four-year-olds.

Attempts to comply with this part of the decision proved difficult. The state had proposed providing additional funding to existing center-based early childhood education programs. However, these programs were far different from the exceptional model programs on which their opinion had been based, often lacking a set curriculum, a limit on class-size, a requirement of teaching credentials, adequate classroom space, and comprehensive health and social services.

**Existing center-based early childhood education programs often lacked a set curriculum, a limits on class-size, a requirement of teaching credentials, adequate classroom space, and comprehensive health and social services.**

School districts also began contracting with community-based child care centers as possible locations for the preschool programs, but these were run by a different government entity, the Department of Human Services (DHS). Standards at these centers were based on child safety rather than program quality, defeating the purpose of the *Abbott* rulings.

ACNJ had provided amicus curae (friend of the court) briefs for previous *Abbott* hearings over the years, and saw a significant need in 1998 to get involved in shaping actual standards around the Court's mandate of "well-planned and high-quality" preschools. ACNJ believed that the best solution for children and families would be a collaborative effort between school districts, Head Start, and community child care, utilizing the expertise of all groups and bringing all programs under one set of standards.

## A Coalition Forms

ACNJ began meeting with a few other concerned parties and began developing a set of quality standards for pre-schools, addressing factors such as curriculum, class size, teacher qualifications and education, and facilities. The small dedicated group would grow into the Early Care and Education (ECE) Coalition, a collection of child advocates, researchers,

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child care providers, Head Start staff, school districts officials, college and university representatives, unions, business people, and foundations.

In such a large and diverse group, there were bound to be differences of opinion. One area of disagreement was over the required level of education for preschool teachers. Most preschools do not require undergraduate or graduate degrees, but research showed that requiring a Bachelor of Arts (BA) degree would lead to higher quality child care and better wages for child care professionals.

The majority of the Coalition supported the BA, recommending a 6-year phase-in with significant support from the state through scholarships. However, some groups, those in the child care community in particular, thought such a requirement unrealistic and extreme and felt it could potentially eliminate suitable teachers. It took a formal vote for the group to settle on the high standard of requiring preschool teachers in the *Abbott* districts to achieve a BA degree; the child care community put aside a significant self-interest to support the Coalition.

Every Coalition member recognized the incredible opportunity to make significant changes for children and education in the state of New Jersey, and worked hard to compromise and operate as a powerful advocating entity. The Coalition chose ACNJ to lead because of its neutral and trusted stance and its extensive advocacy experience.

## A Friend of the Court

The Coalition's efforts gained the respect of both the plaintiffs and defendants in the case, and during the sixth ruling of *Abbott*, the Supreme Court invited ACNJ representatives to participate in the proceedings, arguing the case along with the plaintiff and defendant. The Court was very interested in hearing from the very group of people who would have to implement the decisions it was making.

This legal advocacy would be a critical ingredient in the ruling. The Coalition was cited repeatedly in the Court's formal opinion, and one Supreme Court Justice stated that he felt "comforted and impressed" by ACNJ's participation as the most objective advocate in the mix.

The *Abbott VI* decision spelled out preschool requirements in detail. The court:

- ★ reaffirmed the importance of an established early learning curriculum
- ★ made the 4-year BA degree mandatory for child care providers (with a 4-year phase in period)
- ★ reaffirmed a 1:15 teacher/student ratio
- ★ agreed with ACNJ that contractual agreements with DHS licenses providers must "include clear expectations, necessary supports and accountability measures"
- ★ ordered the Department of Education to adjust its certification regulations to eliminate any differences between district-run and DHS-licensed preschool programs.

## ECE in New Jersey Today

The ECE Coalition has remained active in the aftermath of the *Abbott* case. ACNJ and the Coalition have offered officials a critique of proposed rules for construction and renovation of community facilities, and suggestions for more appropriate rules. They have written recommendations for the professional development of child care teachers, which include a commitment to scholarships for teachers and encouraging diversity. They also recently brokered a consent agreement between the state and the Education Law Center regarding teachers who have not met the 4-year certification deadline, allowing two extra years for those who have made good progress; 85% have already achieved a BA certification.

**The ECE Coalition has secured a $15 million "Early Launch to Learning" budget initiative with the potential to extend quality state-funded preschool to 100 additional districts and 4000 children.**

ACNJ and the ECE Coalition are also working to expand the impact of the *Abbott* rulings to benefit more children in need. They recently published a report on challenges facing non-*Abbott* districts with recommendations on budget issues, and subsequently secured a $15 million "Early Launch to Learning" budget initiative with the potential to extend quality state-funded preschool to 100 additional districts and 4000 children.

As the journey towards a unified, comprehensive education system continues, all participants will need to continue to exercise a skill learned in their own preschool days: cooperation.

In the *Abbott VI* decision, the Court noted that, given the unprecedented nature of New Jersey's efforts to create a single quality preschool network funded by social service and education streams, disputes were bound to arise. It then noted that "the ACNJ has built a coalition of educators and providers that demonstrates the value of collaboration and consensus building. It is our hope that the adversarial relationship between the parties [in the case] will give way to a cooperative effort focused on the provision of high-quality preschool programs for children in the *Abbott* districts. The children deserve no less."

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C H I L D A D V O C A T E S

# Making a Difference

www.voices.org

# Fighting Childhood Obesity in Oklahoma's Schools

The *Child Advocates Making a Difference* series profiles the extraordinary accomplishments of Voices' member organizations across the country. If you would like to receive this publication electronically, email camad@voices.org.

In 2004, The Oklahoma Institute for Child Advocacy, a member of Voices for America's Children, assumed the leadership role in the newly formed Fit Kids Coalition. Initiated by Oklahoma-based INTEGRIS Health, the Coalition works to reduce childhood obesity. The Coalition successfully pushed three bills through the Oklahoma State Legislature that will produce fitter, healthier children.

## A Growing Epidemic

Over the last 20 years, childhood obesity has doubled and adolescent obesity has tripled nationwide. The problem of overweight children has become a burden on the health-care system; hospital costs associated with childhood obesity have tripled over the same time period. Doctors in Oklahoma became concerned when they began to see more and more children with Type II diabetes, a disease historically seen in adults over age 40.

Oklahoma's first Fit Kids Coalition meeting brought together a diverse group of physicians, legislators, school superintendents and other members of the community, including the Oklahoma Institute for Child Advocacy (OICA), an organization committed to improving the health and well-being of Oklahoma's children and youth. The goal: to put public policies in place in Oklahoma schools that would promote the development of healthier children. The Coalition settled on three specific goals derived from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's goals for reducing childhood obesity:

- ★ enact minimum physical education requirements in schools
- ★ reduce the number of high-calorie, sugary foods in school vending machines
- ★ create school health committees to make recommendations in the areas of health and physical education

**In charge of all advocacy functions of the Fit Kids Coalition, the Oklahoma Institute for Child Advocacy worked with the state legislature and played a major role in drafting the three bills that will stem the child obesity crisis.**

An established, successful child advocacy organization, OICA was the natural choice to house the Coalition, and assumed control of all the administrative and advocacy functions. The Coalition's leadership consisted of two committees: legislative and media. Anne Roberts, OICA's Executive Director, headed the legislative committee. Leadership from INTEGRIS Health, a large, Oklahoma-based health care organization, handled media efforts, enabling the Coalition to build an awareness campaign with its extensive public relations resources.

## First Steps

As chair of the legislative committee, Roberts spoke publicly about the need for action, drafted persuasive letters to be used by the grassroots advocates of the campaign, gave newspaper, television and radio interviews, testified before committees and lobbied members of the Oklahoma State Legislature. Most importantly, she helped Oklahoma's legislators write the language of the three bills on the Fit Kids agenda.

OICA worked with two key lawmakers on legislation. The Fit Kids champion in the Senate was a long-time child advocate who had previously established a task force on child health, and chaired the Senate Human Resources Committee that would consider the Coalition's bills. In the House, OICA worked with an equally passionate child advocate and strong believer in preventive health policy, whose father had died of diabetes.

It was not long before the Coalition's work paid off. The Healthy and Fit Kids Act of 2004 passed in the Senate in March by a vote of 32-13, and in the House in April by a vote of 94-4 and. The Act created school advisory committees comprising parents, local health care professionals, and community leaders. Each school would have its own committee to make recommendations in the areas of health education, physical education, and school nutrition. Every community would now be encouraged and empowered to help kids stay fit and reduce childhood obesity.

## Unlikely Opposition

But the two bills remaining on the Coalition's agenda did not pass in 2004. On the surface, healthier food in school vending machines and a minimum amount of weekly physical education seemed like win-win proposals for Oklahoma's schools. Unfortunately, the Coalition ran into unlikely opponents to this legislation: Oklahoma's principals and superintendents.

The Coalition was proposing 150 minutes of physical education per week—30 minutes per day. Principals responded that 150 minutes per week would cause too many conflicts with the other electives that were required in Oklahoma schools, such as music and art. And though they shared the desire to produce healthier children, their obligation to meet all the requirements of the school week gave them no choice but to oppose this bill.

The vending machine issue created a similarly precarious situation for Oklahoma's superintendents. Vending machine contracts are a significant funding source for Oklahoma's schools, and superintendents were understandably reluctant to give it up. Such opposition was daunting, but the Coalition continued to aggressively pursue the final two items on its agenda.

## Compromise and Innovation

The Coalition would not give up on the Physical Fitness bill, maintaining that a minimum amount of physical education was necessary to help children initiate healthier lifestyles. The groups eventually reached a compromise, agreeing on a minimum requirement of 60 minutes per week for grades K-5, and requiring that physical education be available as an elective in middle- and high-schools. This version of the bill passed the Senate by a vote of 41-4 and in the House of Representatives, 89-9.

The School Vending Machine Bill provided an even greater challenge. Resolving the issue of losing a vital funding stream required multiple meetings with the Coalition, the superintendents and the vending machine companies. The Coalition convinced both parties that they could realize the same profits with healthy snacks in school vending machines. If granola bars and fruit juices replaced the sugary snacks, schools could retain their contracts and children would not be exposed to readily available junk food.

But the battle wasn't over. Many Oklahoma state legislators were uneasy, claiming the bill placed too many constraints on school systems. One planned to offer an amendment that would change every "shall" in the language of the bill to "may," thereby rendering the law powerless. The Coalition did not want to see the bill bogged down in a lengthy debate or with multiple amendments.

In a final push, the Coalition held a series of press conferences in conjunction with one of its cosponsors, SUBWAY® Sandwiches, a chain known for having low-calorie options on its menu. One press event was held at the state capitol on the day of the vote and featured Jared Fogle, the chain spokesperson who lost 245 lbs. on the "SUBWAY diet." The conference received impressive media coverage. In the end, every "shall" remained a "shall" and the bill passed the Senate by a vote of 35-11 and in the House of Representatives, 76-20.

> **The 600,000 students in the Oklahoma school system will be prepared to lead healthy lives that include exercise and healthy food choices.**

## Still Going Strong

The Coalition, through the advocacy efforts of OICA, had succeeded in moving three bills through the Oklahoma State Legislature to promote healthier lifestyles for children and reduce childhood obesity. The 600,000 students in the Oklahoma school system will be prepared to lead healthy lives that include exercise and healthy food choices.

The Coalition is now working with the Oklahoma Department of Education on a 2006 statewide health conference and tackling broader societal issues like the "Together at the Table" initiative, which emphasizes the importance of family dinners. Having overcome formidable opponents and proven it has the advocacy power to produce groundbreaking legislation, OICA and the Fit Kids Coalition will no doubt continue to be successful in improving the health and well-being of Oklahoma's kids.

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Child Advocates

# Making a Difference

## Child Advocates Innovate: Making Lemonade Out of Stadiums

During the fall of 1999, proposals for new sports stadiums arrived with a bang in the Keystone State. Philadelphia Citizens for Children and Youth (PCCY), a member of the National Association of Child Advocates, found that the situation provided them with a challenge, and perhaps an opportunity. According to PCCY Executive Director Shelly Yanoff, Philadelphia, like many other urban areas, was struggling to find funding for programs that improved the quality of life for children and families, like good schools, recreation programs, arts enrichment, child care and afterschool programs. As the city's population had grown poorer, the demand for services had grown while its tax base had shrunk. Yet the city seemed poised to support programs for big people and big interests – like commercial developments and sports stadiums – even as it lacked adequate supports for the programs that would make major differences for children and families. When the city, along with two major sports teams and the state of Pennsylvania, pledged huge sums of money to support construction of two new sports stadiums in Philadelphia, PCCY decided to use the stadiums as a hook to leverage money for kids' programs. While PCCY did not take a position on the "hot" issue – to build or not to build stadiums – PCCY urged that if the city was going to invest in stadiums for the wealthy to play in, it must also invest in programs to help kids play in their neighborhoods. Although the outcome looked a little different than they anticipated, in the end, PCCY's action gave birth to a $60 million Children's Fund.

### Putting things in perspective

During the 1990s, multi-million dollar sports stadiums began to sprout up around the nation's cities. Seen as an investment that would ignite revitalization of urban areas, stadiums became a part of the rhetoric and reality of political campaigns at the federal, state, and local levels. Pennsylvania jumped on the bandwagon and pledged financial support in the form of bonds for stadiums in its metropolitan areas, as did the state's two cities that would benefit – Pittsburgh and Philadelphia. In each of these cities, the local share of the required public investment was substantial. Philadelphia was to undertake a commitment of $400 million dollars over the life of the bonds. For child advocates the size of the commitment for a private non-essential service like stadiums seemed inappropriate and in sharp contrast to the city's ability or willingness to support the schools and neighborhood services that kids and families need.

**In order to get the city's financial support, the two sports teams will each contribute $1 million a year for thirty years to a Children's Fund.**

### PCCY tries to level the playing field

Long before the idea of stadium construction arose, PCCY had advocated for the creation of a fund to finance "non-mandated" underfunded children's programs throughout the city's schools and neighborhoods. Always looking for new angles to increase resources for children, PCCY explored linking funding for children's programs to events held at the sports stadiums located in the city.

Originally, PCCY organized an effort to have a 50 cent surcharge placed on tickets for and parking at sporting events at the city's stadiums. The message was clear and simple: "While paying to see the teams play in the stadiums, give kids a place to play in their neighborhoods!" PCCY encouraged the City Council to hold hearings on the need for such investment, issued a report on the lack of afterschool programs in the City, wrote op-ed pieces and generally conducted a public awareness campaign about the need to make the city more child- and family-friendly. Both the City Commissioner of Police and the Recreation Commissioner testified about the importance of, and need for, more afterschool programs in the city. But the effort bumped into many technical hurdles that couldn't be overcome.

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Down, but certainly not out, PCCY didn't give up hope that it could successfully convince the city to commit to kids if it was going to commit to stadiums. When the city would not support the surcharge, PCCY remained diligent in delivering the message – *you must invest in kids*.

## The stadiums were debated while kids waited

Although PCCY felt strongly that construction of new sports stadiums was not the way the city should be spending scarce public dollars, the opposition was powerful. The Mayor, most of the City Council, and the business community wanted new stadiums to improve the city's image and to bring in more visitors. The building trade unions, a large and politically strong force in Philadelphia, packed City Hall time and again in support of the new construction. PCCY felt that kids' advocates could not compete with the forces lined up in support of the stadiums. PCCY decided that while it could not influence the decision about whether the stadiums were to be built, it could develop a strategy to link increased children's funds to the stadium discussion and decision-making. PCCY's position became strategic – "We are not taking a position on whether public dollars should be spent on stadiums. In fact, we do not think this is a wise choice of scarce funds. But should you spend public dollars so wealthy grown-ups can watch games, you must link that expenditure with improving the chances for low-income kids." The organization broke with many of its traditional allies when it chose not to fight the stadium issue. Said Yanoff, "but we felt we were making a case and seizing an opportunity to make lemonade out of the lemons that we were going to get anyway."

> **Staying with the sports theme, PCCY's message was clear and simple – Give kids a place to play while the big guys play! Get kids off the sidelines! Help level the playing field for the city's disadvantaged!**

Construction of two new sports stadiums in Philadelphia caused quite a stir among the city's residents. It was on everyone's radar screen, particularly so when the discussion turned to where the stadiums would be constructed. Everyone had an opinion about where they should go. PCCY took advantage of the media attention that the issue was receiving and successfully pushed their take on the stadium debate to the forefront. They targeted local newspapers, placed several op-ed pieces, and received editorial endorsement from the city's major newspapers. The idea of giving kids a place to play resonated with the public. PCCY created and distributed bright yellow placards arguing their case – "As negotiations between the city and the teams go on, our kids are on the sidelines. They don't have to be!" The literature was distributed at public hearings, to public officials, and to civic groups. Again, they were persistent with the message, debunking the sports teams' assertion that PCCY's involvement was a deal-breaker with the city. "If that's the deal breaker, then we should say 'no deal,'" was PCCY's response.

Stadium construction emerged as a hot election issue. PCCY asked candidates about their stance on children's funding and the sports stadiums in the city's mayoral election, turning the issue into a test for candidates' support of kids overall. Although the issue generally received no commitment from the mayoral candidates, the idea gained more and more momentum, and continued to resurface as negotiations between the city and the sports teams continued. When the new mayor came to office, PCCY wouldn't let die the issue of creating a dedicated children's fund. It worked with a newly-elected councilwoman who introduced a resolution urging the city to withhold financial support for the new stadiums unless it was tied to supporting children and families. Although the resolution never came to a vote, the hearings and discussions that ensued paid off. Behind closed doors, the mayor committed to including what was now called the Children's Fund as part of the "must haves" in the negotiation with the teams.

## PCCY wins big for children and youth!

The result – the two sports teams committed to contributing $1 million each to a Children's Fund every year for thirty years. The new fund, to begin later this year when the new stadiums open, will finance many of the programs vital to children's growth and development – afterschool, child care, recreation, arts enrichment, and library programs – that were traditionally under-funded in the city budget. Because of the complexities of the law, the Fund will not be overseen by the city, but by a local foundation.

## Conclusion

There's more than one way to get the results you want. PCCY successfully championed yet another cause for children and youth in Philadelphia, proving that flexibility, opportunism, and persistence play important roles in making a better world for kids.

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# A Great Idea

Strategies that work from the members of the National Association of Child Advocates

May 2002

Community Mobilization

# Colorado Children's Campaign Partners With Community Leaders For A Stronger Voice In the State Legislature

**Summary**

Colorado Children's Campaign (CCC) works with local leaders in ten communities throughout Colorado to create a statewide network that is committed to supporting a "Children's Agenda" in the State Legislature and in the communities of the local leaders. The program is called *It's About Kids,* and the core of each community committee is made up of people the CCC calls "unusual suspects" because they are not the usual child care, preschool, child health providers, or youth development providers who are the CCC's colleagues in child advocacy. These community leaders, including small business owners, sheriffs, mayors, civic association leaders and other professionals, provide grassroots support to help CCC carry the agenda through the legislature. In turn, CCC provides the community leaders with ongoing updates and information on pending children's legislation in Colorado. Twice a year, the steering committee of *It's About Kids* comes to Denver for a two-day meeting to talk about emerging children's issues in their communities and to meet with key legislators and Governor's Office staff to discuss those emerging issues and to communicate their support for the CCC's policy priorities.

This relationship between CCC and community leaders has given the organization more influence with legislators. It also gives staff members at CCC a better idea of which issues are pressing for children and families at the local level.

## *Background*

CCC understood that the opinion of several key target groups was critical for politicians: civic leaders, campaign contributors and frequent voters. They decided to focus their attention on community opinion leaders and citizens active in local politics. In a series of focus group meetings held in 1998, CCC found that many community leaders across Colorado were deeply concerned about children's issues and really had their fingers on the pulse of what needed to be done for children. This left CCC wondering why there was a disconnect between local leaders and their state legislators who did not always support important children's legislation.

Because of this disconnect, CCC decided to start *It's About Kids*. What has ensued is information sharing between local leaders, child advocates and state legislators. A statewide phone and e-mail tree into the Legislature has helped key pieces of legislation, and the CCC has rapid access to credible spokespeople who can articulate children's needs and solutions to the local media. Strong legislative leadership on children's issues has emerged because of the activism by "unusual suspects" in key districts.

## *Key Elements*

**Getting Started**

- ✦ The organization chose three strategic communities across the state, communities with legislators who made up the leadership in their parties or who straddled the fence on children's issues.
- ✦ CCC built upon already existing relationships with community leaders that grew out of voter education campaigns in 1998.
- ✦ CCC also directly contacted mayors to either establish or deepen relationships with them.
- ✦ Mayors helped get free use of local community centers or other places where initial meetings could be held periodically between local organizers and CCC to establish legislative agendas and to strategize on implementing policy.
- ✦ The CCC secured a grant that supported the staff time, travel and meeting expenses that were required to identify local leaders who would participate and create a strong bond between the committees and the CCC.
- ✦ CCC spent three months meeting with three or four leaders in each community to discuss the specifics of *It's About Kids*. Such specifics included a



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KIDS COUNT briefing on historical trends at the county level, how past policy priorities have had an impact on the data, how CCC develops an annual legislative agenda, and communications strategies both locally and for reaching their elected officials.
- Each community committee formed a Steering Committee. The steering committee appointed a community contact and a local volunteer to maintain the local e-mail network.

**Ongoing Work**
- Now that *It's About Kids* is underway, the organization holds conferences each year. The conferences are attended by representatives, chosen by the steering committees of each of the ten communities, to help CCC develop a menu of options for its annual legislative agenda.
- CCC provides periodic advocacy workshops for local leaders, which include media trainings on message development and media relations.
- CCC e-mails updates to its community contacts on pending legislative matters at the state capitol. The contacts then e-mail all the people on their e-mail distribution lists.
- Local leaders actively develop media coverage of children's issues in local newspapers through such things as editorial board briefings, press coverage of candidate forums, press releases, and opinion pieces.
- Community leaders, along with traditional child advocates on the distribution list, contact their legislators encouraging them to make the right votes on pending legislation.
- When the legislature is out of session, *It's About Kids* committees meet with elected officials and all candidates for state office to educate them and ask for their support for early childhood education, child health, youth violence prevention programs, and K-12 reforms that would benefit high-risk children.

### *Staff Time and Organizational Resources*
- One full-time staff member spends 25% of her time working on *It's About Kids*, with much of the work built into her normal schedule.
- CCC pays the expenses of the staff member to travel to meet with *It's About Kids* committees when the Legislature is out of session.
- CCC does not pay for travel expenses of community participants. The community leaders pay for their own transportation and hotels when attending the conferences. The CCC pays for lunch and dinner during the conference.
- The communities are also responsible for the costs of their own local meetings and the upkeep of their e-mail networks.

### *Possible Problems*
- While so much of the work for the effort can be built into a staff member's normal schedule, there is still much work that needs to go into nurturing such a program. Close, personal relationships need to be built and sustained between CCC staff and the *It's About Kids* community contacts.
- States that are much bigger than Colorado might need to develop regional programs that are more manageable.
- Fortunately, all of the chosen communities had leaders who were interested in *It's About Kids*. But if no local leader emerges to host the initial meetings and then to provide leadership for the committee, the CCC does not continue to work with that community. CCC focuses its resources in places where there is equal commitment to the project.

### *Outcomes*
- CCC has established better relationships with community leaders because of *It's About Kids*.
- There is now more local input in the CCC legislative agenda, better ensuring its viability.
- Local support for the legislative agenda demonstrates to state officials and administrators that the CCC is in touch with the real needs of children and families, making the "Children's Agenda" a truly nonpartisan agenda.
- Legislators quickly become aware of where their community leaders and constituents stand on children's issues, and they see the CCC as an honest broker between community concerns and state policy.

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Child Advocates

# Making a Difference

## Maine Children's Alliance's Start ME Right Initiative

When Elinor Goldberg, Executive Director of Maine Children's Alliance (MCA), invited Senator Susan Longley to attend the National Association of Child Advocates' (NACA's) Budget Advocacy Meeting in the fall of 1998, she knew the experience would help the Senator better understand the impact of important budget decisions by elected officials on children and families. What she didn't know was that information gleaned from the conference would enable MCA to develop and gain passage of critical child care and early education legislation, known collectively as the Start ME Right initiative, affecting thousands of children and families across the state.

Start ME Right is an extensive initiative to expand and improve the state's overwhelmed early care and education system. The initial proposals included a dozen bills to secure low interest loans, tax credits, tuition assistance programs for child care workers and new dedicated income for early care and education programs. A vast majority of the bills were passed making quality child care and early education programs available to more children and families across the state.

JULY 1999

### The Impact on Children

In May of 1998 MCA began the process of educating legislators, the media and the public about the importance of quality early child care and education. In conjunction with the release of the National KIDS COUNT Data Book which focused on child care, they released the first of two brain development papers reinforcing the importance of quality early care and education.

> "Armed with great information from the NACA conference, Elinor Goldberg from Maine Children's Alliance, convened legislators to propose a series of child care bills, most of which were passed and now comprise the Start ME Right program."
>
> — Senator Susan Longley

MCA then embarked on a major public education campaign by submitting opinion editorials, encouraging positive newspaper editorials, and submitting articles to various publications. By educating interested parties via the KIDS COUNT Data Book and brain development papers and the public and media via the public education campaign, MCA ensured that the people of Maine understood the importance of early care and education and its impact on children.

### The Impact on the State's Economy

In a state whose citizen's consider themselves overtaxed, it was clear that in order to pass any significant legislation, the cost to the state, to the business community and to the taxpayer had to be minimal. MCA and MCA's legislative supporters were faced with the challenge of securing legislation for children without proposing many new taxes or requiring the reallocation of funds. NACA's Budget Advocacy meeting provided the crucial information they needed.

The meeting gathered together advocates, lawmakers, and experts to share insights, successes, and challenges in the ongoing process of developing new strategies to ensure that children are a priority when budget decisions are made. The meeting provided attendees with research, fiscal analysis, and discussion on successful strategies to help attendees secure legislative support of their efforts. Moreover, it provided attendees with critical facts and figures regarding the economic impact of early care and education, enabling them to position children's issues in terms their financial impacts on states, cities, and counties.

*Financing Child Care in the United States, A Illustrative Catalog of Current Strategies*, by Louise Stoney (an early childhood policy specialist, founder of Stoney Associates and a speaker at NACA's meeting), Harriet Dichter (deputy director for Philadelphia Citizens for Children and Youth, another NACA member organization), and Anne Mitchell (founder of

*continued on back*

Early Childhood Policy Research), was referenced and distributed. Funded by the Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation and The Pew Charitable Trusts, the catalogue provided even more detailed information on innovative financing strategies that successfully fund child care in the U.S.

Following the conference, Senator Longley carefully studied the Stoney, Dichter, Mitchell research and used her new knowledge to draft legislation that would increase investment in early care and education.

### Building Consensus

It was at this same time that MCA convened legislators and others interested in improving resources for early care and education and formed a coalition which then proceeded to combine legislation to improve such programs. Because MCA convened this group of legislators before the debate period ended, they were open, even interested in an ethically-based pact with detailed ground rules, to go forward together as a team with the Start ME Right initiative.

The coalition worked to educate the rest of the legislature, community members and business leaders about the need for improvements and the economic impact of early care and education. Business leaders were quick to understand the implications largely because they were faced with a tight labor market and increasing competition for good employees. Support from the business community and the knowledge that early care and education programs are the third largest source of employment in Maine and that it often affected attendance, productivity and turnover, helped MCA quickly gain support from legislators, regardless of party affiliation and including leadership of both parties and of both chambers of the Maine legislature.

Because the bills were sent to various committees for review, the challenge then became ensuring that legislators understood that each element they reviewed was part of the comprehensive Start ME Right initiative.

After MCA brought together various groups with vested interests in the bills at hand, the group grew and the leadership expanded. Child advocates, child welfare activists, health care and mental health professionals, Head Start proponents, developmental disability experts, teachers, parents, and business leaders met weekly to discuss moving the agenda forward. They also met independently with legislators to reinforce the community support of the bills. They succeeded in calling a "Children's Week" in the state's Spring 1999 legislative session during which legislators were encouraged to consider bills under their review as part of the overarching Start ME Right initiative. This was instrumental in the overall success of the initiative and was a product of the early planning the coalition was able to achieve.

> **"We really owe our success to the support we received from Senator Longley and the information we received at NACA's Budget Advocacy meeting."**
>
> **— Elinor Goldberg, Executive Director, Maine Children's Alliance**

### The Start ME Right Initiative

A vast majority of the Start ME Right bills were passed securing low interest loans and tax incentives as well as new resources and improved programs.

*Low Interest Loans*

- ❖ Funds for loans to child care start up centers and to expand and improve the quality of existing centers helping providers win licensing and accreditation.
- ❖ Tuition assistance for child development courses for child care workers.

*Tax Credits*

- ❖ Increases in parents child care tax credit from 25% of the federal tax credit to 50% to help make up the difference between accredited and unaccredited facilities.
- ❖ A 100% increase in the credit employers receive for investing in child care services.
- ❖ Tax credit of 30% of corporate investments for starting, expanding, or improving accredited child care programs.
- ❖ Credit to individuals investing $10,000 of $1,000 per year for 10 years thereby recovering their total investment.

*New Resources and Improved Programs*

- ❖ Creation of a new Business Advisory Commission on Quality.
- ❖ Additional funding for Head Start.
- ❖ More funding for ongoing quality improvements.
- ❖ Greater support of the Regional Child Care Resource Development Network.
- ❖ Additional child care licensing staff.
- ❖ Pilot sites for providing after-school care for children aged 13 to 15.
- ❖ Significant increases to support home visitation to new parents.

### A Victory for Children, Families and the Community

Thanks to the Start ME Right initiative quality early care and education programs are now more readily available to thousands of families and tens of thousands of children across the state. Supporting businesses can now "do the right thing" without jeopardizing their bottom line and the community at large can reap the rewards of happier more productive employees and citizens who know their children are flourishing in safe, quality early care and education programs.

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# Chapter 4: Community Engagement

***Community Engagement:** Recruiting, motivating and preparing individuals and organizations affected by or interested in an issue to take action.*

Sometimes child advocates can achieve their goals by drawing upon their knowledge and expertise to convince policymakers to make positive policy changes. Sometimes child advocates can succeed by working with the media to draw public attention to their cause. But sometimes, the only way to create change is by demonstrating broad-based community support.

Child advocates around the country are working to develop effective approaches to involving new constituencies in policy debates that affect children. Each state and local child advocacy organization works within a unique community. Some have highly compact jurisdictions—a single city or county. Others work in states so large that it can take all day to drive to a single meeting. Some communities are divided along party lines, others along geographic lines (urban/suburban/rural). Voices' members represent communities that range in size from under a half million people to 33 million people. Not surprisingly, therefore, the approaches that child advocates use to engage communities in advocacy are as different as the communities they seek to engage. In order to gain community support it is important to build your network, educate it, engage it, and finally to maintain your network and celebrate accomplishments. These four criteria are discussed in this chapter and will help your organization to hold onto a strong base that can step forward in support of your organization's issues.

***Network Building:***
The most successful efforts at community mobilization have all begun with a clear plan that identifies which sector or sectors of the community they seek to involve. Some of the sectors that Voices members have chosen to target have included:

- **The "choir"—**those who already are engaged in and care about children's issues—because they are the group most likely to take action when asked (most Voices members include this group in their target sectors.) Citizens' Committee for Children of New York integrated volunteers who were already helping children into their organization and taught them how to successfully advocate for the children that they already cared about. To keep this group in the network it helps to keep the members aware of the benefits their work has so that they know whether their contributions are successful.

- **The concerned but busy**—those who will speak out for children, if they know what the issues are and can do so quickly. Association for Children of New Jersey used their Community Orientation Course to educate the community about issues affecting children and also about volunteer opportunities. Sometimes this community has just not had the time to become educated on the issues but is willing to become engaged. The key with this group is making its involvement as simple as possible while still being informative. Utah Children's Child Advocacy in a Box allowed trained volunteers to educate hundreds of people on concrete, simple steps they could take to get involved and make a difference. This way they can fit advocacy into their busy schedules.

- **The politically active**—those who vote, give campaign donations, and are opinion leaders in their community, because when they speak out, elected officials are likely to pay attention. The best thing to do with this group is get as many people involved with your issue as possible. The more aware this demographic is of the issue the more likely they are to be actively involved. Voices for Illinois Children has created the Voices Leadership Committees to unite local community leaders and create a statewide network while the Colorado Doll Project has dramatically broadened and strengthened the Colorado Children's Campaign grassroots network.

- **The business community**—because when members of the business community speak out, elected officials listen. The key again here is to expand awareness of your issue. Kentucky Youth Advocates created the Early Childhood Advocacy Fellows and chose key members representing business, academic, research, family resource centers and childcare communities to get them involved in policies shaping children's issues. This gave them a powerful voice in the media and with their legislators. A successful tactic with the business community is to try to show how their support for children can benefit their business/economic success. The Children's Alliance of New Hampshire produced *The Bottom Line Report* to illustrate the impacts of investments on children on the state economy. They used two economists to explore the correlation between children's well-being and the well-being of businesses and communities. It is also helpful to specifically focus on getting the support of businesses that already have a stake in issues that affect children, such as physicians.

- **"Unlikely allies"—**these may range from members of law enforcement to presidents of universities to senior citizens. Wisconsin Council on Children and Families' Intergenerational Advocacy Project targeted senior citizens because they had already established a strong voice in the community. They wanted to get senior citizens to use their voice to advocate for children as well. Philadelphia Citizens for Children and Youth developed the Picasso Project to provide grants for funding music, art, dance, and drama programs in the schools. This attracted foundations that may not have usually been interested in children's issue but were interested in the arts to provide funds. Sometimes by including groups such as these in advocacy efforts, you can bring additional attention to the cause.

- **People who live in the districts of key policymakers or swing votes in the legislature**—these supporters could become the deciding factor for certain controversial issues. Some Voices members have chosen to concentrate their community mobilization efforts in rural districts whose legislators believe that the policies in question only benefit constituents of members from inner cities.

  To engage these supporters it is important to personalize the issue for them. Coleman Advocates for Children and Youth used polls in San Francisco in order to find out what the public wanted and to build a successful campaign message. Advocates should make sure to explain to this group how the issue affects them and why their particular support is so important.

- **Members of the community who are most affected by the policies that the Voices member works on**—this community can be the hardest to engage because the families are often overwhelmed and burdened by the demands of everyday life. However, when members of this community do become engaged they often are the most effective. Coleman Advocates for Children and Youth united these groups who held some stake in early child care such as child care teachers, directors, and parents to help develop more political push and activity.

  Many child advocates also believe that it is an important part of their work to empower people to speak out for themselves rather than having others speak for them. One effective example of a way to reach this sector of a community is by holding town meetings or forums. Agenda for Children in Louisiana did this by holding meetings to mobilize residents in public housing. They educated these residents on how to advocate for themselves, and, in turn, the residents have been able to shape legislation on child welfare.

- **Engaging Youth**—when this group speaks it puts a personal face on the issues. These are the children and young adults who are affected by the policies that are in place. New Mexico Advocates for Children and Families started a Youth Link Project that provided leadership training for youths ages 12-21 in order to develop a youth policy agenda that came from the children themselves. Citizens' Committee for Children of New York has a similar project called the Youth Action Community Leadership Course in which students focus on an area of the city and decide how they want to focus their advocacy efforts. South Dakota Voices for Children has also brought youth advocates together to help develop their agenda.

When this group engages in advocacy it sends the powerful message that they themselves, those actually affected by a policy, feel that things need to change.

- **Reaching Minorities**—this is a community that is often forgotten or left out. Minorities are often not asked to participate, even though quite often it is most important for them to contribute. Many of their needs are not being met. Voices member Michigan's Children began Impact: Innovation for Moving Policy Action for Children of Color Together, in an effort to target and mobilize this group. One strategy for engaging this group is to partner with a church or another community-based organization. Often, these organizations already have many active supporters who would be interested in supporting other issues that would benefit their community. Like any other community it is important to give the message and then provide an easy or convenient way to advocate. The Children's Alliance in Washington State has done this by making their legislative hotline multilingual in order to make it accessible to those people whose first language was not English.

Each sector requires a different approach for successful engagement and mobilization. For example, child advocates targeting busy professionals who care about children but who have little free time, often use email alerts to communicate with their networks; these alerts usually include links to web sites that allow the recipients to send emails to their legislators. Such an approach allows the network members to read email at their convenience and communicate with their legislators in moments. But it assumes that the network members have regular access to email and are already convinced of the importance of the issues and the justice of the cause—that they are eager to speak out if only they can do so with little inconvenience.

By comparison, child advocates who seek to engage low income or vulnerable families cannot rely upon email and cannot assume that these families are familiar with the policy process or are comfortable speaking out. Child advocates interested in engaging these families need to undertake intensive relationship building, perhaps offering trainings on the substantive issues or on advocacy skills, and they need to develop methods of communicating with the community that do not depend on access to technology. They may also need to offer transportation, food and child care at meetings, since otherwise these families may find it impossible to attend. These families can be very difficult and resource-intensive to engage—but time after time, when these families do speak out, child advocates have found that their voices, telling of their experiences first hand, have made powerful statements and have often been crucial in swaying the policy debate.

***Educating your network:***
Frequently, people are unaware of opportunities they have to advocate on behalf of children. The first step to recruiting members of the community is often just to ask. Making this information accessible to them is important and can be enough to motivate them to take action.

As a child advocate, educating the public is one of the most important advocacy strategies you can use to garner support for your efforts and encourage people to join your campaign. Often, apparent apathy or lack of support does not arise because people don't *care* about issues affecting children, but because people don't *know* about them. Public education is the process of getting information about issues affecting children, youth, and families to individuals and organizations so they know about and can make informed decisions on how to impact policy debates. You may engage in public education for a variety of reasons, for example, because you are training community activists and introducing them to the issues and skills necessary to be an effective advocate, or because you are holding community meetings for parents to inform them about a particular policy or program that will impact their children.

Public education includes a range of components:

- Disseminating information and materials on issues affecting children, youth, and families.

- Translating data that is collected through research or analysis into formats that are readily understood and used by non-experts. An example of this is Arizona's Children's Action Alliance's their report, *Raising the Minimum Wage*.

- Including recommended actions steps for supporting your issue priorities and advocacy objectives, when appropriate, and providing necessary materials and contact information to make action quick and easy.

- Serving as a clearinghouse or information center for data and referrals to other information on the status of children, youth, and families that you advertise as a resource for the public and for policymakers.

Educating the public can take any number of forms. While publishing reports, maintaining web sites, and sending electronic updates are common, there are other highly creative methods of disseminating information, including:

- calendars

- postcards

- community forums

- videotapes
- public service announcements
- radio news services
- training community members to give presentations

These formats can be designed to target key audiences and present information in ways that catch their attention. For examples of ways that Voices members have incorporated these techniques into their work look at: Mississippi Forum on Children and Families, Philadelphia Citizens for Children & Youth, and Utah Children.

Your organization's public education efforts will be enhanced by planning ahead and developing an information dissemination plan with clear objectives, strategies, and timelines. Your plan should identify primary, secondary, internal, and external audiences for your information, and you should always frame your messages strategically for each of your audiences taking into account each audience's attitudes, opinions, beliefs, and operating constraints(see Chapter 2 for more information on message framing). Each major informational product should be linked to your information dissemination plan and have a defined target audience, timing, and method(s) of dissemination, and all products should be consistent in their style and language. Disseminating your products will be much more efficient if you are maintaining and regularly updating computerized mailing and e-mail lists of individuals and organizations interested in your issues, including the information necessary to identify target audiences.

It is important to use methods that attract media coverage to your issues. Maintaining a database of your organization's most important media contacts can be helpful in getting coverage for your issue. A media spokesperson can also be effective in getting your organization's message out (see Chapter 2 for more information on using the media).

Engaging in a wide range of public education activities, while maintaining a consistent, professional presence, will enable you to attract the attention of a diverse audience while also mobilizing community members to be effective advocates for children.

***Engaging your network:***
One of the most common approaches to community mobilization, for any of the possible targeted sectors, is providing community advocacy training. Child advocates nationwide have held such training programs with several goals in mind:

- To build awareness of children's issues;

- To help single-issue advocates broaden the range of issues on which they will speak out;
- To help concerned citizens become more effective advocates;
- To help citizens understand the value of advocacy;
- To build relationships between advocates and community members, develop a shared vision and build a movement;
- To train advocates who can in turn educate the broader community;
- To demonstrate the strength of the child advocacy community to elected officials who may be invited to speak, participate or observe.

The length of such training programs may vary from two hours to a year. Some organizations offer training on issue areas (e.g., child welfare, education, juvenile justice, child care); others concentrate on teaching the skills and strategies that will help the participants in the program effectively advocate for children (for example, how to meet with or call government officials, how to develop a message, how a bill moves through the legislature); still others concentrate on building relationships and exploring the value of advocacy, as a base for developing community involvement in the organization's work. Organizations use a variety of techniques to present this information, including role playing, interactive discussions, simulations, speakers, site visits, advocacy manuals, and writing exercises. Some organizations have begun to strategically select the participants for these trainings, selecting people from legislative districts where the organization most needs representation or several people from the same community so that they can work together and support each other. Some of the Voices organizations that have developed the most formalized training programs include Coleman Advocates for Children and Youth, Louisiana's Agenda for Children, the Association for Children of New Jersey, Oklahoma's Institute for Child Advocacy, Utah Children, Washington's Children's Alliance, and the Wisconsin Council for Children and Families.[19]

Once a network of community members has been developed, child advocates need to be able to reach them quickly and have them speak out at key moments in an advocacy campaign. The most common method for this is email or fax alerts, but other approaches include calling key figures in the community (for example, ministers), slipping flyers under doors in housing projects, or sending postcards to the network. The method should be selected based on the community you are trying to mobilize. Any alert should be concise, and include all the information needed for the network to respond, including the target policymakers, their contact information (preferably phone

[19] In 1999 Voices for America's Children offered a seminar on the Elements of Community Advocacy Training. Contact Voices for copies of the materials provided at the meeting.

or email), the message that the network is being asked to deliver, and background information that explains why it's important and when the message needs to be delivered.

Most organizations deliver periodic news updates, so that when it is time to send an urgent alert, the network already is familiar with the issue. For example, the Washington Children's Alliance has developed a weekly (during legislative session) email alert that updates child advocates on legislative developments but kicks off with a different key issue each week. Its theme is "Take Five!" the concept behind it being that people can take five minutes a week to speak out for children. Their web site includes an electronic form for signing up for the alert, and they disseminate information about the alerts at any event or function they attend. They also periodically evaluate the alert by surveying the recipients to see how often they act on the alerts, and also use their alert list to help generate their agenda for the next legislative session. It should not take longer than 15 minutes for an advocate to respond to this type of alert.[20] Alerts should be simple and informative making it easy for the reader. Other Voices members also have similar alert systems, including Colorado Children's Campaign, Michigan's Children, Maryland's Advocates for Children and Youth, Action for Children North Carolina and Wisconsin Council on Children and Families.

***Retaining your Network and Celebrating Victories:***
It is important to prove to your network that they have some stake in what the group is working toward. If the members have something to gain or lose based on the work the organization is doing they are more likely to remain active in the group. It is also important that each member individually believes that s/he can personally make a difference in the group's efforts.[21] The first step in accomplishing this task is to make sure you know how the group currently perceives the issue at hand. Learning about their feelings and perceptions ahead of time makes it easier to understand what additional information they need and gives you the ability to make it a personal and therefore powerful and motivating issue for each member.

One of the most important aspects of community mobilization, and one that is all too often overlooked, is celebrating victories that have been secured through the involvement of the network. Once network members see that their efforts can and have made a difference, they are far more likely to continue to speak out and respond to the child advocacy organization's alerts and requests. Remember, a key to engaging all communities is to develop passion within its members. Furthermore, they are more likely to remain engaged if child advocacy is fun!

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[20] Robinson, Adele, and Deborah R. Stark. Advocacy in Action: Making a Difference for Young Children. Washington, DC: National Association for the Education of Young Children, 2002.
[21] Beckwith, Dave, and Christina Lopez. "Community Organizing: People Power From the Grassroots." Center for Community Change. 9 Nov. 2006 <http://comm-org.wisc.edu/papers97/beckwith.htm>.

# A Great Idea

Strategies that work from the members of the National Association of Child Advocates

August 2002

Community Mobilization

# Reach out and Touch Your Legislator in Your Own Language: Children's Alliance in Washington Works to Ensure EVERYONE has Access

***Summary***

Thanks to the work of The Children's Alliance (The Alliance), Washington State has made its toll-free Legislative Hotline accessible to more communities within the state by going multilingual. The hotline allows citizens to express their concerns and views about legislation with operators who then relay the information to state policymakers. The hotline is now available in 120 different languages (this interpretation service is available nationwide from Marino Language Link), giving more citizens in Washington State a say in their government.

***Background***

It was clear to The Alliance in 1999 that state residents with Limited English Proficiency were not being fully represented by the state's Legislative Hotline. While a valuable resource, the hotline only served English speakers even though Latinos are Washington's largest community of color (12%) followed by Asian Pacific Islanders (5%). Thousands of immigrants and others who either did not speak English, or did not speak it well enough to convey their opinions, were disconnected from their government as a result. Washingtonians fluent in English, on the other hand, could call the state's legislative line to inquire about legislation, voice their concerns or just express displeasure with decisions that had been made at the state capitol and have it all relayed to legislators.

The Alliance realized that the language barrier affected children in a variety of ways, many of them stemming from an inability to communicate with decision-makers. Many of the non-English speaking communities had needs and concerns of their own that some policymakers didn't know about or didn't understand well. Furthermore, when the Children's Alliance began conducting advocacy trainings in Spanish, it became obvious that Spanish-speaking constituents needed access to the legislative hotline to convey their opinions to their elected representatives. A prime example of the need for immigrant communities to express their voice involved a last minute decision this past legislative session cutting 25,000 poor, undocumented children from health insurance.

To make certain more action that could negatively impact immigrants wasn't taken, The Alliance convinced the state to make the hotlines more accessible and then worked with it to implement the new multilingual system. While there is still much work to ensure that every community has a voice in state government, the multilingual hotline has given non-English speaking people a better chance of getting their messages to policymakers.

***Key Elements***

***Convincing the State to Implement the Plan***

- The Alliance tapped into its base of single-issue groups that dealt with immigrant issues and formed a coalition to help convince the state legislature to make the hotline multilingual.

*Continued on reverse side*

- The Alliance developed a proposal on how the hotline could become multilingual. The proposal consisted of information on costs of the interpreters and technology that would enable the state to make the hotline multilingual.
- It prepared a letter supporting the multi-lingual hotline capability and secured support from members of the coalition and policymakers representing non-English speaking areas.
- The letter and the proposal were sent to members of the legislature.
- Writing the letter and developing the proposal to convince legislators of the need for a multilingual hotline was fairly easy, with most policymakers showing little resistance. The process, in fact, started in the fall of 2000 and the multilingual lines were approved by legislators in December and implemented in the spring of 2001.

*Implementing the New System*

- The legislature added a Spanish-speaking operator to the hotline since Spanish is the most commonly used language among non-English speakers.
- To make sure the hotline is accessible to other groups, such as Chinese, Vietnamese and Russian callers, The Alliance worked with the legislature to secure services from Marino Language Link, which interprets 120 different languages. They charge the state $1.95 per minute of call time, no monthly fee and no minimum calls.
- The Alliance marketed the hotline with non-English speaking groups. The state, however, has done very little to promote the hotline. The Alliance is working with state officials to ensure that they will take whatever steps are needed to get the word out about the hotline in targeted non-English speaking communities.

### *Staff Time*

- One full-time policy staff member spent 1/5 of her time over the course of eight months working to convince legislators of the need for the hotline and helping them implement it. A second policy staff member dedicated 20 hours to researching information around the hotline and to writing letters.

### *Problems*

- Because the state has yet to market the hotline to non-English speaking groups, there is still little knowledge of its multilingual capabilities, thus calls from those groups to the hotline remain low.
- Many policymakers continue to respond in English to non-English speaking constituents. So while one barrier to calls coming into the hotline has been broken down, other barriers still need to be addressed.

### *Outcomes*

- Legislators are slowly but surely becoming more educated on the issues that face non-English speaking people.
- Non-English speaking people are now better able to access information through the hotline on policy issues and pending legislation that could affect their lives.
- While there is still so much more to be done to include non-English speaking people in the state's political system, the mutilingual hotline is an important first step that will lead to outreach programs targeting immigrant communities.
- The multilingual hotline will benefit The Alliance and its agenda as many of its coalition members are made up of non-English speaking people. Those people can now contact and communicate with their legislators about issues important to children.

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# A Great Idea

Strategies that work from the members of the National Association of Child Advocates

January 1998


Community Mobilization

## The Colorado Doll Project


### *Summary*

Since 1994, the Colorado Children's Campaign (CCC) has utilized cardboard cutout dolls with individualized stories to place children's issues prominently in the minds of Coloradans. While the Colorado Doll Project has become the source of widespread positive press coverage, its greatest accomplishment has been the development of an effective and reliable grassroots network via a statewide phone tree. The network of volunteer dollmakers contains a growing number of individuals ready, willing, and able to contact elected and appointed officials on the problems faced by the state's children.


### *Background*

In 1994, the Colorado Children's Campaign was faced with one of the traditional struggles that confront most child advocacy organizations — how to develop widespread grassroots awareness of children's conditions and how to then translate that awareness into positive action. A volunteer suggested the idea of cutout dolls that soon became two-foot-tall cardboard dolls complete with appropriate clothing. The doll is accompanied by a card containing a real life story of a Colorado child, general information about Colorado's children, and suggestions of ways to work for children.

The first year's goal was to make 200 of these dolls. The idea spread quickly, and 3,000 dolls were made and displayed at the State Capitol during the first Doll Day in 1994. Their start-up costs were approximately $3,000.

Every April CCC now sponsors Doll Day. Dolls are displayed everywhere, including the State Capitol, town squares, and other prominent public places. Since most of the dollmakers have continued their involvement in the project, they now know the routine with little assistance. Dolls are set out at 9:00 AM on Doll Day around the state. The press now prepares for the event and knows who to contact locally. These activities generate a full week's worth of press coverage by every media outlet in Colorado.

### *Key Elements*

- ✦ The basic design has remained the same. CCC now works with a cardboard manufacturing company that makes the die cuts at cost (24 cents each). The local dollmakers, through garage sales, thrift shops, and their basements, obtain the materials (cloth, bows, yarn, baby clothes, and ribbons) to make the outfits.
- ✦ By 1997, a network of 1,000 dollmakers in 140 towns, made 32,000 dolls in batches of 10 to 200.
- ✦ The featured stories that accompany each doll have been gathered from word-of mouth networking and are compiled on a database. They tell about all children. At a detention center outside Denver, writing the stories is an English class assignment. The making of the doll's clothing is their art class project.
- ✦ The dollmakers are invited to regional training sessions (30 minutes to two hours long), receive Start-Up kits, and are trained on how to work effectively with the media. They also receive training on the importance of participating in the CCC phone tree to state legislators.

*Continued on reverse side*

- CCC is working to develop issue themes not just individual stories with each doll, a strategy designed to improve their communications capacity and boost their effectiveness.

*Planning and Timeline*

- In the beginning the program was highly labor intensive. Each dollmaker needed individualized training to understand the process.
- The Doll Day requires 3 to 3 1/2 months of concentrated planning (mid-January to mid-April). Most dollmakers now know the routine simplifying the process.

*Involvement*

- CCC has a full-time Doll Campaign Coordinator.

*Outcomes*

- CCC receives extensive press coverage that regularly includes lead stories coupled with color photos in every newspaper in the state. The individualized stories of the dolls are highlighted by the reporters (each wants his/her special child to cover). The image has been created that there is an army of people working on children's issues in the state given the huge number of dolls being placed here, there, and everywhere throughout Colorado.
- The Colorado Doll Project was the inspiration behind Advocates for Children and Youth (Baltimore) developing the Kid Pins concept. (The pins now are sold in 26 states, aiding many NACA members with an additional source of unrestricted income).
- The Doll Project is an effective grassroots effort. The phone tree built upon the dollmakers network has become a powerful political force on behalf of Colorado's children. Their outreach now can produce rapid calls to every legislative committee member. They have shut down the state legislative switchboard on a particular piece of legislation. And, when CCC's president presented a proposal to the state's legislative leaders to form an ad hoc committee designed to make major advances for children, they readily agreed.
- The dolls have become so universally recognized that CCC now has a Yard Doll program where CCC staples a doll to a stake and places it in the front yard of the homes of people who have done exemplary work on behalf of children. Receiving a Yard Doll has become a source of great pride.

*Lessons Learned*

- Get die cuts for the dolls or invest heavily in Band-Aids.
- CCC has decided to concentrate on younger children. CCC believe that when you stop trying to be all things for all people, people are more likely to join you.
- Look at different opportunities to communicate what your organization stands for.
- The people most removed from children are the ones most moved by the stories. They react from their heart.
- Do not be afraid of taking a risk as long as it is attached to a solid strategic plan.

*Unanticipated Results*

- CCC still is amazed that so many people make the dolls.
- The entire process has removed the details and jargon of this or that policy. The dolls alone have given voice to the overriding children's issues.

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# A Great Idea

Strategies that work from the members of the National Association of Child Advocates

July 1999

Community Mobilization

## Utah Children's Child Advocacy in a Box

*Summary*

Utah Children has developed an outreach tool called "Child Advocacy in a Box" that has allowed them to educate and encourage hundreds of people annually to become more involved in children's issues. Through a combination of easily understood props, trained volunteers to complement their staff and relevant statistics, they have created a cadre of speakers who can inform religious, civic and citizens groups throughout the state about what really is happening for children. Their approach does not overwhelm people with statistics or make them wonder what an individual or a small group can do, but provides concrete steps for people to get more involved in ways they can see make a difference.

*Background*

Utah Children, like many other NACA members, faces the problem of how to reach potential supporters who are concerned about the state's children. Utah is a physically large state. Utah Children's small staff wanted to reach out to all parts of the state in a cost-effective manner. They created the Child Advocacy in a Box tool in 1995 and have made it a part of their annual Advocacy Academy. The Academy trains 30 volunteers from around the state on the various aspects of child advocacy, provides them with their individual Box, and sends them out for public speaking opportunities. The Box and its contents provide people who might not be comfortable with public speaking with an easy vehicle to present information on the needs of children.

*Key Elements*

Utah Children starts with a sturdy box (a 12" x 7" x 5" box works well) or toolbox capable of holding the items for the Child Advocacy in a Box tool. The Box is decorated colorfully with the organizational logo and art for the sides. The Box then is filled with props representing all the things that a child needs to grow up healthy and a productive member of society. The Box is accompanied by a two-page script for the presenter and multiple copies of a statistical handout on children. The props include:

- ✦A diaper highlighting the need for quality prenatal care, and the issues of infant mortality and teen pregnancy
- ✦A syringe to discuss the state's immunization rates and other health problems
- ✦An insurance card to indicate the need for quality, affordable and accessible health insurance
- ✦A Teddy Bear or stuffed animal to remind people of the need of every child to be loved and nurtured and to discuss child abuse, divorce rates and violent death
- ✦A dictionary, children's book and a calculator to lead to a discussion on the need to read and acquire math skills
- ✦A ball to discuss the need for a safe place to play and the need for quality child care and after school care
- ✦An apple to discuss nutrition, current welfare benefits and the rates for free and reduced priced lunches
- ✦A toy house to discuss the need for shelter and a safe place to live and to introduce poverty statistics

*Continued on reverse side*

✦A short video on child advocacy (to be replaced by the new NACA video)

✦A pair of handcuffs to remind people that if the various areas of a child's life are filled with what she/he needs, there will be less need for the handcuffs.

*Planning Required*

✦Shopping for props for the Box. Many items can be contributed as in-kind donations. It costs approximately $25 per Box to assemble all the elements.

✦Development of the two-page script, along with the statistical handout sheets

✦The recruitment of volunteers from different parts of the state to receive the training to make the presentations

*Involvement*

✦A coordinator to spend a week to assemble the Boxes' contents, develop the statistical sheets, and train volunteers.

✦When Utah Children receives a request for a Child Advocacy in a Box presentation, they will assign someone who is available and lives nearby. Utah Children staff do many of the Salt Lake City requests. For those outside the capital, volunteers willing to absorb the out-of-pocket expenses, make the presentations.

✦Follow up involves keeping track of all the presentations with information on the presenter, where it was held, the number in attendance, and the response.

*Outcomes*

✦The Child Advocacy in a Box presentations have been a success. To date, Utah Children and staff have made over 100 presentations and have reached over 1,500 people. Most requests now come via word-of-mouth networking.

✦There are many anecdotal stories. One church decided to create a legislative committee on children. Others have mobilized to support Utah Children. These additional voices for children mean that state legislators now are being contacted by more knowledgeable constituents on behalf of children. As more presentations are made, the momentum builds.

*Problems*

✦It sometimes has been difficult to receive sufficient feedback from the volunteers around the state about when they make a presentation, how many presentations they have made, the number in attendance at each, the response, and other evaluative mechanisms.

*Lessons Learned*

✦Make sure to have enough informational handouts to distribute for the attendees.

✦In the presentations, always provide concrete suggestions describing what an individual can do for children. The recitation of statistics alone can leave people feeling there is nothing she/he can do. Motivate people to action.

*Unanticipated Results*

✦People most inspired by the presentations actively engage their organization in Utah Children\'92s work and ask to come to the next Advocacy Academy to receive the training to make presentations to other groups.

✦Utah Children has increased its name recognition in all parts of the state.

✦They have received some unsolicited donations.

*Morris Rodenstein*

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# Integrate Volunteers into *All* Aspects of Your Organization

**Citizens' Committee for Children of New York**
Rose Anello, Associate Executive Director of Public Affairs, ranello@cccnewyork.org

*Citizens' Committee for Children of New York, Inc. (CCC), a member of Voices for America's Children, believes that no one can better speak for children than New Yorkers who volunteer on their behalf. Since the 1960's, the organization's **Community Leadership Course (CLC)** has prepared aspiring community leaders to be objective, persuasive, and effective agents for change.*

The ten-day CLC course features morning visits to 32 programs directly serving children, youth and families, and afternoon seminars with policy experts. Most sessions cover one of CCC's issue areas; the last session focuses on the role of government. By the end, volunteers understand CCC's mission and city and state government processes, and can knowledgeably advocate for children's policy initiatives. CLC grads become involved in every aspect of the organization's child advocacy, from task force to boardroom.

"If they are not informed, then they are not as valuable to us…[H]ere, volunteers are involved in every aspect of the [advocacy] process."
*- Rose Anello, Associate Executive Director for Public Affairs.*

## *Serving Many Roles*

Volunteers conduct, surveys and site visits throughout New York City. They meet with elected officials, speak at press conferences, deliver testimony at public hearings in City Hall, advocate budget priorities for children, and represent CCC at coalition meetings. (CCC provides activity-specific training.) Having concerned citizens deliver these messages often helps to "humanize" the data collected by CCC.

Volunteers also help to train new volunteers, serving as mentors, discussion leaders, and site visit leaders for CLC and YouthAction NYC. (Since 1999, CCC has also engaged children from New York City high schools through the YouthAction NYC Community Leadership Course.*)

### Getting Candidates on the Record

Volunteers worked to develop a candidate questionnaire, and then met personally with candidates in the mayoral, public advocate, and borough presidential races. They also corresponded with candidates running for City Council.

The results were posted in an online voter guide on CCC's Web site. CCC's report, ***Prospects and Promises 2006***, distributed by staff and volunteers in personal meetings with newly elected officials, provided recommendations and benchmarks for children to be achieved in the next 4 years.

## Key Planning Elements

***Volunteer make-up:*** CCC's volunteers have diverse backgrounds. Only a few have jobs related to child advocacy or direct services for children. Some take time off from work to attend the CLC. Others are retired, raising children, or in between jobs. The only requirement is a commitment to the educational process and making positive change for New York City children.

***Recruiting:*** CCC distributes brochures and, in 2006, began a targeted e-mail campaign. But because the program is well-established, volunteers are often recruited by word of mouth, and often come from within the family—i.e., children of volunteers or board members.

***Retention:*** CCC consistently informs volunteers of the tangible successes they foster for children, via newsletters, e-mails, and a city/state budget impact analysis. Each fall, CCC offers a series of **policy briefings** on the issues coming before its task forces. A series of **issue updates** follows in the spring. These venues provide volunteers with a broad perspective, an opportunity to refocus efforts, and positive feedback that helps retention. A sense of ownership and belief that their work makes a difference leads many volunteers to stay for decades.

***Staff time:*** For each CCC program/activity, staff are paired with volunteer chairs to develop workplans and engage other volunteers. **CCC's teamwork approach requires upwards of 50% of every staff person's time, but the return on this investment is enormous.**
***Evaluation:*** Evaluation works both ways. To determine that volunteers are keeping current in their knowledge of children's issues, CCC tracks their participation in educational activities and advocacy activities. Volunteers evaluate the organization via oversight committees; assessments are forwarded to the Board of Directors. The same process is used to review work plans and policy recommendations. Having volunteers evaluate impact and outcomes helps the organization remain effective.

***Costs:*** Volunteers pay $900 to attend CLC, which helps cover costs. (Some scholarships are also available.) Some costs are factored into CCC's overall budget, and the organization also seeks foundation grants.

## Results

CCC's goal is for the 25 adults who graduate annually to become actively engaged in making York City a better place for children. Most do. A typical year's class yields:

- seven to ten new and very active volunteers;
- graduates who attend CCC lectures, fundraisers or advocacy events at City Hall or in Albany;
- graduates who start programs in their own communities; and
- child advocacy professionals with new expertise.

## Lessons Learned

- **Consistently engage volunteers in a hands-on manner.** Involve them in planning, and take them to see where direct service is being done.
- **Emphasize the importance of continuing advocacy education**—knowledge of government policies, program budgets, legislation related to children, and organization initiatives is key to effectiveness.
- **Don't try to do it all yourself**—use your network; allow colleagues (and, eventually, other volunteers) to be educators. Showcase colleagues and, as awareness grows, others will be anxious to contribute their program/expertise/perspective.
- **Keep the creation of educational courses manageable** by limiting the number of policy issues you cover.

* *see* Voices' *"Developing Young Advocates Through the YouthAction Community Leadership Course" -* A Great Idea!, *December, 2004).*

A Great Idea
Strategies that work from the members of the National Association of Child Advocates

February 1999

Communications

# The Mississippi Forum on Children and Families KIDS COUNT Calendar

*Summary*

The Mississippi Forum on Children and Families has developed a unique way to release their KIDS COUNT data -- on a calendar. Over the past five years, the Forum has highlighted native-born Mississippians in different fields - authors, playwrights, business leaders, entertainers, and for 1999, athletes -- as a vehicle for presenting their annual KIDS COUNT data. They knew the numbers would not be easy to present and wanted to avoid blame and finger-pointing that could become self-defeating. They instead sought to build upon Mississippi's assets rather than its deficits.

Each data book, including this year's calendar is targeted towards specific audiences in a deliberate strategy to engage different state leaders at a deeper level of understanding than the simple, depersonalized recitation of facts and figures. The Forum's goal was to elicit more thoughtful responses whereby readers would be energized into becoming active agents for change rather than react with punitive prescriptions.

*Background*

In 1993 when the Forum first received the Annie E. Casey Foundation's KIDS COUNT grant, they understood that they faced a tremendous challenge in translating the data to the state's leaders. They knew that when compared to other states, Mississippi would be at the bottom of the list of states or close to it for the foreseeable future. If they printed a series of KIDS COUNT reports that repeatedly told a story of how badly the state's children were doing, it would be difficult, if not impossible, to motivate and mobilize people to make the necessary changes. If Mississippi was to become a state good for children and their families, the task could not appear so daunting and overwhelming that it would create a hopeless, "there's-nothing-we-can-do-about-it" attitude. They sought to show individuals that they can and do make a difference and can be part of the solution for Mississippi's children.

Mississippi, while poor economically, was viewed as culturally rich. Even with their problems, Mississippi nurtured people like William Faulkner, Tennessee Williams, Eudora Welty, Elvis Presley, the developers of Netscape and MTV, along with the blues musicians. In developing these calendars featuring Mississippi's successful sons and daughters, the Forum offered the vision that it was each Mississippian's mission to ensure the development of all the state's children. Like the featured individuals, all children deserve to be treated with the high level of support and respect whereby they all would feel like stars.

*Key Elements*

- Each year, the KIDS COUNT calendar focused on a different profession in an effort to garner the attention of different audiences. The calendar highlighting business leaders, as an example, was designed with the goal of being found on the CEO's office coffee table. This calendar focused on the emerging brain research. The Forum's leaders believed that business leaders would be most responsive and supportive of a promising

Continued on reverse side

long-term strategy to help the state's children by learning more about the impact of investing now in the children's futures.

- ✦The 1999 Mississippi athletes calendar contains past and present stars in football, basketball, baseball, auto racing, track and field, tennis, and golf. Each month has an action photo of the athlete, a childhood inset photo, and a personal quote (or a quote from a deceased athlete's family member) and statistics of the individual's sports accomplishments. This calendar was targeted towards middle managers and the large number of Mississippi sports fans.
- ✦The athletes were selected from a pool of names through research with the state sports' museum. They narrowed the field to include athletes from different parts of the state, starring in different sports, and reflecting the state's diverse population.
- ✦The 1999 KIDS COUNT data and calendar was released on a high school football field, providing an ideal photo opportunity for the media.
- ✦There is a two-page spread for each month. One page features all the information about the athlete. The facing page, with the actual calendar, includes information on the work of child advocates in different parts of the state and is accompanied by a quote of a local leader praising the Forum's work.

### *Planning Required*

- ✦The planning for each calendar is a six to nine month process at times involving the entire Forum staff.
- ✦After the initial research on the potential featured individuals, the staff spends one full day developing the detailed plan and theme. A dummy copy is created in advance.
- ✦A site is selected for the calendar's public release consistent with its theme.
- ✦They then contact the selected people to ask for the needed information including written permission. The process is very labor-intensive, especially at first. Some individuals had to be persuaded that it was okay to have themselves associated with depressing data on Mississippi's children.

### *Problems*

- ✦Not everyone approached to be featured wants to be involved.
- ✦Even with the best of plans, receiving pictures from current stars often means working with agents who work on their time schedule and not yours.
- ✦Receiving permission from the estates of deceased individuals can be difficult. Families might be more cautious about lending his/her loved ones name to any project.

### *Outcomes*

- ✦The outcomes to date have largely been anecdotal. Public recognition of the Forum appears much higher. Many more people now make the direct link between the calendars and the Forum, an important step forward that allows the Forum to better advance its other projects and activities.

### *Lessons Learned*

- ✦Remember who are the target audiences and keep your eye on them.

### *Unanticipated Results*

- ✦None that were negative.

*–Morris Rodenstein*

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# A Great Idea

Strategies that work from the members of the National Association of Child Advocates

May 1998

Community Mobilization

# Town Meetings and Legislative Trainings in New Orleans' Public Housing

***Summary:***
Agenda for Children offers trainings to New Orleans public housing residents on a range of legislative issues. Most recently, they trained both public housing residents and staff on the 1996 welfare law. As a result, large numbers of low income families have attended legislative hearings on welfare reform. Their concerns have shaped legislative outcomes.

### *Background*

Agenda for Children's relationship with the public housing tenant leadership arose serendipitously when Donna Johnigan, a public housing resident and public assistance recipient, came to work for Agenda for Children as a VISTA volunteer. She became an Agenda staff member and eventually also president of the city-wide tenant council.

Through this relationship, Agenda for Children began to offer town meetings and, later, trainings for public housing residents. They have already provided sessions on legislative proposals on child care and welfare; next they will offer trainings on the child health program. As a result of these trainings, public housing residents are well informed on the legislative issues that may affect them, and frequently attend legislative and regulatory hearings on these matters.

### *Key Elements*

- Agenda for Children began offering town meetings in public housing on a small scale before they had funding; by the time they sought funding for this work they had a track record. Now they have a grant for community mobilization.
- The trainings are conducted jointly by the Executive Director, the head of the city-wide tenants' council, and the leader of the local Welfare Rights Organization. State agency staffers also join them as appropriate.
- The public housing agency provides the space, and offers transportation to public housing residents from other locations. The housing agency paid Agenda for Children to provide welfare reform trainings to housing agency staff. The tenants' council distributes notices of the sessions.
- The trainings are episodic; scheduled when there is a new topic the housing residents need to know. For example, Agenda gave a training on the food stamp waiver process before the state applied for it; when the state agency held a hearing on the food stamp waiver, five busloads of public housing residents appeared.
- The trainings last about three hours. (The town meetings, by comparison, were brief—20 minutes.) Written materials are kept short—three pages maximum.
- Some of the critical elements include: knowing the policy material well, telling the truth and not trying to manipulate the community, and always working in partnership with the community leaders.

### *Timeline*

- It took two to three years to get the program really up and running; at first only 50 people would

*Continued on reverse side*

show up. As they gained credibility and respect, the number of participants grew.

*Involvement (Staff)*

- The Executive Director prepares for and helps give the trainings. Most of the rest of the preparation (for example, leafleting) is handled by the tenants' council.

*Outcomes*

- Legislators began holding hearings in New Orleans after five busloads of public housing residents came to the first hearing in Baton Rouge. They began to expect low income members in the audience; when Judy Watts showed up alone they asked her whether anyone else was coming.
- The public housing residents provided articulate and informed testimony. Some of the outcomes which probably resulted in part from their participation include: restoration of training and education in the TANF program; a six month earned income disregard up to $900; and keeping all the hardship exceptions to the 2 year time limit.
- The concerns and issues that public housing residents raise at the trainings help shape the Agenda for Children policy choices; it keeps them "on track" by basing their work in the reality of poor families' lives.
- When Agenda for Children is asked to speak now on issues like welfare reform, an Agenda staffer teams with either the housing council President, the head of the Welfare Rights Organization, or both. The Agenda staffer provides the technical information and the other speaker provides the passion.

*Lessons Learned*

- During any meeting with public housing residents you should be prepared to handle requests for help with individual cases. The process has stretched the Agenda staff's ability to respond. They often can help and if they cannot, they can at least give them important information. This type of community mobilization must be paired with individual case advocacy.
- It is important to be consistent with the relationships, to nurture and respect them. It is also important to share, and talk about, a common understanding of institutional racism.

*Barriers and Concerns*

- Agenda for Children used to bring in welfare officials. All the housing residents would tell their stories; the agency staff would promise to resolve their problems but never did.
- One large barrier was the high level of alienation and distrust, and the consequent inclination on the part of the housing residents to ignore the town meetings and trainings.

*Unanticipated Results*

- Agenda learned from this community how to build broader partnerships in grassroots communities outside New Orleans. When they went around the state holding forums and meetings, they used to be hosted by middle class organizations such as white churches or the local League of Women Voters. There were very few poor people or people of color at these events. About six or seven years ago, they began to seek grass roots community organizations to host their events; for example, African-American church leaders, Head Start parents groups and Legal Services Client Councils. As a result, their leadership is increasingly lodged in grassroots communities, while the involvement of more traditional allies remains strong.

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Voices FOR AMERICA'S CHILDREN A Great Idea

community mobilization December 2004

# Developing Young Advocates Through the YouthAction Community Leadership Course

**Citizens' Committee for Children of New York, Inc.**
**Contact:** Betsy Guttmacher, Program Coordinator - YouthAction, bguttmacher@kfny.org

*Citizens' Committee for Children of New York, Inc. (CCC), a member of Voices for America's Children, believes that teaching children to be strong and successful advocates results in involved, passionate and articulate adults. Five years ago, CCC developed a free course to teach high school students about the important issues facing their city, while also preparing them to become effective advocates for themselves, their families and their communities. The YouthAction Community Leadership Course (YCLC) provides students with the tools and the opportunity they need to play an important role in shaping the issues that affect them.*

## Background:

The idea for the YCLC stems from the Community Leadership Course designed by CCC in the 1960's to educate adults about advocacy and community issues. In 1999, with guidance from CCC staff, a group of CCC adult volunteers adapted this course to educate youth on the same topics. The course was taken on by CCC as a staff-run project after the first year and continues with help from adult volunteers who lead small group discussions and supervise youth on site visits and meetings with elected officials. The YCLC has enjoyed success as a result of partnering effectively with high schools, community programs studied as part of the course, and elected officials.

The YCLC is held after school for three hours once a week for nine weeks. Participants are provided with eight sessions of classroom instruction, engage in small group activities, and go on site visits to community programs. During their study, students focus on a community, such as East Harlem, and identify issues on which to focus their advocacy work. During the final session, students present their concerns to New York City Council members using a public hearing format at City Hall. At the end of the course, the students are invited to become members of YouthAction, CCC's student membership program. They also participate in activities with CCC staff and adult volunteers.

> *"We try to integrate YCLC graduates into all aspects of CCC's advocacy work just like our adult volunteers. We see them truly as our partners in this work." - Betsy Guttmacher, Program Coordinator, YouthAction, CCC*

## Key Planning Elements

***Creating relationships:*** It is important to create strong relationships with volunteers, students, schools, legislators, and the staff of programs and sites that will be studied. (Adult volunteers are recruited from CCC's Community Leadership Course and trained prior to the start of YCLC.)

To recruit for this program, CCC partners with over 40 public and private high schools, setting up face-to-face appointments with principals, and speaking to service groups. The schools recruit students using a short enrollment form provided by CCC; schools are asked to recommend interested students six weeks prior to the beginning of the course.

***Publicity:*** Staff give speeches at school assemblies and post information about the course on the CCC website, www.kidsfirstnewyork.org, but CCC leaves the majority of the publicity for the course up to the schools and the community programs.

***Funding:*** Costs for the course include one dedicated part-time staff person, transportation to and from the site visits, dinner and snacks one night a week, overhead and a small stipend for those students who wish to receive it. Funding is provided by grants from foundations.

***Timeline:*** Because CCC already had the basics of the curriculum developed for the Community Leadership Course, it did not take much time or effort to adapt it for students. But establishing relationships with students, schools, community program staff, and elected officials takes a significant amount of time, so start early! (**CCC is crafting an adaptable form of its curriculum for other organizations to use which should be available in early 2005.)**

***Staff time:*** A CCC program coordinator balances two days a week developing, coordinating, and teaching fall sessions and spring sessions with her normal work with YouthAction members. The Executive Director speaks to the students about advocacy and the importance of civic participation during the sessions prior to the City Hall meeting.

***Evaluation:*** Each week, CCC staff and adult volunteers meet to evaluate the previous week's activities and prepare for the coming session. Success is also measured by the number of students who become members of CCC's YouthAction program and continue their advocacy work.

## Lessons Learned

While the YCLC participants range from freshmen to seniors, CCC prefers sophomores and juniors because they are able to be a part of the program for several years, providing a sense of continuity with the programs, sites and legislators from year to year, and are able to serve as mentors to the younger students.

Between 66 and 75% of students who complete the course go on to become YouthAction members. Those who are unable to most often cite scheduling conflicts with other extra-curricular activities.

## Results

- Students involved in the YCLC have participated in advocacy efforts that have resulted in the passage of legislation restoring $100 million in spending for programs that benefit children and families, including a summer youth employment program. They were also instrumental in urging the legislature to create a New York City-based Earned Income Tax Credit – a $50 million initiative.
- CCC benefits from having a young and passionate pool of members to help in creating and sustaining grassroots movements on various issues such as public housing, youth homelessness and substance abuse treatment. Through these activities, students gain a better understanding of the issues facing their communities and actively advocate for systems of change.
- As members of YouthAction, students also are able to take part in a CCC peer-training program, where they can share what they have learned with other students.
- Participants increase their interest in the government process, improve their public speaking skills, learn about diversity, and develop their leadership skills.
- Students have the opportunity to interact with their elected officials and council members. Elected officials and council members benefit from increased insight into what their youngest constituents are concerned about.
- Due to the success of this program, CCC expanded the course in 2004 to include a spring session in order to provide more students with this opportunity.
- To date, over 150 students have been educated through CCC's YouthAction Leadership Course.

# Voices for America's Children: A Great Idea

Community Mobilization | June 2006

## Voices *of* America's Children: Cultivating Youth Advocates in South Dakota

South Dakota Voices for Children
Susan Randall (srandall@sdvoicesforchildren.org) & Betsy Rice (betsyr@sdvoicesforchildren.org)

*Council members Katie, Hannah, Emily, Peter, Tootie, and Peter*

South Dakota Voices for Children (SD Voices), a member of Voices for America's Children, has long been committed to involving young people in the formation and pursuit of the organization's advocacy agenda. Initially, youth involvement was through Board service, but in spring 2002, the Board formed a **Youth Advisory Council** as a more effective, developmentally appropriate avenue. A statewide announcement invited youth to apply, and the Board amended its own bylaws to formally make the Council an advisory body. Now in its fourth year, the resulting Youth Advisory Council gives teens a meaningful way to affect community decisions that ultimately influence their lives.

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### Key Elements

- **Application process** – SD Voices distributed nearly 2,000 brochures to high schools across South Dakota, resulting in 50 applications for 15 available seats. Advising the Council during its first year, the SD Voices Board of Directors selected the initial class. The Council subsequently appointed a nominating committee to review applications each spring, with the assistance of one organization Board member and two staff.

- **Terms of service** – Council members may serve more than one term and are asked to re-commit annually.

- **Regular contact** – The Council meets on a quarterly basis, has bylaws and annually elects a chair and vice chair. Chosen on a rotating basis, the chair and one Council member serve as liaisons to SD Voices' Board. A summer retreat, which includes orientation for new Council members, overlaps by one hour with a SD Voices Board meeting, so that Council members can meet directly with Board directors. (SD Voices is currently re-examining the need for the Council liaisons to attend the regular Board meetings, since coordination and travel logistics have proven difficult.)

- **Opportunities for action** – SD Voices engages the Council in three ways:

    - *Influencing decision-makers* - SD Voices invites Council members to events such as Children's Day at the State Capitol, where they can lobby legislators. Members also testify on youth issues in support of the work of the organization.
    - *Conducting research* - Council members gather opinions on issues and legislation for SD Voices by both interviewing members of their high schools and holding youth listening sessions in their communities.
    - *Advising the Board* - SD Voices' Board seeks input and guidance from the Council on policy positions, particularly those directly affecting South Dakota youth.

- **Tracking Participation** – Council members record their participation in activities such as speaking to a class or community group, writing a letter to the editor of their local newspaper, inviting a local legislator to Children's Day at the Capitol, staffing a SD Voices booth or testifying on a bill. Created to answer the question, "What would put you in 'good standing' as a Council member?," the tracking document is a useful record of accomplishment for graduating seniors as they seek letters of recommendation."

## Staff/Program Costs

The Council is not responsible for the management of a budget. The total program incurs approximately $5,000 in annual expenses. Two of the quarterly meetings require overnight stays, while others are day trips. SD Voices provides a per-meeting travel reimbursement of up to $50 to member teens, and pays for meals and hotel costs during both the spring overnight meeting and the summer two-day retreat. SD Voices staff plan logistics for each meeting.

## Things to Think About

- **Geographic hurdles** – Logistics are harder in larger states with relatively small populations.
- **Diversity** – SD Voices aims not only for diversity in race and gender, but also age, geography, environment (urban, rural, reservation communities) and school experiences (public, private, home-schooling).
- **Mentorship** – It is essential to support teens so that they feel ownership in their projects, yet remain accountable to the larger group.

## Outcomes

After the first year, interest among member teens seemed to decline. To circumvent this, SD Voices listened carefully to their suggestions, working to ensure that their service on the Council became an integral part of SD Voices' advocacy strategies. Youth have increasingly embraced the opportunity to shine a spotlight on important matters. As evidence of its valuable perspective and burgeoning influence, the Council has chosen an expanded theme for SD Voices' first public forum in Fall 2006: *Addressing substance abuse by youth - <u>and</u> adults.*

# A Great Idea

Strategies that work from the members of the National Association of Child Advocates

January 1998

Community Mobilization

## New Mexico Advocates for Children and Families Youth Link Project: Getting Youth Involved in Public Policy

*Summary*

In 1994, New Mexico Advocates for Children and Families (NMACF) started Youth Link, a statewide project to provide leadership training to young people between the ages of 12 and 21. The ultimate goal was to develop a youth policy agenda grounded in the reality of New Mexico youth.

This program has succeeded on several levels. The youth of New Mexico have become their own best advocates. Kids once classified as "hard to reach" or "at risk" now feel they have a stake in what happens in their community. Adult youth and policy makers have become allies with youth, not just workers on their behalf.

*Background*

NMACF recognized that in the discussion of youth problems an important resource was missing: the youth themselves. With funding from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation,Youth Link began as a demonstration project. In 1994, NMACF developed a request for proposals and encouraged different communities across the state to develop Community Action Teams (CATs), with grants ranging from $1,000-$1,500. Fifteen sites were selected, however, since 1994 that number has been scaled down to six CATs statewide. The CATs are inter-generational and very diverse in terms of socio-economic status, race, culture and category of youth including the "high achiever" and the "high risk". The adults give support and guidance, but the youth are the driving force. They pick the policy agenda, decide on the implementation strategies, and then take the action — sometimes advocating for local change; at other times, on a statewide level.

The CATs are provided with training on how to research an issue, team building, and how issues affect the community. In 1996, Youth Link co-hosted a statewide town hall, "On Youth, By Youth", where the youth were given training and developed a consensus report on the status of New Mexico's youth that included a policy agenda along with policy recommendations. This type of statewide agenda building continued in 1997 with a Youth Public Policy Institute. Before the Institute, the CATs met in their communities to set a local policy agenda and met with local policy makers to move that agenda forward. The Institute allowed local CATs to get together and develop a statewide policy agenda for the upcoming year.

*Key elements*

- ✦ Develop a clear criteria for CATs before beginning the project.
- ✦ Affiliate CATs with community agencies to ensure strong grounding in the community.
- ✦ Provide a variety of trainings to the CATs including how to facilitate groups, understanding group dynamics, and strategic planning.
- ✦ Invest a lot of time in planning the Public Policy Institutes, including the meeting of the CATs on the local level.

Continued on reverse side

*Planning required*

- For a statewide project, the CATs need to learn the different players and needs of the communities that the project will be operating in, e.g. rural vs. urban.
- Bring together a group including policy makers; organizations that deal with youth, health, juvenile justice, education to brainstorm and create a vision for the project. This helps to develop stakeholders and build allies in the community.
- Develop a comprehensive training sessions, including how to lobby at the state level.

*Involvement*

- Full time director to coordinate statewide effort—seeks funding, provides technical assistance to adult sponsors, and coordinates and hosts all statewide and regional meetings
- Other staff at state level—half time assistant and a quarter-time youth coordinator.
- Local CAT staffing—adult sponsors who work with the sponsoring organization that allows them to work on CAT-related projects. Some have youth coordinators, currently trying to get youth coordinators at all CATs.

*Outcomes*

- More youth are being invited to discussions about policies that affect them. Perceptions of youth are changing.
- The program has provided a vehicle for youth to become active citizens.
- A meaningful bridge has been created between youth and adults in forming and enacting an agenda for direct youth input in addressing their needs.
- Youth formerly classified as "hard to reach" or "high risk" are emerging as leaders.
- The Albuquerque CAT has developed a mandatory intervention process for students facing expulsion or suspension in the Albuquerque Public School District.
- The Laguna CAT is formalizing the first elected Laguna Youth Council to serve as a major policy advisor to the Mayor's Office to guide the development of youth initiatives.
- Members of CATs provided testimony to the 1997 New Mexico Legislative session on a variety of issues concerning youth.
- Youth Link participants were asked to present at the National Healthy Mothers/Healthy Babies Conference in Baltimore, MD.

*Barriers/Concerns*

- Currently the New Mexico Governor's office has been categorizing young people as predators, instead of resources, cutting programs that support youth leadership while putting more money in juvenile justice and prisions. This issue has been hard to struggle against, but has also inspired the youth involved to succeed at this project.
- Fundraising to support the project is an ongoing concern.
- Staff shortage is also a concern.

*Lessons Learned*

- Start off with a smaller number of CATs to get the program going and build from that. NMACF started with 15 CATs and that number has been scaled down to six to make the project more effective and stronger.
- Set strong specific criteria for the CATs before the RFP goes out. This leads to less confusion and a healthier operation.
- Hire a community organizer to help build an infrastructure in the communities.
- Once youth realized they were being listened to, they invested in the project and felt great pride in their accomplishments. Adults are often surprised and impressed by the capabilities of these youth. Helps build youth self-esteem and investment in the community.

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Child Advocates

# Making a Difference

## Advocacy and Organizing Pay Off Big for San Francisco's Early Care and Education Workforce

The link between child care quality and child outcomes is indisputable. And as child advocates know, a critical ingredient in the recipe for high quality child care is adequate compensation rates for child care providers. During the late 1990s, Coleman Advocates for Children and Youth, a member of the National Association of Child Advocates, set out to address the low compensation and high turnover rates of child care providers in San Francisco by leading a multi-year campaign to secure more public funding for child care workers. Despite an unparalleled period of economic growth, child care providers – *caregivers of the future* – were earning on average barely $8/hour, or about $16,640 annually, in a city where average monthly rent for a 2-bedroom apartment was over $2,500, and the annual child care staff turnover rate hovered around 30 percent.

Higher child care wages attract a well-trained, better educated workforce and help reduce staff turnover rates. Having stable, trained, and educated caregivers is a vital part of child care quality. Child care providers with more education and training provide more stimulating and supportive care, engage children in more complex play and creative activities, and provide greater social and intellectual stimulation. Likewise, loss of contact with any caregiver is stressful for a child. Children in child care programs with high staff turnover rates tend to be both more aggressive and withdrawn. Thus, higher wages are vital to a child's social and emotional development, not to mention school readiness.

With three years of sustained advocacy, organizing, policy and budget efforts, Coleman Advocates and its colleagues in San Francisco instigated a major coup. As a result of their crusade, the City and County of San Francisco dramatically increased its ongoing investment in early childhood programs and the child care workforce, including two innovative publicly-funded child care wage supplement programs. In 1999, San Francisco C.A.R.E.S. (Compensation and Retention Encourage Stability) was created, and building upon that momentum, W.A.G.E.S. Plus (Wage Augmentation Grants for Entry-Level Staff) was established in 2000. The programs together currently total over $8 million annually in local and state funding.

**"Coleman Advocates and their colleagues in San Francisco secured public funding for two child care provider wage supplement programs, together currently totaling over $8 million annually."**

### Good Old-Fashioned Organizing – Inside and Outside

San Francisco had a number of elements in place from which to build a more politically potent and mobilized early childhood constituency. First, it was one of 19 cities nationwide selected as part of the Starting Points Initiative, a comprehensive, citywide policy and planning vehicle for families with young children. Oversight for Starting Points was vested in a community-based monitoring group, the Early Childhood Interagency Council (ECIC). The ECIC represented a credible group of 24 key early childhood stakeholders and an effective means of building consensus on policy and budget priorities — from inside local government — affecting families with young children. Coleman Advocates' Executive Director, Margaret Brodkin, has served on this body for several years, playing an indispensable role in shaping policy priorities and articulating winnable budget initiatives. In a groundbreaking roundtable strategy session involving these and other stakeholders in December 1998, Coleman fashioned strong consensus on key early childhood policy and budget priorities – with compensation and benefits for child care providers identified as the number one issue. All that was left to do was to convince decision-makers of the need to allocate necessary resources.

Although most of San Francisco's city supervisors were initially supportive of the campaign, many leaders, including the mayor, were reluctant to use public funds to subsidize child care workers' wages and salaries. In fact, although the advocates requested $1.5 million, the original allocation in the city budget was barely 10% of that original request. Coleman Advocates discovered that while there was no lobby against the initiative they were fighting for, there were competing priorities.

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According to Joe Wilson, Associate Director of Coleman Advocates, the way leaders were won over represented a coming of age for San Francisco's child care field. The mobilization efforts led by Coleman Advocates united groups that shared a common stake in the quality of early care and education offered in the city: child care center directors and teachers, family child care providers, parents, educators, faith-based and other community groups – groups that together had little experience with the political process. These groups came to understand that change would come about only through persistent political activity. Through concentrated leadership development cultivated by ongoing trainings and support by Coleman Advocates, this collective group of advocates was transformed into a persuasive and powerful voice at the forefront of the campaign.

Coleman Advocates strongly believed that success would come about by empowering the leadership existing within the child care community, and thus set out to turn a nearly invisible employment sector into a potent political force. In rebuilding the infrastructure of the child care provider associations and parent organizations, Coleman Advocates and its colleagues discovered a wealth of untapped resources and energies. For instance, while fighting for San Francisco CARES, Coleman Advocates, in partnership with a citywide child care coalition, helped orchestrate a grassroots postcard and media campaign that bombarded City Hall with over 10,000 postcards, criticizing the mayor for not prioritizing the city's children and urging the city supervisors to find money needed for the program in the budget. In a stunning development on the eve of the passage of the City budget, the Board of Supervisors announced that the mayor had "found" an additional $1 million to fund the CARES program. At that point, it was truly under-stood that the child care field had arrived as an active player in city politics.

As part of the overall strategy, Coleman sponsored several annual community mobilization events, including a Speak Up for Kids Day – a legislative open house and civic engagement exercise that enables city residents to meet with their local representatives about issues important to children and families – and the Baby Brigade – an event which allows hundreds of parents, child care providers, and toddlers to flood City Hall and appeal to the Mayor and Board of Supervisors to invest more in child care for working families. At the 2000 Baby Brigade, San Francisco's mayor announced the $4.1 million WAGES-Plus initiative after Coleman Advocates facilitated a working group to develop another wage initiative for child care providers.

## What is San Francisco CARES?

"San Francisco CARES" promotes staff retention and stability by awarding stipends or bonuses of up to $5000 for child care staff, both at centers and family day care homes, who continue their education and remain in the field. The program was originally funded at $1.15 million annually, but has grown to $4 million overall, from both state and local sources. It now reaches more than 1,100 child care professionals, a vital part of the potent early childhood organizing base which Coleman continues to help mobilize, support, and cultivate. The child care professionals receiving these stipends constitute the Child Development Corps. Coleman facilitates regular advocacy and organizing trainings for this group.

## What is WAGES Plus?

WAGES Plus is another city initiative aimed at bolstering child care quality by providing direct wage support to child care centers. The city created the fund to subsidize wages for providers at centers whose enrollment includes at least 25% low-income children. WAGES Plus grants awarded to qualifying centers are used to raise the wages of the lowest-paid staff, such as entry-level aides and assistants, to a minimum of $9 per hour. Teacher and director salaries are raised a commensurate amount to maintain appropriate differentials depending on education levels, length of service, and so forth. Centers wishing to participate in the WAGES program must agree to raise the lowest paid teachers' salaries to a pre-determined average wage level for each staff classification. Successful centers then receive the WAGES grant and use the funds to further raise staff salaries. The WAGES Plus program was funded at $4.1 million in 2000 and $3.35 million for 2001. In FY 2002-2003, San Francisco will launch a similar initiative for family child care providers, to creatively augment income to stabilize these unique community-based small businesses to support working families needing quality child care.

## Conclusion

Taken together, San Francisco CARES and WAGES Plus have provided stipends and wage increases to nearly 1,500 child care professionals. Turnover among the child care workforce has been reduced, and the number of child care providers pursuing professional development has increased significantly. Furthermore, these child care professionals represent a tremendous potential organizing base of people, each with a concrete "pocketbook" motivation to get involved and remain engaged.

Clearly the inside-outside strategy of consensus-building on early childhood policy priorities and coalition-building and mobilizing of hundreds of child care professionals and parents realized impressive concrete benefits, and the strategy succeeded in reallocating an astounding level of local dollars to craft an early childhood investment portfolio virtually unmatched by any city of comparable size in the country.

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*The "Child Advocates Making a Difference" series is supported by a generous grant from The Annie E. Casey Foundation.*

# A Great Idea

Strategies that work from the members of the National Association of Child Advocates

December 1999

Community Mobilization

## The Wisconsin Intergenerational Advocacy Project

*Summary*

Child advocates have never had the natural constituency available to our elderly citizens. The reasons are obvious; children don't vote and those who are most in need of a voice are the very children whose parents may have few resources to provide a voice and little access to power. Meanwhile, the elderly have had the time, money and skills to raise their voices and they have been heard. Social Security, Medicare and other beneficial programs reflect the powerful involvement of the elderly on their own behalf.

In recognition of these credits and debits, the Wisconsin Council on Children and Families (WCCF) and the Coalition of Wisconsin Aging Groups (CWAG), a coalition of 650 member organizations, formed a partnership, The Intergenerational Advocacy Project (IAP), to strengthen child advocacy by involving senior citizens in direct advocacy on children's issues.

*Background*

In 1998, the Annie E. Casey Foundation approached WCCF and CWAG to discuss the idea of involving older people in child advocacy. The two organizations developed the plan to expand WCCF's base of support to include the elderly and to further institutionalize CWAG's commitment to bridging generations which had focused more on program rather than policy. The Casey Foundation agreed to fund the establishment of the Intergenerational Advocacy Project (IAP) which began in fall 1998.

The executive directors of each organization met to hire a full-time project director who is an employee of CWAG, but spends several days a week at WCCF offices. The partners agreed upon several issues to pursue in the state budget which was introduced after the project started. Plans were laid for CWAG member organizations to be involved in WCCF's public awareness campaign on the importance of early childhood based on the brain research.

Since its inception, the partnership has expanded to involve CWAG members more actively and visibly in child advocacy to stress the interdependency of the generations. It became clear that both groups had some surprising issues in common, such as child care and elderly day care or the brain research with themes like "use it or lose it" pertinent to the young and the old!

*Key Elements*

- Information sharing among agencies is crucial to the program's success.
- As the project has developed, it has become more structured. An IAP Advisory Committee to the CWAG Board was created. The Executive Director of WCCF serves on that committee. Other organizations have been invited to participate. Twenty-one individuals sit on the committee ranging in age from fifteen to eighty years old.
- The Advisory Committee developed an Intergenerational Platform to provide a framework for CWAG members. Child and family issues are featured in CWAG's newsletter, district meetings, and annual convention. The CWAG Executive Director has submitted articles on intergenerational issues for the WCCF newsletter as well.

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*Timeline*

The IAP staff has worked in the first year to become an effective ally for WCCF's child advocacy program. Each of CWAG's nine districts now includes child advocacy as part of their regular agenda. WCCF held their press conference for the release of the 1999 WisKids Count Data Book at the CWAG Milwaukee District meeting.

*Involvement*

The Executive Directors of CWAG and WCCF meet with the Project Director each month to review the work. The Project Director researches issues and develops materials for CWAG members and participates in various project activities. WCCF staff members meet with the Project Director when appropriate to discuss issues. Elderly advocates have participated in several child advocacy events such as Tobacco Free Wisconsin's Kids Day at the Capitol and Intergenerational Unity Day.

*Outcomes*

WCCF's Legislative Coordinator addressed over 3000 elderly persons at the CWAG rally at the State Capitol during the budget process in 1999 to urge support for an increase in the benefits to children of disabled parents, a benefit that was reduced substantially with the advent of welfare reform. The increase in benefits was adopted in October.

The IAP, in collaboration with WCCF, and other agencies has successfully advocated for expanded eligibility for child care benefits under W-2, including the provision of child care subsidies for children 13-18 years old with a disability.

The project has focused on the need for increased access to dental services for children receiving Medicaid. Working with WCCF and the Children's Health Alliance of Wisconsin, the effort paid off as Medicaid reimbursement rates for pediatric dental services were increased for the first time in many years.

*Challenges*

- Some children's groups were reluctant to include a senior advocacy group in their advocacy efforts, assuming it would be an attempt to shift resources to senior's issues, essentially accepting the "greedy old geezer" stereotype.
- Allocating staff resources at WCCF to support the project.

*Lessons Learned*

- There must be a continual flow of information and regular discussions on advocacy strategies between WCCF and CWAG, the principal partners in the project.
- While sought after as volunteers, older people are often overlooked as a source of advocacy and support for children's issues.
- If armed with adequate, accurate information on children's issues, many older people like being included in child advocacy efforts.
- Issues must be chosen carefully — not all lend themselves to intergenerational grassroots work due to the highly technical and specialized nature of the issue.
- There is a growing discontent among people of all ages with political strategies that attempt to pit generation against generation.
- It is possible to reframe some policy debates in a way that considers the needs of people of all ages.

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A Great Idea

Strategies that work from the members of the National Association of Child Advocates

February 2001

Community Mobilization

# Coleman Advocates for Children and Youth's Use of Evaluation and Polling to Secure Funding for Children's Programs


## *Summary*

Coleman Advocates for Children and Youth (Coleman), a NACA member, organized a strategic citywide campaign to persuade San Franciscans to re-authorize the Children's Amendment. In November 2000, the Children's Amendment was re-authorized with an increase from 2.5% to 3% of property taxes to support programs for children, youth and families.

The Children's Amendment renewal campaign, run by volunteers and Coleman employees, consisted of a program evaluation and public opinion poll, among other strategies. The evaluation documented the successes of various children's programs in the city and the large number of children served, lending credibility to the renewal campaign. Poll results further demonstrated to elected officials the growing public support for children's policies and programs and the importance of re-authorizing the Children's Amendment. Moreover, the poll helped develop a successful campaign message to gain public support and momentum.


## *Background*

In 1991, tired of the constant fight with elected officials over funding levels for children and youth programs, Coleman Advocates for Children and Youth created and sponsored the Children's Amendment. This groundbreaking city charter amendment set aside 2.5% of property taxes to support programs for youth, children and families in San Francisco. In the last ten years this landmark provision provided more than $122 million for more than 180 programs such as early childhood-development centers, health services, and non-school hour recreation programs.

To secure re-authorization, Coleman had to show the public the success of the Amendment. The organization decided to evaluate. The evaluation demonstrated that 71,000 children were served by the fund and that the Children's Amendment improved planning and coordination of services in the city. This, coupled with a public opinion poll showing that an overwhelmingly large number of San Franciscans found the city a harder place for children to live than adults, helped garner support from officials that led to re-authorization.

## *Key Elements*

- ✦ Coleman Advocates hired an objective outside evaluator to assess the first nine years of the Children's Amendment.
- ✦ The evaluation assessed program outcomes and funding levels and analyzed data collected from structured interviews with service providers, administrators, and youth program participants.
- ✦ Disseminating the evaluation to elected officials and the public lent tremendous credibility to the renewal campaign.
- ✦ The public opinion poll measured the public's attitudes toward children's funding and related children's issues in individual neighborhoods, helping Coleman aptly phrase the campaign message.
- ✦ Coleman only released favorable poll results. Less favorable results were used to target specific areas the campaign needed to emphasize to get the amendment passed.

## *Planning Required*

- ✦ Extensive planning was required to ensure that adequate resources, staff time, and quality consultants were available for the two-year effort.

*Continued on reverse side*

- ✦ Coleman assessed the internal costs involved for such items as staff time and for external costs for the polling ($20,000) and the evaluation( $35,000) and then secured support from private foundations.
- ✦ The organization took great care in selecting the best evaluators and pollster to ensure credible results.

### *Timeline*

- ✦ Coleman began organizing and strategizing almost two years before re- authorization.
- ✦ The evaluation took 9 months to complete and 3 - 4 months to thoroughly disseminate.
- ✦ The poll was completed 9 months before the referendum.

### *Involvement*

- ✦ Coleman's Executive Director worked extensively with the polling firm to develop questions and with evaluators to ensure an objective report.
- ✦ Coleman went to great pains to find individuals to interview for the poll who were not direct beneficiaries of the Children's Amendment to get an impartial perspective.

### *Outcomes*

- ✦ On November 7, 2000, the referendum, complete with Coleman's requested increase from 2.5% - 3% of the tax allotment, passed by 74%.
- ✦ The combination of a comprehensive evaluation and a positive public opinion poll allowed for a successful renewal campaign.
- ✦ Coleman's efforts helped secure one of the most (if not the most) comprehensive children's services planning structures in the country.
- ✦ San Francisco now must devise a three-year planning cycle for all children's services, with extensive community input, including  hearings in every neighborhood, and a poll conducted by the city controller of residents' experiences with children's services.
- ✦ A services plan for all children's services in the city must be developed, and every city department must be involved.
- ✦ The city now has a new oversight and planning body created for children's services which includes parents.
- ✦ The campaign mobilized child advocates, and formed coalitions, many of which are still active.
- ✦ Many new leaders within the ranks of child advocates emerged.
- ✦ The campaign increased the political and media savvy of many child advocates.

### *Possible Sticky Issues*

- ✦ An organization can receive information from a poll that is not politically helpful and can be damaging to a campaign.
- ✦ Securing funds to cover the high cost of an evaluation and polling by a quality firm can be a challenge.
- ✦ It is important to find pollsters who are familiar with children's issues and who will be accurate and careful.

### *Lessons Learned*

- ✦ It takes significant time to produce a thorough evaluation and poll and to disseminate the information.
- ✦ By starting early, advocates can control the political process.
- ✦ It is essential to have volunteers, especially youth, involved in the whole process, from collecting data to sharing that data with the public.
- ✦ Objective assessments tremendously strengthen the political muscle of child advocates.
- ✦ The process took more staff time than expected.

### *Unanticipated Results*

- ✦ The poll proved to be useful in persuading public officials of the importance of other issues, including recent efforts to provide a universal health-care plan.
- ✦ It further showed parents and children how much all San Franciscans are willing to invest in children's programs.

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Voices FOR AMERICA'S CHILDREN

# A Great Idea

community mobilization

July 2005

## Demonstrating the Value of Arts Education in Schools

**Philadelphia Citizens for Children and Youth**
**Contact:** Bonnie Raines, Youth & Development Director, bonnieraines@pccy.org

*Philadelphia Citizens for Children and Youth (PCCY) created the Picasso Project to financially support art and music instruction in Philadelphia's public schools and generate advocacy for more school funding of the arts. The Picasso Project makes small grants enabling inadequately funded public schools to incorporate an arts education project into the curriculum.*

### Background:

Art and music programs in Philadelphia have been devalued and sacrificed in favor of basic academic subjects in an attempt to raise standardized test scores. Out of 275 schools, 152 have no art program and 120 have no music. In 2001, PCCY issued a report on the academic value of arts and music education, citing research on how art and music programs actually strengthen critical thinking and problem-solving skills, as well as benefit overall academic achievement and school success. After reading the report, two school district administrators approached PCCY to discuss possible solutions. In the fall of 2002, through collaboration with a local family foundation, PCCY launched the Picasso Project, providing small grants to schools to provide for art, music, dance and drama projects, and advocating for more public funding for arts education in schools.

### Key Elements

- **Funding**
  - The project attracts foundations that ordinarily do not fund advocacy efforts, but that are interested in the arts and drawn in by the knowledge that the money will go directly to the classroom.
  - Outreach efforts attract additional funding from individuals. PCCY plans to hold informational "house parties" in the city and suburbs to attract new constituencies. Guests, including current PCCY donors and potential supporters, will hear about the project directly from teachers and students.

**"There are so many rich resources in the city and kids are going through school with no exposure to this." -** Bonnie Raines, Youth & Development Director, Philadelphia Citizens for Children and Youth

- **Grants**
  - PCCY sends an application packet to all area public schools in November. (In coming years, schools will receive posters for advance publicity.) Teachers receive application guidelines, project evaluation criteria, and possible arts organizations with which to partner.
  - Potential projects must be integrated into core academic subjects and have a duration greater than half the school year. Schools must demonstrate how a proposed project would enrich the curriculum.
  - Grants range from $500 to $5000, depending on the projects proposed and current assets.
  - A 15-member Advisory Committee comprised of artists, educators, community leaders, parents, and child advocates supervises the projects. PCCY gathered interested individuals to form the initial Committee, which included PCCY staff and board members. There is no formal rotation of Committee members.
  - The Advisory Committee developed a template for an evaluation outcome report, encompassing factors such as populations served, problems encountered, and the extent to which goals were met. Each grant recipient submits this report at the conclusion of the grant period.

- **Advocacy**
  - Schools receiving grants must also carry out an advocacy activity and report on it in the evaluation outcome report. The Advisory Committee provides schools with a “menu” of possible activities, such as visiting the city council or writing letters to elected officials.
  - A subcommittee meets with elected officials to encourage them to write articles and op-eds about the Picasso Project.
  - In order to raise public awareness and generate publicity, PCCY plans to contact artists, musicians and dancers who have come through the Philadelphia public school system and encourage them to become ambassadors and spokespersons.

## Staff Time

- PCCY developed the project over a 6-month period between the beginning of the year and the fall.
- The busiest time each year is from mid-December, when applications are due, through mid-January, when grant recipients are notified. The Advisory Committee reads over submissions and meets in small groups to score each of the applications.
- The entire Advisory Committee meets four times per year. Three subcommittees—fundraising, publicity/public awareness, and operations—meet as necessary.
- One PCCY staff member spends two days per week on fundraising for the project and administration.
- A member of the Advisory Committee is linked to each school grantee in order to provide support and advice about the project throughout the school year. The member visits the school, oversees the project, and contacts community newspapers and elected officials to generate awareness of the school’s grant.

## Outcomes

- The Picasso Project has raised over $98,000, awarding grants to 30 schools from a total of 70 applicants, and reaching approximately 7,000 children in elementary, middle, and high schools throughout the city.
- PCCY senses an increased awareness among legislators of the inadequacies of public school funding and the importance of arts education.
- One school worked with a city council member who introduced a resolution in council for “Arts Education Day”. After the resolution was adopted, the school brought children to the city council, where they performed a sample from their production of “Annie” and spoke about the value of their experience.

A Great Idea

Strategies that work from the members of the National Association of Child Advocates

April 2002

Community Mobilization

# Children's Alliance of New Hampshire Makes Children's Issues the Bottom Line for Business Leaders


### *Summary*

To illustrate the impact of investments in children on the state economy, the Children's Alliance of New Hampshire commissioned two economists to explore and, if possible, quantify the correlation between children's well-being and the well-being of businesses and communities. The resulting report, *The Bottom Line: Kids Count to New Hampshire's Future,* concluded that investments in children yield high dividends both for businesses and for the state economy. Among other findings, the report found that a 10-percent reduction in child poverty rates would mean a $262 million per year increase in personal income and a $73 million per year benefit to the state. The report was released at a forum of business leaders hosted by the Children's Alliance of New Hampshire.


### *Background*

As the Children's Alliance of New Hampshire reflected on the impact of its *2000 KIDS COUNT Data Book*, it saw a challenge. The book had been well received by child advocates, but it did not reach a significant portion of policymakers uninvolved in child and family issues. To broaden the impact of its work, the organization turned to research highlighting the effectiveness of unlikely messengers. What if the Children's Alliance targeted its 2001 book to a *business audience?* What if the data on child health and well-being were linked to the state economy? Would not a whole new group of opinion leaders then understand the need to make greater investments in children and families?

The Children's Alliance of New Hampshire hired two of the state's leading economists to conduct the study and create a special report. An executive summary was inserted into the state's only business magazine, *Business New Hampshire. The Bottom Line* was presented at a statewide forum, during which representatives from major state-based businesses such as Verizon-NH participated in a panel discussion and took audience questions. The presence of well-known and highly respected business leaders attracted other business people, and added credibility to the forum and to the message that investing in children was essential to their bottom line.

### *Key Elements*

- ✦ The Children's Alliance of New Hampshire hired economists – one a college professor, the other the president of an economic research firm — with excellent reputations and credibility with the business community.
- ✦ Funding for the study came through the KIDS COUNT budget. The organization and the KIDS COUNT Committee worked with the researchers to choose the right indicators, the right methodology, and the right language to convey the intended message.
- ✦ The organization partnered with the state's only business publication, with local Chambers of Commerce, and with the local Public Broadcasting System station.
- ✦ The organization contracted with *Business NH* magazine to run the report's executive summary and to promote the forum. The publication's staff also provided guidance on how best to reach a business audience, allowed one-time use of its mailing list, and contacted leaders to encourage their participation. *Business NH* also helped design and print the invitations, with a similar look to other promotional material and the report's cover.

*Continued on reverse side*

- The organization created a committee of honorary co-chairs that endorsed the event and provided lists of suggested guests.
- Two months before the event, all the participants were confirmed, and logistical details such as the breakfast menu, sponsors' banners and audio-visual equipment were finalized.
- Local Chambers of Commerce inserted a forum flyer into their newsletters.
- At the forum, after a PowerPoint presentation of *The Bottom Line*'s findings, the host of a New Hampshire Public Television news program moderated a discussion among five business leaders. The discussion ranged from the report's implications to the kinds of investments needed to effect change for children.
- News reporters covering the forum were invited to interview business and policy leaders, as well as child advocates.
- The report's executive summary was mailed to 13,000 businesses throughout the state. The full report was sent to leading lawmakers and made available at no cost on the organization's website.

### *Staff Time*

- The project complemented the staff's regular responsibilities: from its KIDS COUNT work, to media and communications efforts, to organizing, to awareness building.
- Children's Alliance staff and board members put a significant amount of time and energy into the project, from selecting the report's indicators to designing the forum's guest list.
- For the six weeks before the event, one full-time staff member spent all of her time planning the forum, coordinating the myriad details with the business magazine, the printer, the facility, and the participants.

### *Problems*

- A decision was made to coordinate the look of the executive summary and the full report, and the similar covers proved confusing. In the future, the Children's Alliance will make separate pieces complement, but not mimic, one another.
- The organization arranged for a computer expert to webcast the event. However, technical problems arose that morning and the webcast failed. Lesson learned? Arrange for backup equipment.
- In an effort to respect attendees time demands, the forum was held from 7:30-9:00 a.m. Although the hour ensured a good business turnout, too little time was allotted for an extended question-and-answer period.

### *Outcomes*

- The report received a tremendous amount of media coverage, elevating the importance of children's issues, as well as awareness about the organization. In many cases, the report received "dual coverage" in both the news and the business section of newspapers.
- The report and forum conveyed to the business community the importance of investing in children.
- Solid relationships were built between the business and child advocacy communities.
- The organization garnered ideas from business leaders on how to effect change for children.
- The project was a foundation for further partnerships between the organization and business community. That foundation paid off in the subsequent legislative session when business leaders spoke on behalf of early learning legislation.

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# Chapter 5: Legislative Advocacy

*Legislative Advocacy: Influencing the drafting and passage of legislation*

Legislative advocacy is likely to be a central tool in your organization's work to improve the lives of children. You may be working to pass or amend laws that will help children, or to block the passage of legislation which could be harmful to children. In general, legislative advocacy can take many forms, including tracking legislation and reporting on it, drafting legislation or developing position statements. It can also include publishing research reports and policy analyses, bringing legislators to see a program first-hand, testifying at public hearings, lobbying individual legislators or the governor, asking your network of coalition partners and community members to speak out on an issue, developing a web site that lets people send emails directly to the legislators on your issues, conducting polls to document public support for your proposal and organizing a lobby day or call-in day — legislative advocacy is limited only by your creativity. The following guidelines, culled from Voices member materials[22] and the work of leading national organizations, can help improve your effectiveness.

***The Basics***

**Know the rules.** Legislative advocacy takes many forms and in some cases may be considered lobbying. Nonprofit organizations with are 501(c)(3) tax status[23] are allowed to lobby, but they are subject to specific IRS rules about what constitutes lobbying and about how much they can lobby. Child advocates who engage in legislative advocacy need to become familiar with these rules so that they know when their advocacy activities qualify as lobbying. *Being a Player,* by the Alliance for Justice, is a very useful handbook on the lobbying restrictions on nonprofits.[24] Often, foundations that fund 501(c)(3)s will include language in their grants that limits an organization's ability to lobby using their funds. In addition, many states require individuals who lobby to register as lobbyists; child advocates who lobby regularly should be familiar with their state's requirements. Nevertheless, nonprofit organizations can lobby, and should not be afraid to acknowledge that they do so.

Under the right circumstances, some advocacy organizations consider starting a 501(c)(4). This kind of organization does not enjoy tax exempt status and cannot

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[22]Many thanks to the Arkansas Advocates for Children and Families, the Children's Advocacy Institute (CA), DC Action for Children, Advocates for Children and Youth (MD) and the Oklahoma Institute for Child Advocacy, which provided the materials from which these tips were synthesized.

23 Public charities can qualify for 501(c) (3) status by applying to the IRS; this allows donors to make their contributions tax deductible. All Voices members are 501(c) (3)s.

24 Harmon, Gail, Jessica Ladd, and Eleanor Evans. Being a Player: a Guide to the IRS Lobbying Regulations for Advocacy Charities. Alliance for Justice, 1995., can be ordered at www.afj.org.

accept private foundation funds, but is free to engage in unlimited lobbying activities. Learn more about 501(c)(4)'s in Voices' May 2005 *A Great Idea!* edition.

**Know your state's legislative calendar and process.** While most child advocates know the basics — when the legislative session starts, by what date bills must be filed, how bills move through the legislative process — some of the more detailed aspects of the legislative process can be very useful. For example:

- When does the process of developing the budget actually begin in administrative agencies? You will want to meet with agency staff to make your recommendations early in the process. Your state agencies may start to develop their budgets as soon as the last legislative session ends,

- Can your legislative committees demand that state agencies produce data and information? If so, you may want to work with a friendly legislator to set up a hearing that will allow you access to information you otherwise cannot obtain.

- Do particular legislative leaders have the authority to appoint people to commissions or to oversee bodies that regulate children's programs? You may want to suggest child advocates who should be appointed — members of the community affected, or people with particular expertise in the topic who are also strong voices for children.

**Work year-round.** Your state legislature may meet for only a portion of the year, or every other year, but you can stay ahead of the game by planning and preparing year-round. Be aware, too, that the decision-making process for many issues, especially major budget decisions, may begin before your state's official legislative session. And in states with biennial legislatures, oversight committees often meet between legislative sessions.

**Get to know the players and build relationships.** Most child advocates believe that developing relationships with lawmakers is a key part of legislative advocacy. Build these relationships throughout the year, so that when your legislative session starts, elected officials will already know who you are and what you support. In general try to:

- Become familiar with your representatives and (if they have them) their staff.
- Try to identify the following in your legislature:
  - *Key Players* – Look for legislators who are in a position to move legislation through the legislative process, perhaps because they chair a key committee. Learn about the wider interests, politics, and leadership positions of any key legislators, so you have a context for negotiation.

  - *Supporters* – Learn who has been supportive of your organization's agenda in the past and find out which legislators are willing to dedicate time and energy to it now. Look especially for one or two key legislators with whom you can work most closely. Particularly if you hope to propose legislation, you'll need one or more legislators you can count on to introduce and support your bill. For example, Voices' member Oklahoma Institute for Child Advocacy successfully passed a bill to improve the health and nutrition of children in their state in part by partnering with a state senator and a member of the House — both of whom had track records of supporting children's issues.
  - *Opponents* – It is important to determine who has stood in opposition on your priority issues. Anticipating how they will counter your arguments will enable you to more effectively defend and advocate for your position.
  - *Influential Staff* – Get to know the staff of legislators and legislative committees. Since legislators are increasingly dependent on their staff for information about specific policy issues, such individuals are in key positions to shape policy and may also be a good point of access when introducing legislation. Also, staff may stay in place even as new legislators are elected.
- Reach out to your governor and agency heads. While most of your lobbying efforts may involve your legislature, it is also important to educate and involve your governor's office and administrative agency heads.
  - *Governor* – At a minimum, you will need the governor to sign any positive legislation that may be passed or veto any harmful legislation that you may work to block. Additionally, an active and involved governor can work wonders in promoting key legislation and new initiatives. For example, Voices' member organization Children's Action Alliance in Arizona capitalized on its governor's commitment to reform the state's child protective services and successfully advocated for more resources for the system and for critical policy changes.
  - *Agencies* – Legislators will often check a proposal you offer with the relevant agency head, to see if it is desirable and feasible. So you are better off if you know, in advance, what kind of reception the legislators will receive and prepare them accordingly. Often the agency head will be grateful to your organization for raising an issue — even if they cannot support it in public. Even when they oppose your position, knowing what arguments they will raise will help you to prepare to effectively counter such opposition.
  - *Staff* – Just like with legislators, staff in the executive branch play pivotal roles in their respective offices. If there is a specific executive staff person who specializes in children's issues, or staff

people dedicated to human services or other related areas, try to build a relationship with these staffers.

Building relationships with elected officials has never been easy, but now that many states have strict term limits, it is both more important and more difficult, because you may need to work with brand-new legislators who are completely unfamiliar with your organization or your issues. Consider getting a head start on educating them. (See below for more information on how to do this).

**Support children, not political parties.** As you are working to build relationships with elected officials keep in mind that most child advocates, whether they come from states and communities dominated by one political party or divided down party lines, feel that it is very important to be nonpartisan and to work with legislators from both parties. In many jurisdictions, legislation may be more likely to succeed if it has sponsors from both parties. As you are working to establish contacts with officials from both sides of the aisle, keep in mind that your messages should be tailored to the specific individual you are trying to reach. Lawmakers come from a variety of backgrounds and political persuasions so it is not enough to simply say the same thing to everyone. Voices' North Carolina member, Action for Children, has put together a summary of the differences between the two political poles that is helpful to use when developing messages[25].

**Know your resources.** Many child advocates feel intimidated or overwhelmed by the task of advocating to staff and legislators. There are supports available to help. Advocates may be able to collaborate with analysts who are more sophisticated about the issue but not knowledgeable about or capable of advocacy; these partners might include legislative staff who are asked by legislators to work with you, or, in the case of budget issues for example, university professors who analyze state fiscal matters. Additionally, the Voices network is a great resource, so you might want to consider consulting your colleague organizations. For example, Voices' Kansas City member, Partnership for Children, hosts legislative advocacy courses that are designed to help advocates gain an enriched understanding of both the state and federal level policymaking processes. In addition, in about half the states, there are State Fiscal Analysis Initiative (SFAI) groups (of which a number are Voices members) that undertake state budget analysis and advocacy. Voices can facilitate these connections for members of the Voices network.

***Building on the Basics***

**Educate legislators.** A key element in building relationships with elected officials is establishing your organization as a knowledgeable and trusted voice on children's issues. Think long-term and begin efforts to try to educate legislators about your organization and its agenda before the legislative session begins. For example:

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[25] Solari, Anthony. "How to Adapt Your Advocacy Message." North Carolina Partnership for Children. 2006. North Carolina Partnership for Children. 9 Nov. 2006 http://www.ncsmartstart.org/conference/Handouts06/242b.doc .

- You may want to prepare and personally deliver "briefing books" for legislators. These could include information about:
    - the status of children in your state
    - your organization
    - a list of your members or supporters
    - your legislative agenda for the year
    - reports or studies that support your agenda
    - polling results that show popular support for the agenda you are pursuing
    - press clips that show media attention to the issues of concern to you and that demonstrate your organization's capacity to work with the media
- Consider compiling a children's budget agenda — your budget proposal —complete with legislative priorities for children and families. This not only raises awareness among legislators about children's issues but works to increase the visibility of your organization. Many child advocacy organizations hold legislative breakfasts at which they release their legislative agenda.
- Voices for Children in Nebraska begins even before the legislators are elected, by having key volunteers conduct surveys of each legislative candidate's positions using materials that also educate the candidate about children's issues.
- To help win support for your issues, you may want to offer to take legislators on a "reality tour", showing examples of the problems that need to be addressed, or of the positive results of programs that need continued or increased legislative support.
- Develop legislative fact sheets that are targeted to each legislator's district. For example, the Association for the Children of New Jersey developed fact sheets for each legislator that showed how many people in a legislator's district would benefit from a state earned income tax credit. Kentucky Youth Advocates put information by legislative district up on their web site, so that network members could share data with their legislators about the impact of a state earned income tax credit in their districts.

If you consistently provide good information, legislators will turn to you as a resource even if they do not share your views, because they will know that they can rely upon your data.

**Target your advocacy**.

- **To the key players**—Once you have figured out who really makes the decisions, target your advocacy work to them. In most states, a few players — the governor, the leaders of the two chambers, perhaps a few key committee chairs — control many of the big decisions. When key legislation is hammered out or the final budget packages are negotiated, they are the ones who will be in the room. In some states, children's legislation will succeed only if it is supported by legislators from many areas of the state — for example, in areas where there is a significant divide between perceived urban and rural issues. In those states, you will want to be able to demonstrate how important this issue is in legislative districts across the state.

- **To strong proponents**—Once you have a legislative "champion"—someone who is willing to introduce and move your legislation — support them. Give him or her the information he or she needs, draft legislation, provide witnesses for hearings and press events, and share information regularly. If you do much of the legwork, it will be easier for the legislator to move the legislation, and he or she will be more willing to sponsor future legislation.

### *Using the Basics*

**Define your goals.** Try to define exactly what in your state's law you want changed. Sometimes it is tempting to include everything that you would like to see changed in a program, but having clearly defined goals usually makes it easier to get legislation passed. Keep in mind that legislators and legislative staff have many priorities, while you, as a child advocate, have a very specific focus. If you can come to the table with clearly defined, workable suggestions for legislative change, you will vastly improve your chances of having an impact. For more on defining your goals, see Chapter 1: Setting an Advocacy Agenda.

**Be strategic.** Once you have identified your goal, you need to develop a strategy to move it through the legislative process. As you're doing so, be sure to identify a few key elements:

- Figure out who you need to reach, and what you can do to make them adopt your position or proposal. What pressures do those targets respond to, and what message frame is likely to sway their thinking? For more, see Chapter 2: Strategic Communications.
- Figure out a realistic timeline; often big legislative advocacy campaigns take years to come to fruition. If you think it may take several years to win passage of your legislation, let your allies know, so that they won't be discouraged.
- Think ahead so that you know where you may be asked to compromise, and what is acceptable to you.
- Identify the steps that you need to take to implement your strategy, and secure the resources you need to do so. The implementation of your legislative strategy may include anything from meetings with the governor to conducting a poll or a study, but nearly every child advocacy legislative campaign will include some core components:
    - remaining in step with progressing legislation

- producing materials that make the case for the legislative proposal
- advocacy and lobbying by organization staff, media advocacy
- coalition work
- grassroots mobilization.

In general, remember that each activity of your strategy should be selected with a particular goal in mind.

**Track and analyze relevant legislation.** When your legislature is in session, make sure you know what bills are being proposed that would affect your priority areas and analyze the governor's or mayor's budget as it affects programs and services for children and families. If they seem likely to move ahead, make sure you understand the consequences of each piece of legislation, so you can decide whether to take positions on them. It is important to carefully read bills that are clearly harmful as well as bills that appear to be innocuous or even generally good, because even one provision can be problematic. When this is the case, you will need to decide whether or how to take a position on the bill.

**Provide data and research-based information that supports your position.** Most child advocacy organizations find that in order to be effective legislative advocates, they need to be recognized as knowledgeable, nonpartisan, honest, and reliable about the problems being addressed and solutions being proposed. If you plan to propose or support legislation, be prepared to explain and defend it. While it is important to show that there is a need for the legislation, be sure that you can also show that your proposal will meet the need (or, if you are suggesting an innovative, untested approach, be up-front about this and include an evaluation component). It is also important to be able to offer a realistic assessment of the cost and be able to identify possible sources of funding for the proposal.

**Provide information in accessible formats**. Once you have identified the key pieces of information that you think policymakers need, prepare materials that convey that information clearly and effectively. Since few policymakers will read lengthy reports, provide information in several formats. Develop longer reports that tell the full story and convey your thoroughness, as well as shorter pieces that provide the key information quickly and talking points — one-pagers that you or a legislator can use to refer to during a meeting.

**Use many strategies to reach out to legislators.** Effective child advocates use every possible tool to make their voices heard. Some of the common approaches include:

- **Personal visits** —The strongest way to spread your message as an organization is generally face-to-face. Whenever possible, schedule personal meetings with legislators. Be sure to prepare clear and concise written materials in advance, so everyone leaves the meeting with a clear understanding of exactly what problem needs to be solved, and what change in the law you are seeking. At a minimum, you will probably want to have a one-pager that describes your organization and a one-pager that describes the particular legislative change you are seeking. With your written materials providing the details, you can then focus on being impassioned and persuasive (but brief and to the point) in your oral presentations. Mention how many constituents your organization represents. You may want to bring some of your network or coalition partners with you. For example, if lobbying for improved health care coverage for children, a good team might be a member of your organization, a concerned health care administrator and the parent of a disabled child who was unable to afford needed treatment. You will want to use these visits not only to convince the legislator but also to gather information about what other legislators are thinking, who else you should talk to, what proposals are being floated, and what you should do to persuade key legislators. Regardless of the outcome of the meeting, send a follow-up note, thanking the legislator and reinforcing your message.

- **Draft legislation** — If you have a champion who is willing to introduce your legislation, you will probably want to draft the legislative language to ensure that it does exactly what you want. Most state legislatures have staff who can turn draft language into the proper format for a bill, and your champion will probably ask them to revise your work. Make sure that your meaning is not distorted in the process.

- **Offer testimony** — If you are working closely with a legislator, or have established a reputation for expertise, you may get the opportunity to give oral testimony at a legislative hearing, and/or submit written testimony into the legislative record. This is an important chance to make your case persuasively, and perhaps to gain support for your positions.

- **Oral testimony** — If your organization is invited to testify, consider asking whether you can also bring members of the community who support your position. Identify two or three of your most persuasive network participants (with a mix of perspectives and demographics), and ask for a time allotment for each. Typically, there is a strict time limit per speaker, such as five minutes or less. Your speakers should prepare and practice comments in advance, carefully observing the time limit. Bring along written copies of the comments as well, observing any rules about paper size, spacing, etc. Speakers should arrive early and be prepared to wait, so ask your speakers to plan accordingly. Once the preparation and planning is done, however, each speaker should focus on only one thing: *You have an important message, which needs to be heard. Speak your message plainly and from the heart, and you will do fine.*

- **Written testimony** — In some jurisdictions, written testimony is relied upon by staff and legislators, while in other jurisdictions it is ignored.

Check around in your state or locality to see whether it is worthwhile for you to produce written testimony. Written testimony may be included with oral testimony, or accepted on its own. While oral testimony is generally by specific invitation, written testimony may sometimes be accepted from the public at large. Opportunities to offer written testimony are typically announced in a state's legislative record, legal or leading newspaper, and/or state web site. Typically, there are strict rules about length, paper size, spacing, and other details, so be sure to follow them scrupulously. You will want to be brief, clear, and well-reasoned, but also passionate and persuasive. Both your organization and your network can use this tool, so you may want to work with individual network members to develop effective written testimony.

**Work with the media.** Legislators care about how they are presented in the media. They pay attention to issues that get press attention and they are more likely to respond favorably to your concerns if those concerns appear to draw widespread attention. Chapter 2 discusses working with the media in depth, but there are some additional points to consider when you work with the media as part of your legislative advocacy efforts.

- **Make sure your legislator knows of the media coverage you have generated.** This increases the attention he or she will pay to that issue and to your organization the next time you approach him or her. If you give a legislator a briefing book to introduce your organization and children's issues, include relevant press coverage and highlight references to your organization. If you secure important press coverage of your issue during the legislative session, send it with a cover note or bring it by the office.

- **Look for opportunities to draw press attention to the legislator.** If the legislator is an ally, consider holding an event, such as a visit to a program site, and invite the press. Get your legislator to use the event to speak out in favor of your agenda item. If the legislator is opposing your position, consider how you can use the media to pressure him or her. For example, Advocates for Children and Youth (ACY), in Maryland, needed to pressure a legislator who generally supported their positions but who was refusing to support major educational legislation on the grounds that it was irresponsible to support it without knowing where the money would come from. ACY ran a paid editorial (an ad) that said that this key legislator was the person who could pass this popular legislation; while he was unhappy at being put on the spot publicly, he did move the legislation.

**Use your coalitions.** Coalition support, which is discussed in Chapter 3 of this *Primer*, is often crucial to the effectiveness of your legislative work. By working with other groups and individuals to support or oppose specific legislation, you dramatically increase your strength. Legislators are more likely to listen and to support your group's position if you can show that others support it — especially groups that have high credibility and visibility, and groups within the legislator's constituency.

Effective coalition building may sometimes breed unlikely allies — partnerships on a particular issue between two or more organizations that fundamentally disagree on other issues. Improved child support enforcement, for example, may be favored by progressive groups because it decreases child poverty, while conservative groups appreciate that it emphasizes parental responsibility and decreases dependence on government benefits.

When working with groups whose legislative goals only partially overlap your own organizational mission, it is essential to keep a clear focus on your goals. If you think the negatives outweigh the positives (for example, if you think your group's credibility would be undermined by working with a group that is perceived as hostile on related issues), you can tactfully decline to be involved in joint initiatives. But if you think working together will help you gain a broader base of influence, you can work together on shared goals, while agreeing to disagree on other issues.

Beyond official coalition partners, there are at least four other important powerful voices you should consider involving:

- Legislators who may have had personal experiences with your area of concern may be willing to champion or support your proposals even when they do not generally support children's programs. These may be some of the best "unlikely allies."
- Campaign donors who ask the legislator to support your position also will be likely to at least be heard.
- Business leaders, because of the respect they command in the legislature, are important allies. For example, Children's Alliance of New Hampshire wanted to catapult child and family issues into the spotlight. To do this they knew they had to increase support from the business community. Therefore, they decided to document the link between child well-being and the economy in order to garner the business community's support for investment in child and family programs. The Children's Alliance in Washington State hired economists to produce a report that was presented at a forum for community business leaders and mailed to businesses throughout the state. The project successfully garnered support from the business community. In subsequent legislative sessions, business leaders spoke on behalf of child and family legislation.
- Professionals from related fields are a ready source of data and expert testimony regarding your issues. Such individuals might also have valuable connections to other community leaders.

**Involve your network.** Using your expertise, your access to the media, and your coalition partners are all important strategies, but your greatest strength may be in your network of community members. Network members can be asked to make phone calls, write letters or emails, meet with legislators, participate in public events, or engage in other creative strategies to draw attention both to your issue and to its popular support.

Chapter 4 on Community Mobilization reviews ways to reach out to your network and get them involved. Keep in mind, as you try to involve your network of supporters, that you want to give them the tools they need to be effective — your organization's network members will be best able to influence your state's legislative process if they know how the process works, who the players are, and when and how citizens may participate. Many child advocacy organizations offer community advocacy trainings to their networks. When organizing such trainings to prepare community members to undertake legislative advocacy, it is helpful to offer them general information on how a bill becomes a law, training on how to call, write or meet with a legislator, and simulated opportunities to practice these skills.

You will also want to make sure that they have clear, brief fact sheets and materials to leave with the legislator if they are conducting lobbying visits. You should consider developing a tip sheet that your network can refer to before undertaking these activities. Some of the points that you may want to include in your tip sheet include:

- Keep what you want to say simple;
- Present the issue the way you want others to see it—frame the issue for the legislator;
- Practice how you will present it;
- Always be honest;
- If you are asked a question you can't answer, offer to find out the answer and get back to them (and then follow up!);
- Ask whether the legislator will support your position, but don't press for a commitment the first time;
- If the legislator won't commit to your position, ask what his or her concerns are so that you can learn whether there is information that you should provide to help persuade him or her;
- Ask the legislator what he or she can tell you about your agenda item—who else you should speak to, what other legislators are considering, and what suggestions he or she has for you;
- Be polite and positive; don't threaten or insult the policymaker or staff;
- Do not "write off" any policymaker.

In order to engage your network in your advocacy, you will want to have a system of regular communications with them that keeps them up to date on what is happening and that allows you to make clear specific requests of your network. Many child advocacy organizations offer email and fax alerts to their networks to ensure that their networks can be reached promptly when needed.

When you ask them to speak up, sometimes you will want your network to identify their connection with you, to bolster the legislators' impression of your organization as powerful and widespread; sometimes you will want them to only identify themselves as constituents. In every case, however, they should clearly state what they want the legislator to do and why.

- **Phone calls to legislators.** Never underestimate the power of phone calls, especially from individual constituents to their local representatives. Voices member organizations report that as few as 10 to 15 phone calls or letters may sway a state legislator's vote, particularly if the issue is controversial or the legislator undecided. In larger states where legislators have staff, calls are typically taken by staff members that tally the constituent positions and report to the legislator. For this reason, callers need not insist on speaking to the legislator, but should simply: 1) identify themselves by name and as a constituent, and 2) state whether they support or oppose a proposed bill. The caller may then also, if desired, give a brief explanation or personal example of why the issue is so important.

- **Letters and e-mail.** Regular and e-mail letters are good ways for individual network members to register positions and garner support. In states with legislative staff, letters, like phone calls, will be summarized and tallied for the legislator — and some may be read by the legislator personally. It is helpful to provide your network with a sample letter, but also to encourage people to adapt the letter and/or add brief personal examples, if possible. Be sure to include, in any request or alert to your network, full contact information for legislators, as well as information on which legislators serve which geographic region. It is also helpful to include specific information about which key contacts are doing what on specific pending legislation. For example, if a bill is about to be marked up by a Committee, in your alert you could give the names and contact information for the Committee members. One tool that some child advocacy organizations are using is a web site that individuals can use to send email to their legislators — they can use a preformatted email text or adapt it, and the web site sends it directly to their representatives. The organizations include links to the site in their email alerts.

- Some good examples of alerts can be found on the Voices' web site (www.voices.org) as well as Maryland's Advocate's for Children and Youth (www.acy.org) and North Carolina's Action for Children (www.ncchild.org/covhome.htm). Voices for America's Children has partnered with a company that provides such a service to give its members to utilize this powerful tool at a reduced rate. Contact the Voices office for further information.

- **Attending or speaking at hearings.** You may want to bring your network to legislative events. Louisiana member Agenda for Children brought a busload of New Orleans housing residents to a hearing on the implementation of welfare reform in the state capitol, over an hour away. Legislators were so impressed that they began to schedule some hearings in New Orleans to facilitate attendance. While the observers were not supposed to speak, legislators were known on occasion to refer questions to them to figure out, for example, how a welfare payment really is calculated. If you do bring network members, make sure they can be identified as such. Signs are usually prohibited, but buttons work well — or have them all carry pads and folders with the name of your organization written prominently across the back.

- If possible, you may want to have network members speak at hearings or public events. Five minutes from a person impacted by the policy who describes how the proposed policy change would help them can often be far more effective than any number of experts. In one Capitol Hill hearing about developing services for youth graduating out of foster care, a legislator asked a young speaker what services were the top priority, since resources were limited. The youth replied “Which would you rather have your child have, a home or health care?” The final bill included at least seed money for a full range of services. But make sure that your witnesses cannot be perceived as irresponsible, or having failed to do the best they could — all too often that feeds into negative stereotypes or message frames about why people need and use these programs.

- **Public rallies and events.** Well-designed public events can draw media attention to your issue — and that increases legislator interest. Bringing children to a rally about children will often increase media exposure, as it gives the media a chance for great pictures. As described above in Chapter 2, Voices member Coleman Advocates for Children and Youth has developed a Baby Brigade of moms and children who march down to City Hall, with clowns, balloons, and entertainers. At City Hall, various parents who are members of Coleman’s network speak out about their concerns. This event has become so highly visible that various city legislators feel compelled to come and speak to the rally and promise specific legislation. Be creative in these events. Once, when Voices’ member Arkansas Advocates for Children learned that their state legislature planned to address a budget shortfall by taking money from Medicaid funding, the group orchestrated events in nearly every legislator’s district to draw attention to the importance of Medicaid. The events featured speakers from statewide health advocacy organizations and direct service groups and gave attendees the opportunity to sign their name and city on a banner which was displayed on the steps of the Capitol just before the final vote took place. In general, make sure that the event is clearly tied to your specific policy concern.

*Successful? The work isn't over*

**Say thank you—publicly!** Everyone likes to be appreciated, but elected officials need to be appreciated in order to win reelection. When your legislation has passed, thank your legislative champion publicly. You may also want to make sure that as legislation moves through the legislature, you thank the key people who have moved it along, and let your network know to do so as well.

**Follow up on implementation.** Once legislation has passed, legislators may not hear anything more about it. It is your role to track the implementation, and to let legislators know how it is going. If it is working well, they will want to work with you again to further help children. If it needs modification, your organization may be the only voice letting them know. And if the program is slow getting off the ground due to administrative delay, one of the best ways to move it along is to ask the legislators who got it enacted to lend a hand.

**Evaluation.** It is helpful to assess your work both as an ongoing part of your advocacy efforts and after the completion of a measurable timeframe. How closely have you followed your legislative strategy? What has worked and what hasn't — and how will this impact future efforts? What new relationships have been created that should continue to be nurtured? What has actually been accomplished? Such questions will position your organization to be more effective in future legislative advocacy efforts (see Chapter 10 for more information on advocacy evaluation).

# Chapter 6: Electoral Advocacy

***Electoral Advocacy:*** *Raising the visibility of a particular issue, such as the needs of children, youth, and families, during electoral campaigns.*

An election year provides advocacy organizations with an opportunity to raise the visibility of the needs of children, youth, and families. Electoral advocacy is a powerful strategy that can encompass a broad range of actions, from reaching the candidates through the public to developing a candidate briefing book. Child advocates can get involved in this process on all levels, from city council elections to congressional elections. Although federal law places certain limitations on the electoral advocacy of nonprofit organizations, there is a wide range of opportunities open to them within those constraints.

This chapter is a brief overview of electoral advocacy. For more detailed information check out Voices' *Electoral Advocacy Toolkit 2005* located on our webpage at www.voices.org. This chapter helps to explain how federal law applies to 501(c)(3) nonprofit organizations conducting electoral advocacy. However, it should only serve as a guide for your efforts – the chapter is not legal advice. Your organization may want to contact a lawyer before starting an electoral advocacy campaign.

### *Federal Law*

Before conducting an electoral advocacy campaign, it is crucial for nonprofit organizations to understand the laws that govern such activity. The Internal Revenue Code (IRC) and its accompanying regulations adopted by the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) define the legal requirements for 501(c)(3) charities and other nonprofit organizations conducting electoral advocacy at any level – federal, state, or local. The primary federal election law, the Federal Election Campaign Act (FECA), and the accompanying regulations adopted by the Federal Election Commission (FEC) govern certain election activities related to campaigns for federal office – United States President, Vice President, Senator, and Representative. Election laws at the state and, in some cases, local levels govern activities related to all state and local races.

### *Electoral Advocacy Strategies*

Consistently, polls demonstrate that U.S. voters rank children's issues high among their political priorities. Yet when child advocates ask politicians to support children's measures, all too often they hear that other policy goals are more important, from financing roads to cutting taxes. Elections offer child advocates an opportunity to focus political attention on children's issues and to bring popular opinion to bear on policy makers.

Electoral advocacy is all about increasing awareness. It is your job to make the public, the media, and the candidates see how important children's issues are and to show them what they can do to improve child well-being. Your main goals should be to:

- **Educate candidates about children's issues** so that they are better prepared to act if they are elected.
- **Motivate candidates to commit to specific activities** that will promote children's well-being, although you cannot ask them to sign any sort of pledge.
- **Direct public attention to children's issues** that may not receive attention at other times of the year.
- **Draw public attention to the positions of the candidates** on these issues so that voters may make informed decisions; however 501(c)(3) organizations should not suggest to voters which of the candidates have a better position on children's issues.
- **Educate candidates about your organization** so that they will respond to you when you approach them later about legislative issues.

Equally important to educating candidates is educating the public to create an informed voter base. Your target audience might include persons involved in the political process in your state, such as community leaders, regular voters and other individuals who have the candidate's attention. Your target audience may also include parents and the communities most affected by the issues you work on. If your target audience understands and prioritizes children's issues, then candidates will too.

Electoral advocacy encompasses a broad array of activities. Following are some of the strategies available and the laws that govern their usage. There is much more detailed information on each of these strategies, including more legal information, is available in the Electoral Advocacy Strategy section of Voices' toolkit.

***Voting Records and Legislative Scorecards:***

Voting records provide a broad-ranging list of bills and show how elected officials voted on each bill. Scorecards take voting records one step further and provide a rating for how well each legislator's votes compare to the advocacy organization's preferred position.

Scorecards can be released to the organization's membership ONLY. Voting records can be released to both the membership and the general public. Scorecards (only released to members) can focus on a few issues important to your organization. However, a voting record (released to the general public) must address a broad range of issues. Both reports must include all legislators from your organization's state or region served, not exclusively the candidates running for office.

Although the IRS has recognized the value of voting records and scorecards to a 501(c)(3)'s legitimate education and advocacy activities, 501(c)(3)s must not use voting records and scorecards to attempt to intervene in elections. For this reason, the IRS has said that a 501(c)(3)'s release of voting records and scorecards should not be "timed to coincide with an election." Practically, that means that any voting record or scorecard that you produce in an election year should either be separated by a number of months from the election or released at the same time of year that you always release a similar voting record or scorecard, even in non-election years.

For an example see Child Advocates' Use of Legislative Report Cards.

***Voter Polls:***

Voter polls allow you to connect your message to issues that your target audience already finds important. Polls also demonstrate to candidates that children's issues are important issues to voters, specifically, voters in their districts. However, because the information would have value to a campaign, charities cannot give polling results to candidates except as part of a general release of this information to the public.

***Candidate Briefings:***

Nonprofit organizations can visit, call, or send materials to candidates addressing their issues of concern. Charities should offer to provide all candidates with the same research materials. It is illegal to provide one candidate with issue research without making it available to all candidates.

An issue briefing can attempt to persuade a candidate to lean a certain way on an issue, but the organization should not publicize the names of candidates that pledge or refuse to pledge their support.

Note that if the candidate is an incumbent, the communication would be considered lobbying if the materials address a view on a specific legislative proposal. If no reference to legislation is made, then lobbying has not occurred.

Colorado Children's Campaign, a Voices member, holds candidate briefings for Gubernatorial, State Attorney General, and State Legislature candidates. This practice, begun in 1998, paid off when a new Governor-elect announced that child health would be a top priority during his administration. The Governor went on to sign into law several bills that increased health insurance coverage for low-income children.

***Candidate Questionnaires:***

Candidate questionnaires are a great avenue to gauge candidate support for children's issues and to allow the public to differentiate between candidates. However, federal regulations only allow nonprofit organizations to impartially educate voters with their questionnaires. Therefore, your questionnaire should ask questions concerning a broad range of issues. Questions should be worded in a non-biased way that does not suggest the correct answer. Your organization must provide the questionnaire to all candidates. When publishing the responses, make sure that all candidates are treated equally. Don't present the responses in a way that would indicate favoritism and don't edit the responses in a way that could be seen as mischaracterizing a candidate's response. Only questionnaires that follow all these rules can be distributed to the general public.

***Candidate Forums:***

Forums encourage the media and members of the community to discuss relevant issues with candidates. This in turn, encourages candidates to educate themselves on children's issues and to take those issues seriously. 501(c)(3) organizations sponsoring a candidate forum should take steps to ensure an unbiased event, such as:

- Inviting all candidates for an office (or at least all of those that meet some objective standard of being a viable or credible candidate).
- Having an independent panel prepare questions on topics that cover a broad range of issues.
- Providing each candidate with an equal opportunity to present his or her views.
- Finding a neutral moderator to run the forum in an unbiased manner.

Oklahoma Institute for Child Advocacy gathers a panel of Oklahomans from diverse backgrounds to ask the gubernatorial candidates questions relevant to their life experience. This panel provides the candidates a better understanding of the issues facing a full range of societal needs. (Remember that the questions need to be diverse and not designed to indicate support or opposition to a candidate.)

***Voter Registration:***

Voter registration drives are about registering qualified individuals to vote. Voter registration involves contacting individuals by phone or by another individualized means to assist registration. Federal regulations allow nonprofit organizations to operate a nonpartisan voter registration drive, but this campaign must be designed solely to educate the public about the importance of voting. The voter registration campaign is strictly prohibited from presenting a biased opinion or information for or against any candidate or party. Issue advocacy can be mentioned, but only if the presentation of the issue does not favor a candidate or a political party. (Avoid focusing on particular issues on which the candidates or parties are publicly divided.)

The geographic locations in which a 501(c)(3) chooses to run a voter registration drive must be nonpartisan as well. Targeted populations can include underrepresented groups (such as people who are homeless, low-income, or members of an underrepresented minority) or people your organization serves (such as members, donors, clients, or people who live in your area). 501(c)(3) voter registration must not target people who belong to a certain political party or particular electoral districts selected because the 501(c)(3) supports or opposes the policy positions of the incumbent representing that district.

Arkansas Advocates for Children and Families, conducted a campaign in 87 child care centers across Arkansas, which targeted mothers with young children. The campaign was very successful—50 parents registered and over 170 parents pledged to vote.

***Early Voting & Absentee Ballot Initiatives:***

Many voters are unable to vote in their precincts on Election Day. Nonprofit organizations may choose to focus on assisting voters with obtaining absentee ballots, publicize early voting locations or provide rides to the polls on Election Day to increase voter turnout. In most states voters can obtain an absentee ballot by contacting their county or city election official. Many jurisdictions have early voting sites the week before the official Election Day. State laws on absentee ballots and early voting vary widely, so check your state law before developing an absentee or early voting strategy. Also, review the targeting guidelines in the voter registration for more details on targeting.

Voices' Arizona member, Children's Action Alliance (CAA), includes an early ballot request form with its voter education materials. In 2000, CAA mailed its voter education materials to a group of its members. After the mailing, CAA received a significant number of phone calls regarding how to obtain early ballots.

***Get Out the Vote:***

Get Out the Vote (GOTV) campaigns are last-minute drives to encourage registered voters to turn out at the polls on election day. The goal of GOTV campaigns is to encourage voting and overcome voter apathy. Therefore, your GOTV message must stick to broad campaign issues, nothing that will show support or opposition for any candidate. When choosing whom to target for your GOTV campaign remember to follow the targeting guidelines in the voter registration section.

***Campaign Follow-up:***

The passage of Election Day does not signal the end of your advocacy efforts. During the election season you have worked diligently to build strong relationships with the candidates. Campaign follow-up allows you to continue building and maintaining those relationships. Follow-up activities include:

- Continue being an information source.
- Say thank you to the policymakers and their staff and to your supporters.
- Track their campaign promises.

- Debrief pollsters after the elections using a pollsters' forum.

Educating candidates and receiving their support is an important step in reaching the long term goals of your organization. With their support, you will have obtained a short term victory which will help to build momentum in achieving the desired future your organization wishes to obtain.[26]

[26] "Strategy Planning Objectives." Advocacy Institute. Advocacy Institute. 8 Nov. 2006 http://www.advocacy.org/planning/objectives_intro.htm.

# Chapter 7: Administrative Advocacy[27]

*Administrative Advocacy: Influencing agency deliberations or decisions on regulatory issues and rule-making.*

Sometimes the best way to improve the policies that affect children's lives is by advocating with the administrative agencies that are in charge of implementing the law. Administrative advocacy is often necessary to ensure that a legislative victory for children is implemented effectively. Administrative agencies tend to receive far less public scrutiny than other policy making bodies such as the legislature and the courts, so advocacy at the administrative level — and calling attention to the acts of agencies — often can have a significant impact.

Administrative agencies have significant control over many programs that support children and families, so administrative advocacy can take many forms.

Agency responsibilities can include:

- issuing rules and other policies interpreting the law
- managing budgets
- making legislative proposals
- hiring, training and supervising the staff charged with carrying out the law
- managing the computer system used to administer programs
- reporting data on the implementation of the program
- handling the processes by which children and families are brought into a program or service

Each of these functions is an opportunity where administrative advocacy might be valuable.

A law may be written so generally that the agency must make many decisions about how the law will actually work. In such a case, advocates can work with the agency to help develop the interpretation of the law in the way that will best serve children. In another instance an agency may have misinterpreted the law, failed to issue rules to implement the law, or issued rules but failed to take the other steps necessary (such as training case workers). In these cases, advocates may negotiate with the agency to get agency policy issued, clarified or implemented.

Often administrative advocacy also includes obtaining agency data and tracking agency processes in order to be able to understand what is happening to children. When data is not available, advocates may work to persuade or compel the agency to track and release the data. Advocates also work with administrative agency staff to help shape their budget requests and develop legislative proposals. In some cases, administrative advocacy may include testifying at hearings, or sitting in on advisory or oversight

[27] This section draws upon materials developed by the Children's Advocacy Institute.

committees.  Advocates may work with the federal agencies charged with overseeing the federally-funded programs in their states to help ensure that their state complies with federal requirements.

In short, administrative advocacy is influencing agency deliberations or decisions on regulatory issues and rule-making.  Sometimes administrative advocacy is necessary to ensure that a legislative victory for children is implemented effectively.  If agencies have the power to address the policy concern as part of their regulatory powers, no additional legislative action is necessary.  Administrative advocacy includes

- Identifying the relevant regulatory agencies
- Developing and maintaining a relationship with key agency staff
- Tracking the passage of laws and implementation of administrative rules
- Providing input before rules are finalized
- Engaging in discussions or negotiations with administrators about specific policies or procedures

***Identifying the Agency and Developing Relationships***

In order to undertake administrative advocacy, the first step is to identify the regulatory agency or agencies in question.  Every governmental program that serves children and families is housed within, or has governmental oversight from, at least one administrative agency.  Some programs may be managed by several administrative agencies — for example, in a state where cash assistance is linked to Medicaid and Food Stamp benefits, and is also run by county agencies, nine separate agencies could be involved; the federal, state and county agencies responsible for TANF, the federal, state and county agencies responsible for Medicaid and the federal, state and county agencies responsible for the Food Stamp program.  Each of these agencies has some regulatory discretion, and the state and county agencies are also legally constrained by the regulations issued by the federal and (for county) state agencies.

If an agency regulates a program that your organization cares about, you will want to develop and maintain a relationship with the agency head or key staff as Voices member, Colorado Children's Campaign did so effectively in their '98 Campaign for Kids.  Building relationships will allow you to provide input informally, raise concerns, and perhaps (depending on the nature of the relationship) comment on policies as they are developed rather than once they are proposed publicly.  This will also allow you to make budget suggestions early in the cycle of developing legislative budget proposals.

***Tracking Laws and Implementation***

Another aspect of administrative advocacy is tracking the implementation of legislation. Federal and state agencies issue rules, sometimes called regulations, to interpret and clarify federal and state laws.  Some agencies also issue various other kinds of policy guidance that are less formal than rules.  Even the desk books that agencies develop for case workers to use in their daily work constitute interpretations of policy.  As a practical matter, even the way computers are programmed or the topics that staffs are trained on can determine the implementation of policy.

***Providing Input Before Rules are Finalized***

Federal agencies and most state agencies are required to publish proposed rules for public comment before actually passing them. This gives you and your advocacy colleagues a chance to provide input before the rules are finalized. For example, in California, state regulatory agencies must announce proposed rules or rule changes in the *California Regulatory Notice Register* at least 45 days before they become final. Your state probably has a similar publication. For important regulatory changes, agencies may also hold public hearings. Advocates can submit comments that identify the implications of proposed regulations for children, and inform the media of the proposals and their expected effects. You can also attend and testify (or submit written testimony) at hearings and encourage families that will be affected by the policies to attend and testify. You may want to request hearings if none are available. You may even want to submit proposals of your own for new regulations. In California, Voices' member the Children's Advocacy Institute uses the public notices to create the *Children's Regulatory Law Reporter*, which describes regulatory proposals and explains how they will affect children. This strategy of publicizing agency regulations and their impact on children has led to increased media coverage of these issues and thus increased public awareness. It also helps other child advocates act more efficiently and effectively for children. However, this is a huge undertaking. Make sure to consider the costs and benefits of this carefully.

Your state may also have a distinct state regulatory body responsible for considering the proposed rules and changes made by state agencies. In California, the Office of Administrative Law (OAL) performs this task, and individuals can request that it make a "determination" of whether an agency has followed rulemaking guidelines when proposing its rule or change. The OAL's "determinations" also appear in the *California Regulatory Notice Register*. These "determinations" are helpful to child advocates because they identify violations by agencies when writing their regulations. iI you suspect an agency transgression, you should consider requesting a "determination" (if available) and publicizing the results..

***Engaging in Discussions or Negotiations with Administrators***

In addition to commenting on proposed laws, you may want to engage in discussions or negotiations with administrators about specific policies and/or procedures. This kind of administrative advocacy is often linked to monitoring administrative agencies, which involves reviewing agency records and processes. Sometimes, this data is readily available in regularly published sources.

However, even if it is unpublished, you probably still have a right to see it. The federal government, and most states, have freedom of information laws (sometimes called "Sunshine Acts") that require public agency meetings and hearings to be open to the public, and administrative records to be produced for the public (with a few exceptions for items like personnel decisions). If your state doesn't have such a law, you may still be able to obtain much of the information you want about a federal program by asking to see the reports that your state is required to make to the federal agency that oversees the program. These laws usually apply not only to state agencies but also to school boards and other deliberative bodies that set public policy.

Depending on your organization's relationship with agency staff, you may be able to obtain information informally, simply by asking, or you may need to present a written request for the documents you wish to see, and if denied, ask for an explanation. Even if you do not know the particular documents you wish to see, you may describe them (e.g., "I hereby request any documents that include information regarding..."), but try to include as many specific details as possible. If you need to make a formal request, it is helpful to include a note at the end of your request, such as "Failure to respond to this request within ___ days will be deemed to be a categorical denial of this request." This way, if they don't respond within the set time, you have legal standing to go to court to seek a court order for the release of the information.

In addition to reviewing data, sometimes it is helpful to review policies below the level of rules, or even to go to an agency office and watch what happens there. The problem may be as simple as that the agency computer system has not been programmed appropriately to allow case workers to implement a change in policy. Consider asking whether you can have a demonstration of how the system works; a friendly agency staffer may be able to walk you through a typical case and let you see whether the computer can do what it should be able to do.

After collecting available data and documenting the problem you wish to address, you may begin negotiations with administrators. Such negotiations will likely involve scheduling private meetings in order to exchange ideas, resolve differences, and develop relationships.

Voices members often engage in this type of advocacy. For example, Maine Children's Alliance developed an ombudsman program in order to receive calls and monitor child welfare services in Maine to make sure caseworkers were doing everything possible to help children.

***Advocacy with Federal Agencies***

While most state advocacy organizations deal with state agencies, you may also find it necessary to engage in administrative advocacy with federal agencies. In programs that are established under federal law, such as the Food Stamp program, or state or local child welfare programs receiving federal foster care reimbursement, federal agencies are responsible both for issuing regulations and for administering the program. This offers state- and locally-based child advocates an advocacy route that often goes unused: working with the federal agency to resolve a problem in your state.

If a state is running a federally funded program in a way that violates federal law, or if it seems to be misinterpreting the law, you can contact the federal agency to request that it investigate the practices or policies of the state and clarify the matter. If you cannot obtain data from the state, it may be possible to obtain it from the federal agency. Also, when the state is submitting a plan for operating the program, it usually is required to first provide an opportunity for public comment, and then submit those comments with the plan. These comments are considered in the decision whether to approve the plan. If the state is seeking a waiver of federal law, the federal agency will consider whether advocates and community members support or oppose the waiver.

While federal agencies are often reluctant to impose fiscal penalties, states are equally reluctant to incur them, so even mild letters of inquiry from federal officials, or simple phone conversations, can dramatically alter state policymakers' positions or encourage them to pay attention to problems previously ignored.

In order to take full advantage of this advocacy avenue, it is important for you to understand what the federal law requires, what it allows, which agency is responsible for enforcing the law and what the penalties are. It is also a good idea to know what data the state must report to the federal agency, and to identify the regional office responsible for regulating the state. Some agency regional offices maintain mailing lists of advocates and community members; you may want to ask to be included, so that you can participate in conference calls and meetings hosted by the office.

# Chapter 8: Legal Advocacy

*Legal Advocacy: The act of bringing a case or otherwise advocating before a court or adjudicative agency to achieve improved outcomes for children, youth and/or families.*

Legal advocacy can be a valuable tool for child advocates in certain contexts.[28] A law suit can allow advocates to win victories for unpopular causes that will not succeed in the political arena. When children are being harmed, a court's preliminary injunction order may be the quickest way to protect them, even in cases where the long-term solution must be found through other avenues. The process of litigation may allow you to gather important facts that you could not access in other ways, and use them to draw attention to the problem or to craft a remedy. Litigation may draw media attention to a problem, or force a legislature to allocate increased funding.

Since policymakers do not like to be sued, even the possibility of litigation can strengthen your efforts. Washington Children's Alliance was able change their state's welfare program by making the problems public and therefore putting more pressure on the Governor to make a change. Sometimes, negotiations with a state agency are much more effective if a lawyer is on the team, and the agency knows that you are willing to go to court. An organization that has sued in the past may get more attention and carry more credibility when it raises other issues.

In some situations, you may also want to participate in a lawsuit brought to the table by others. If a case affects children, you may want to ask the court to allow you to intervene as a party or to file an *amicus curiae* (Latin for "friend of the court") brief. Both of these options will allow you to speak up for children in a law suit where neither of the primary parties to the suit are doing so.

Child advocates may also want to consider some forms of quasi-litigation — for example, filing complaints with investigative agencies, such as public utility commissions. They may also want to file Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests to get access to government records — and may need to sue to get compliance with those requests.

You or someone in your organization should have a working knowledge of the different types of legal remedies/strategies for legal advocacy (e.g., class action lawsuits, individual lawsuits, seeking a declaratory judgment, seeking a writ of mandamus, using the threat of litigation) before proceeding to actual litigation and/or filing amicus briefs in suits filed by others. This will help you to undertake a preliminary determination or consideration of whether a legal remedy is advisable or possible.

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[28] This section draws upon discussions among Voices member Executives and on comments provided by David Richart of former Voices member National Institute on Children Youth and Families.

Child advocacy organizations rightly deliberate long and hard before bringing about a law suit. Litigation can be expensive, time-consuming, and risky, and it can create an adversarial atmosphere that may damage your relationship with policymakers. However, in some situations, it may be the best or the only route to meeting children's needs.

Some of the factors to consider when deciding whether to sue include:

- **What kind of remedy are you seeking?**
  Is it something that the court has the power to order? Or would you be able to use the pressure the lawsuit creates to significantly increase your negotiating power with the other side? If so, will they agree to have it "so ordered" by the judge, thus giving it the force of a court decision and giving you the right to return to court on a contempt hearing if they fail to comply?

- **If you win, will your victory be implemented?**
  If you are seeking a change in policy—perhaps a decision that changes the eligibility standard for certain benefits—or trying to prevent a change in policy, then it will be relatively easy to ensure that the state complies. However, if you are seeking administrative changes—such as quicker action by the agency on particular kinds of cases, or better training of caseworkers—then you will need to monitor their performance. It can be expensive, time-consuming and difficult to prove failure to comply in these "agency practice" cases; also, judges are more reluctant to find an agency in contempt of court or order specific solutions in such cases.

- **If you win, can your victory be reversed by the Governor or legislature?**
  If you are suing based on the federal or a state constitution, then a win is likely to remain in effect. A victory based on the interpretation of legislation may be more likely to be reversed, particularly if it is politically unpopular or expensive, by the current or subsequent legislature, while a decision based on regulations can be reversed by the Governor or administration. However, even a temporary victory may be valuable if it protects enough children, or it may create enough popular support for your position that it is unlikely to be reversed.

- **How difficult will it be to bring your lawsuit? How expensive and how time-consuming?**
  Generally speaking, cases that challenge policies are quicker, cheaper and easier than cases that challenge program practice and implementation.

- **Will your lawsuit strengthen the hand of reformers within the government, or meet with significant resistance?**
  Sometimes staff within the agency may welcome your lawsuit because the litigation gives the administration the political force it needs to persuade the legislature to increase the program budget or make an unpopular political decision. In these cases, there will be a change maker within the institution who will take on the role of ensuring compliance. Litigation can also force government agencies (or different government bodies, such as states and counties) to work together to set up a solution that, absent litigation, no one had any interest in undertaking. On the other hand, if the administration really opposes what you are seeking, it may be able to undermine a victory in many subtle and not so subtle ways.

- **Will your victory increase funding for children, or just take money from one program to fund another?**
  This can be very hard to predict but is an important factor that needs to be considered.

- **What are your chances of winning?**
  You will need to consult with an experienced public interest attorney to determine this. Factors include not only what federal and state constitution, law, and regulation says, but also whether your agency has standing to bring the case, whether you are likely to get a sympathetic judge, whether you have the resources and the proof necessary to win, and whether you have sympathetic plaintiffs.

- **What is the risk if you lose?**
  Will you set a bad precedent that will hurt children down the road? Will you have jeopardized your organization's fiscal health, political agenda and/or reputation? Will you have used up valuable staff resources that could have been better spent in other advocacy pursuits?

- **Even if you lose, will the litigation assist you in seeking a solution in other venues?**
  Will the information you can garner, the public attention you receive, or the potential involvement of federal oversight agencies, help move forward your agenda? Remember, as with any advocacy effort, legal advocacy may be most effective when used in conjunction with other advocacy strategies.

If you decide that litigation is a worthwhile avenue, you will need to find competent counsel. To do this, you must understand the types of cases different attorneys take on as well as the availability of resources and the range of possible attorney fees. The five main resources that may help you in your search for an attorney are:

- **Legal Services.** A legal services program for the poor is one possibility. However, curtailment of federal funding as well as restrictions imposed by Congress limiting the ability of legal services attorneys to bring class actions may cause problems for you. If you wish to challenge a practice, or a policy as it has been applied, you may need to bring a class action lawsuit, which federally-funded legal services programs may not be able to pursue.

- **Law School Clinics.** Law schools often host clinics run by students (supervised by faculty) who take cases of clients who cannot afford attorneys. While these clinics primarily accept cases from individual clients, they are often willing to take on test litigation or represent organizations.

- **Public Interest Clearinghouse.** Your state may have something similar to California's Public Interest Clearinghouse, which serves as a center for coordination for various public interest law and legal services organizations. California's Public Interest Clearinghouse created Legal Aid/Net, which is a national computer network for individuals involved in legal services and public interest law. Another important activity of the Clearinghouse is the publication of directories of public interest organizations and private nonprofit law firms that engage in public interest and *pro bono* litigation.

- **Public Interest Litigators.** In some states, there are public interest law firms (both for-profits and not-for-profits) that might bring litigation on your behalf. In addition, some public interest organizations that address specific issues employ attorneys and can be willing to accept test litigation.

- **Local Bar Associations.** Local bar associations are private trade associations of attorneys which are not affiliated with the government. They often provide lawyer referral services and directories of attorneys who specialize in various areas. Many private lawyers are willing to accept cases on a *pro bono publico* (for the public good) basis, so as the client, all your organization would have to pay would be litigation costs. (Keep in mind that these can still be substantial.)

It is also important for you to consider how your attorney's fees will be covered. It will be easier to find an attorney if you invoke a statute that covers attorneys' fees. While there are a number of different types of "costs" incurred during litigation, especially for the losing side, most significant are the attorneys' fees, which could be hundreds of thousands of dollars if the case reaches the appellate courts. There are some statutes that award attorneys' fees if the plaintiff wins, especially in a case that enforces a statute that aids the public against a large organization or group. Such statutes include federal and state antitrust laws and civil rights actions.

Throughout the litigation process, you must keep in mind what your attorney's obligations are. Your attorney cannot drop your case solely because he/she thinks that the outcome may be unfavorable or that the judge is hostile, or because it is costing a great deal of money. The only legitimate reasons for which your attorney may abandon your case are: if there is a conflict of interest, if the client's interests would be better served if the attorney left, if the client plans to lie or break the law, or if the attorney is disabled. Make sure you are aware of your rights and of the duties of your attorney any time you embark on the litigation process.

You should also be aware of your organization's obligations. If you bring a class action, and the court "certifies the class" (allows you to represent the class) you will have certain legal obligations to represent the class fairly.

Above all, remember that a comprehensive understanding of the underlying legal framework of your organization's priority issues and the systems that address them allow you to identify when and how legal advocacy might be an option, and when it makes sense to seek counsel to explore that option.

# Chapter 9: Program Monitoring

*Program Monitoring: An external process that is designed to determine whether an established program is being properly implemented by the responsible party.*

Once legislation is passed, it must be implemented by the responsible government agency. Monitoring and evaluating the agency's implementation of a program allows advocates to assess the extent to which goals are being met and to influence policies and programming. Monitoring program implementation is an important task of child advocates across all policy areas. Areas to assess include whether the program is reaching its target population, whether the appropriate services are being delivered, and whether the program activities are in compliance with any legal or regulatory requirements.

Program monitoring is done throughout a project and is useful as an efficient and effective tool for pinpointing specific problem areas and responding quickly with evidence to address further policy and program changes. Staying accountable by using program monitoring is important in making sure a law passed for children continues to be efficient and successful and helps to stay on path toward its goals.

Voices member, the Wisconsin Council on Children and Families (WCCF) began monitoring Wisconsin's welfare reform policy because WCCF knew it could not wait several years for the results of many large-scale studies to examine Wisconsin's maverick policy. Monitoring allowed WCCF to pinpoint problems in the welfare policy relatively quickly which enabled it to seek needed policy changes. Often, program monitoring can identify program features which need to be changed or modified. For example, monitoring might identify that computers have not been reprogrammed to implement the policy changes, or that no efforts have been made to inform the families of their rights, responsibilities and opportunities. This enables an organization to deal with these problems right away.

***Program monitoring serves advocates by:***

- Pinpointing specific implementation problem areas
- Providing evidence advocates can use to promote fast policy and program changes.
- Assessing whether adequate resources have been dedicated to a program.
- Communicating with policy leaders and attracting media attention
- Exposing ineffective or even harmful programs.

Program monitoring can be especially effective in cases where policymakers would benefit from having information linking the effects of a particular policy or program to those who are directly impacted by it. For example, providing feedback from welfare recipients about the strengths or weaknesses of particular benefits programs could be helpful in assessing specific aspects of welfare reform. Program monitoring provides the opportunity for advocates to:

- shed light on specific aspects of a policy problem;
- illustrate the need for policy changes through real examples;
- include people in the policy process who are not typically part of the process.

Monitoring program implementation is a useful advocacy tool for communicating with policy leaders and for getting media attention for a particular program. Political leaders and policymakers want to know if the programs they authorize and implement are successful, but they may be content to do so using data that addresses program outcomes. However, there may be important effects on children and families during their participation in a program that do not show up in the final program outcome. Because such detailed, process-oriented analysis often does not directly benefit policymakers, and because they don't have the time or resources to track all of the programs they establish, it is your job to provide them with information about how the program affects people. In order to see progress for children, you must engage in monitoring program implementation. A lack of monitoring may lead to ineffective, or even harmful programs; and effective programs falling by the wayside.

*Planning your monitoring project* – Program monitoring can be conducted through review of administrative data, study of administrative procedures, surveys, interviews, telephone hotlines, or focus groups. Each of these methods provides direct feedback about impacts of a program or an aspect of a program. It can be helpful to document the perspective and experiences of people in the system receiving services, or the caseworker perspective on problems in the system. For example, Kentucky Youth Advocates organized a toll-free hotline to solicit stories on the effectiveness of child protective services in Kentucky. KYA collected powerful stories to document how the child protective services system was not effectively meeting the needs of Kentucky's children. Often, program monitoring will result in identifying unintended consequences of the program. In this way, an advocacy organization can determine which families may need more assistance, and more broadly, which policies and programs need to be reformed.

*Assessing resources* – It is always a good idea to collaborate with others in order to increase your resources, connections, information base, and skills. Working in conjunction with others may afford you access to people affected by the program. It may also allow you to distribute your final result more quickly and to a larger audience. Coalition partners you should consider include: foundations that can issue grants, grassroots organizations that have connections to the target population, colleges and universities that have technical information and support, national advocacy organizations (e.g., Voices) that have sample materials and can provide technical assistance, and service providers that can provide ideas for topics and questions as well as facilitate data collection. For more information on coalitions refer to Chapter 3: Working in Advocacy Coalitions.

*Reporting your results*- In reporting results, it is important to consider:

- **Who is your target audience?** This will likely consist of government officials and others who help to dictate public opinion (e.g., business executives), as well as the media and possibly service providers and community and faith-based groups.

- **What do they want/need to know? That is, what is your message?** Your message should be ten words or less, remain compatible with the principles and mission statement of your organization, and connect your research results with the consequences for children. (See Chapter 2 on Strategic Communications for more information on message framing.) Also, use your findings to devise some talking points that will help you maintain consistency as you present your message to the media and the public. You may wish to test your message on a focus group drawn from your target audience so that you can refine it (if necessary) and better predict questions or objections that may arise.

- **How can you present your results to the media and to your target audience so that they can use it effectively to benefit children?** You may hold press conferences and media briefings as well as meetings with editorial boards, which will allow you to discuss your results in more depth. It is a good idea to issue both a long report, which will enhance your credibility and serve as a reference, as well as shorter reports, summaries, and fact sheets that will be easier for the media and policymakers to use. You may hand out your reports in public places and locations that families visit as well as encourage coalition partners to distribute the reports to their contacts. The families who are affected by the programs in question are often particularly eager to learn about the broad-scale consequences of the program; they may also be interested in speaking out to help exemplify some of your findings. Other avenues you may wish to follow include choosing spokespersons (often from the population you studied) and creating speakers' bureaus to communicate with community groups. (For more information on working with the media, see Chapter 2, Strategic Communications.)

Once you have gone through the program monitoring process and called for improvements, it is important to repeat the process. By continuing to monitor a program, you are able to ensure that the changes made are beneficial to the program and also make sure that no new problems arise. Establishing a monitoring cycle will provide continuous checks on the government agencies which are implementing the programs to make sure that they will continue to benefit children.

# Chapter 10: Evaluation of an Organization

> *Organizational Evaluation: Internal review of an advocacy organization's work that is intended to find out whether the organization did what it planned and accomplished what was expected.*

It is important for any organization to regularly and systematically undertake a process of assessment that is guided by clearly defined goals and measurable objectives, based on both qualitative and quantitative information. Evaluation is particularly important for child advocacy organizations, which generally secure most of their limited funding from foundations. You must be able to document the effectiveness of your work in order to compete for limited funding opportunities. Funders want to know that your organization's work is improving the lives of children. Assessment and evaluation results can be used to demonstrate that their funding and the work of your organization are making a difference, and to justify continued or increased funding in the future.

Evaluation is a process that allows organizations to assess their work and to improve the design, the administration, the implementation, and the overall effectiveness of a particular initiative. Organizations should evaluate their work not only to demonstrate whether the initiative was successful or worthwhile, but to improve the way it works in the future and ensure successful replication of effective initiatives.

However, evaluating the work of advocacy organizations can often be fraught with difficulties. It can take years of building coalitions, educating the public, forging connections with policymakers and other advocacy efforts to lay the ground for policy change. Therefore, it is often difficult to present funders with an assessment of an organization's progress, especially given the short-term nature of many grants. In addition, when you work in coalition with other organizations and have to acknowledge the work and roles of all members, as child advocates often do, it is often difficult to demonstrate how your specific role was crucial to the work of the group as a whole. An evaluation process can actually help reduce the inherent tension that often exists between your need to work in coalitions, and your efforts to document your critical role in achieving change.

The first step to a successful evaluation process is to establish clear expectations, roles, and visions from the beginning. The more specific the goals and processes are from the beginning the easier it will be to know what you need to evaluate.

When setting up your evaluation process it is important to plan it well so that it is beneficial for your organization. Key things to consider include:[29]

- Use an outside facilitator if possible. This will help to give you the most objective evaluation of your organization.
- Get input from the people who are supposed to be benefiting from your work. They will be able to give you feedback as to whether your work is actually having an affect on their lives.
- Make sure that you have all the resources and time you need to complete the evaluation. This includes the time to do the evaluation and also a time to go over the results with your organization.
- Set a timeframe for making changes that are needed based on your findings. This could be good when presenting to possible funders, especially if they see you evaluated your organization and then took steps to make sure improvements were made.

There are three important things to consider when doing your evaluation: purpose, audience and the tasks performed.[30] By establishing a purpose you focus on what exactly your organization tries to accomplish. It helps to have specific and established goals for your organization. This makes it easier to stay on target throughout your organization's programs and other work.

The audience to whom you are presenting your findings is very important during the evaluation process as well. What you may present to a potential funder can often be very different from the evaluation you go over with the staff of the organization. When you are presenting to a funder you want to show the great advances your organization has made for children so that the funder will see that your organization is worthy of receiving money. When evaluating within your organization, however, it is more likely you will highlight the things that need improvement so that your organization can improve in the future.

The tasks performed are what programs and activities you did in order to reach your organization's goals and purposes. This is helpful in looking at what activities were productive and what can be done away with.

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29 "Evaluations: the Art of Organizational Self-Examination." Community Change Agents Project. 8 Nov. 2006 http://www.communitychange.org/resources/orgdevtools/downloads/evals.pdf .
30 "Goals, Objectives, Assessment, Evaluation: Which One and Why?" NP Action. 2005. NP Action. 8 Nov. 2006 http://www.npaction.org/article/articleview/222 .

**The Logic Model**

The first step of project evaluation can be done even before the program starts. At the outset, it is a good idea to create a logic model, which is like a map of your program. It indicates important aspects of the program, such as goals, necessary resources needed, activities, and desired outcomes. This model may be drawn like a flow chart, with the goal of the program written at the top. Below the stated goal, the first column consists of inputs, or the resources needed for your program. Next is the activities column, identifying specific endeavors involved in the planning, implementation, and monitoring of the program. The third column is for detailing outputs, which are the products of the activities, such as the number of Public Service Announcements developed, alerts issued, or newsletters distributed. Finally, list the immediate and long-term desired outcomes of the program. The logic model may be drawn differently if you choose, but should include these major elements. Creating a logic model allows you to document stakeholders' assumed connections between the program's goals, activities, and outcomes. If stakeholders disagree about the issue or problem the program attempts to address, creating a logic model gives each one a chance to provide input and also allows discrepancies to be viewed and resolved openly. The model will also give you a basis when planning your evaluation because staff and stakeholders have to decide which aspect of the program (or column of the model) warrants the focus of the evaluation. Additionally, when you are analyzing and interpreting the data from your evaluation, the logic model can provide a means of determining where changes or adjustments are needed.

In order to evaluate your work, tools such as survey instruments, focus groups, individual interviews, and/or community forums can be helpful. You may also conduct evaluations in-house or hire an outside consultant. The Children's Alliance in Washington conducted an in-house evaluation of the effectiveness of its Children's Action Alerts via a survey to its membership. The survey was distributed to each member in the same way the Children's Alliance distributed the alert – via fax or e-mail. The survey results gave the Children's Alliance useful feedback on what type of information members want in the alert, such as information on the local impact of state legislation, and what motivates members to take action, which they planned to incorporate into the field organizing work plan.

There are many different approaches and methods of evaluation that advocates can use to measure the outputs and outcomes of their work but whatever evaluation process you use, it is important to remember to include interim program monitoring in your evaluation design. Many initiatives will have unsuccessful outcomes but this does not necessarily imply that the advocacy effort is futile. Often, a negative evaluation is the result of poor implementation rather than of design. Monitoring can help resolve implementation obstacles early on and help to ensure that the initiative is off to the right start. It can also help you to identify which strategies work best as you go, allowing you to use the resources that you have most efficiently. Ongoing project assessment can also help you identify and correct problems as they arise. While this task may seem challenging and time-consuming, it is actually easier than waiting until the end of the program to start data collection and assessment and will likely save you time, and resources, in the long-run.

Some suggestions that can help you evaluate your project on an ongoing basis include:

- planning your program with specific outcomes in mind,
- continually collecting data that will help you assess the program's effectiveness, and
- including evaluation activities in the actual structure of the program.

For example, when Pennsylvania Citizens for Children and Youth developed an SCHIP/Medicaid outreach and enrollment strategy, they collected data from early on in the process. This enabled them to learn whether their efforts were working early on, and even to make mid-course corrections where necessary.

Overall, evaluation is crucial to your work as a child advocate. Implementing programs with no means to assess them could lead to inefficient programs that eat up valuable time and resources. Evaluation gives you a way to correct problems as they arise, and allows you to provide concrete data for funders regarding the effectiveness of your programs. Most importantly, evaluation of your work lets you know when what you are doing is actually making a difference for children.

# Additional Resources

## Foreword: The Challenge of Child Advocacy

- Effective Advocacy With City Hall and County Government. Coleman Advocates for Children and Youth. Contact VOICES for a copy. 202-289-0777

## Chapter 1: Setting an Advocacy Agenda

- Fairness Is A Kid's Game, Children, Public Policy, and Child Advocacy in the States, by David Richart and Stephen Bing, April, 1989. (502) 451-2929 or email: david@millerconsultants.com. ($17.50)

- From Sand Boxes to Ballot Boxes, by Margaret Brodkin and Coleman Advocates for Children and Youth, 1994. (415) 239-0161. ($10)

- Identifying How Issues Are Addressed: *A Tapestry of Choices for the Local Advocate;* 2001; Yanoff, Shelly, Philadelphia Citizens Committee for Children & Youth, Philadelphia, PA, www.pccy.org

## Chapter 2: Strategic Communications

- Effective Language for Communicating Children's Issues, Susan Bales, Coalition for America's Children with the Benton Foundation, May 2000.

- The Jossey-Bass Guide to Strategic Communications For Nonprofits: A Step-by-Step Guide to Working with the Media to Generate Publicity, Enhance Fun, by Kathy Bonk, Henry Griggs, and Emily Tynes, The Communications Consortium Media Center, 1999. Order from http://www.amazon.com. ($30)

- The Frameworks Institute website – www.frameworksinstitute.org

- Building Your Knowledge: Focus Group Responses to Media Messages About Children VOICES Members Only Forum www.voices.org

## Chapter 3: Working in Advocacy Coalitions

- Building Coalitions Fact Sheet, by the Ohio State University College of Food, Agriculture, and Environmental Sciences. Downloadable online at http://ohioline.osu.edu/bc-fact.

## Chapter 4: Community Engagement

- So You Want to Make a Difference: Advocacy is the Key, by Nancy Amidei, published by OMB Watch, 1724 Connecticut Avenue, NW, Washington, D.C. 20009 (202) 234-8494. Fax or e-mail request. Fax-202-234-8584, westernb@ombwatch.org. Cost-$7 per copy, $5 each for over 10 copies.

- Co/Motion: A Guide to Youth-Led Social Change, Chapter 2: Power and Change; 1998; Alliance for Justice, Washington, DC, www.afj.org

- Building Bridges: Linking Child Advocacy and Community Organizing Strategies to Improve Children's Interests, David Richart. The National Institute on Children, Youth & Families, Inc. 502-451-2929.

- Nurturing Children, Caregivers, and Working Families: A Policy and Organizing Primer. Coleman Advocates for Children and Youth. Copies available at VOICES. 202-289-0777.

- San Francisco Campaign For Kids Advocacy Guide: Turning Up the Heat in San Francisco for Happy, Healthy Kids. Coleman Advocates for Children and Youth. Copies available at VOICES. 202-289-0777.

## Chapter 5: Legislative Advocacy

- Budget Advocacy Resource Guides, Volumes 1-5, National Association of Child Advocates, 2000. (A copy was sent to each VOICES member.)

- Stretched Thin: The Effect on Children's Service in San Francisco. March 2002. www.colemanadvocates.org

- Budget Advocacy at the Local Level: Helpful Hints from Shelly and Margaret; 2001; Yanoff, Shelly & Brodkin, Margaret, Voices for America's Children, Washington, DC, www.voices.org

- Economic Downturn and the San Francisco 2002-2003 Budget; Priorities, Principles and Questions. April 2002. www.colemanadvocates.org

## Chapter 6: Electoral Advocacy

- Being A Player, A Guide to the IRS Lobbying Regulations for Advocacy Charities, by Gail Harom, Jessica Ladd, and Eleanor Evans, Alliance for Justice, 1995 (202) 822-6070.

- Charity Lobbying in the Public Interest. Available online at http://www.clpi.org.

- E-Advocacy for Nonprofits: The Law of Lobbying and Election-Related Activity on the Net, Elizabeth Kingsley, Gail Harmon, John Pomeranz and Kay Guinane, Alliance for Justice, 2000.

- Electoral Advocacy Tool Kit, Voices for America's Children, 2002. Each VOICES Member was sent a copy but please call VOICES for additional copies 202-289-0777.

- Foundations and Ballot Measures: A Legal Guide, Thomas R. Asher. The Alliance For Justice, 1998.

- *Do's and Don't for 501(c)(3) During an Election Season:* Federal Tax Law Governing 501(c)(3) Public Charities' Activities During a Political Campaign, 1999. www.clpi.org

- Local Elections: A Not-to-be-Missed Opportunity for Child Advocates; Brodkin, Margaret, Coleman Advocates for Children & Youth, San Francisco, CA, www.colemanadvocates.org

- Connecting Non-Partisan Politics to Children's Issues: The Florida Model VOICES Management Brief

# Chapter 7: Administrative Advocacy

- A Citizen's Guide On Using The Freedom Of Information Act And The Privacy Act Of 1974 To Request Government Records, Committee on Government Operations, Government Printing Office, 1999. (202) 512-0000. http://www.gpoaccess.gov/index.html

## Chapter 10: Evaluation of your Organization's Work

The Program Manager's Guide to Evaluation, by the Administration on Children, Youth, and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

## Also:

- Advocacy Institute www.advocacy.org
- NP Action www.npaction.org
- Public Interest Clearinghouse www.pic.org

For other resources check out our members websites listed at the end of the Primer

# Voices' Mission and Services

**Our Vision**

Voices for America's Children works to create a society in which children∗ are a priority and all children are valued, respected, and able to achieve their full potential.

**Our Mission**

The mission of Voices for America's Children is to improve the lives of children in the United States by advocating for effective public policies. Voices works on behalf of all children, but is particularly concerned about those who are most vulnerable and in need of the greatest support.

Voices accomplishes this mission by:

***Promoting effective public policy at the federal level by:***

- Raising the visibility of the best interests of children;
- Engaging in partnerships;
- Employing members' experiences with state policy to advise federal policy goals and Voices' strategy;
- Mobilizing members to participate in federal policy advocacy; and
- Supporting effective implementation of federal policies and effective utilization of federal resources at the state and local level.

***Strengthening Voices members by:***

- Facilitating connections and networking among member organizations; and
- Providing training, information, and technical assistance to members

**Core Values**

Voices believes that all children should have:

- quality health care;
- quality educational opportunities throughout their childhoods;
- protection from all forms of abuse, neglect, exploitation and violence;
- a nurturing family in a supportive community committed to children's development to their maximum potential;
- economic security and freedom from poverty; and
- equal opportunities and freedom from racial disparities.

∗ Voices recognizes "child" to include ages 0 to 21 years.

Voices has member organizations in nearly every state and a growing number of cities and communities. It serves as the forum where professional child advocates nationwide convene to share ideas, exchange information, formulate joint efforts, and coordinate strategies. To support its member organizations, Voices provides a range of services, including timely information on critical issues affecting children and families, national conferences and regional training opportunities that enable child advocates to gain knowledge and augment skills, and individualized technical assistance that is tailored to the needs of state and local child advocacy organizations.

Examples of some of the services Voices provides are:

- *Voices Update*: This bi-weekly report, delivered electronically, includes updates on child health, early care and education, child welfare, technology, communications, and fund development. Staff at Voices members who wish to receive the *Voices Update* should email Nick Geisinger at geisinger@childadvocacy.org or sign up on our website at www.voices.org.

- *Speaking Out*: Voices sends out a regular electronic update on legislative activities to keep child advocates in the know on what's happening at the federal level.

- Members Only Forum: Voices' Members Only Forum, a private, password-protected area on the Voices website, www.voices.org, is available to all members. To get a username and password, send an e-mail to geisinger@voices.org or use the link on Voices' website.

- Listservs: Voices hosts a listserv for member Executive Directors to share information and exchange ideas. Voices also offers listservs in a variety of subject areas which provide both timely alerts and the opportunity to communicate with your colleagues nationwide. You may join list serves in any of the following areas – Voices member Executives, Budget Advocacy, Child Health, Child Welfare, Communications, Early Care and Education, Electoral Advocacy, Fundraising, Income Supports, Reauthorization, and Youth Development. Please log into the members only section of the Voices web site at www.voices.org if you are interested.

- Engaging Members in Federal Advocacy: Voices provides information, tools, and technical assistance to support members that want to engage in advocacy on children's issues at the federal level

- *Child Advocates Making a Difference:* This bi-monthly publication highlights outstanding Voices member successes in passing legislation, promoting program improvement, or other policy "wins" for children. It is an excellent tool for learning about and replicating key policy and program successes. It also can be useful in explaining to funders just what it is that child advocates do, and why they should support your work. Each month’s edition is sent to all members and the full series is available on the public section of the Voices web site.

- *A Great Idea*: This bi-monthly publication of "great ideas" and innovative strategies help child advocacy organizations learn from each other's successes and replicate effective strategies or approaches on topics including: fundraising, communications, use of technology, community mobilization, organizational development, and electoral advocacy. The full series is available on the Voices web site.

- Ongoing technical assistance: Voices staffers provide ongoing technical assistance to members. Please call or email us with questions you may have.

- Conferences/Workshops: Voices convenes a variety of issue-specific child advocacy meetings. Meetings include: the Child Advocacy Leadership Institute and the Forum, as well as various issue- or strategy-specific conferences. From time to time, Voices also holds meetings on both issue areas and advocacy skills. Recent topics have included child welfare, children’s health, and strategic communications..

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# Member List

*With 59 members in nearly every state, as well as the District of Columbia and the U.S. Virgin Islands, Voices for America's Children (Voices) is the only nationwide network of state and local child advocacy organizations. Members of Voices are independent, nonprofit, multi-issue organizations dedicated to the well-being of children in their locations. By gathering data and conducting research, educating the public and the media, working with elected officials, monitoring government programs, and offering creative solutions, ,Voices' members advocate for children across the country.*

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