

# Making Social Change

**Case Studies of  
Nonprofit Service  
Providers**



# About the Building Movement Project

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**T**he goal of the Building Movement Project is to build a strong social justice ethos into the nonprofit sector, strengthen the role of nonprofit organizations in the United States as sites of democratic practice, and promote nonprofit groups as partners in building a movement for progressive social change.

Many individuals in the nonprofit sector are strongly motivated by the desire to address injustice and promote fairness, equality, and sustainability. The Building Movement Project supports nonprofit organizations in working toward social change by integrating movement-building strategies into their daily work.

## Core Strategies

To accomplish its goals, the Building Movement Project makes use of four core strategies:

1. Changing the discourse and practice within the nonprofit sector to endorse social change and social justice values.
2. Identifying and working with social service organizations as sites for social change activities in which staff and constituencies can be engaged to participate in movement building.
3. Supporting young leaders who bring new ideas and energy to social change work.
4. Listening to and engaging people who work in social change organizations—especially grassroots and community-based groups—to strengthen their ability to shape the policies that affect their work and the communities they serve.

## CONTACT US

To offer feedback, comments, questions, or examples of your work in this area, please contact us:

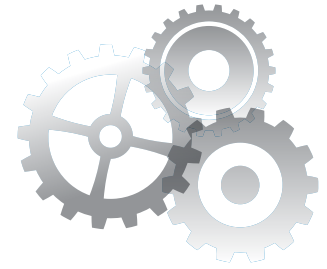
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# About the Authors

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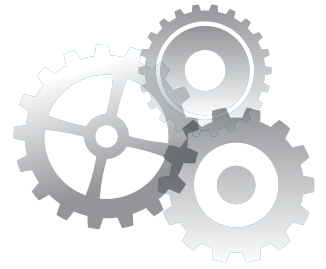
Marnie Brady served as the primary interviewer and author for *Making Social Change: Case Studies of Nonprofit Service Providers*, writing the narratives for Queens Community House, Somos Mayfair, Bread for the City, and Moving Forward Gulf Coast. A doctoral student in sociology at the Graduate Center of the City University of New York, and a Graduate Teaching Fellow at Hunter College, Marnie's research involves urban space, migration, and social movements. Before moving to New York City in 2006, Marnie was a community organizer, facilitator of popular education, and coalition coordinator in Washington, D.C., where she worked for ten years with immigrant-based service providers involved in community-led social change. Contact Marnie at [mbrady1@gc.cuny.edu](mailto:mbrady1@gc.cuny.edu).

## Trish Tchume

Trish Tchume contributed the Family & Children's Service narrative to *Making Social Change: Case Studies of Nonprofit Service Providers*. As the Director of Civic Engagement for the Building Movement Project, Trish supports the Project's ongoing work of integrating social change values and practices into nonprofit service organizations. Prior to joining the Building Movement Project in April 2008, Trish served first as a campus organizer and then as a community outreach manager for Action Without Borders/Idealist.org. In addition, she serves as a member of the national board of the Young Nonprofit Professionals Network. Through each of these roles, Trish has had the privilege of helping to strengthen the social justice work of inspiring individuals and nonprofit organizations by connecting them with resources and networking opportunities. Contact Trish at [ttchume@demos.org](mailto:ttchume@demos.org).

## REPRODUCING THE CASE STUDIES

We invite you to make copies of any piece of this report to adapt for use in your organization. Please remember to credit Building Movement Project and the appropriate case study organization.



# Introduction

**T**he Building Movement Project developed the five case studies in this publication as a response to numerous requests from groups looking for real-life examples of the often-challenging process of incorporating social change models into social service work. Our hope is that these case studies, geared toward practitioners, board members, and funders interested in this work, will serve to complement two other Building Movement publications: *Social Service and Social Change: A Process Guide* (2006), which is already in wide use, and *Social Service and Social Change: Toolkit* (forthcoming, 2009), which will provide interactive exercises and information for organizations ready to take this work to the next level.

The *Process Guide* reflected the growing trend among nonprofit service providers to find ways to address both the individual and systemic problems facing their constituents. Groups were frustrated by government and other service policies that made their work with clients more difficult, undermining the ability of the people they worked with to lead healthy and productive lives. The *Process Guide* outlined how service organizations could build the capacity of their clients to address personal issues as well as have a voice in both the organization and their community. The goal was to support clients as constituents and encourage them to become full participants in the public and private decisions that affect their lives.

The five case studies in this publication offer examples of organizations that are integrating social change activities into their work.



- **Queens Community House** in New York made a commitment ten years ago to find ways to return to its activist roots. The organization is dedicated to integrating constituent voices into its work despite the size and scope of its service delivery programs and the tremendous diversity of the people they serve.
- **Somos Mayfair** started as the foundation-sponsored Mayfair Improvement Initiative in San José, CA. Now as Somos Mayfair, the organization is using a culturally based transformative approach that emphasizes popular theater, peer-to-peer case management, and community organizing.
- **Bread for the City** offers health, legal, and social services as well as food and clothing to low-income residents in Washington, D.C. They have begun an organization-wide effort to bridge services and social justice activities and to create

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a formal structure for advocacy. Now they are figuring out what it means for staff members to support constituent involvement.

- **Family & Children’s Service** has drawn on their 130-year history of community advocacy and a focus on organizational values to recommit to strengthening communities and embedding client/constituent voice into their service provision in Minnesota. The organization has been particularly reinvigorated in this work by the influx of immigrants into the metropolitan area.
- **Moving Forward Gulf Coast** emerged in response to Hurricane Katrina, providing

emergency services to residents throughout the Gulf Coast region. Now the founder and executive director are moving from an emphasis on individual service to video advocacy while building deep collaborations with other groups.

The organizations highlighted here were selected not to lay out a set of best practices for all organizations but to serve as practical illustrations of how groups decide to extend their work to promote client/

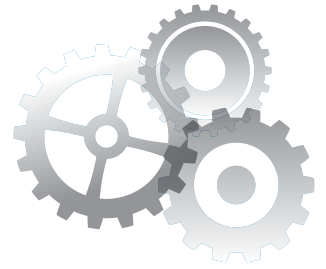
community voices and the challenges posed by that decision. Each group is different—in size, scope, geography, approach, age, and client population—but there are also many similarities.

Some common themes emerged from the studies that identify the skills and views that help groups integrate social change activities into service delivery programs. For example, all groups stress the importance of relationships both with their clients/constituents and with other organizations. For **Bread for the City**, understanding their relationship with other advocacy groups has been crucial as they look to institute an advocacy program addressing systemic community issues. **Somos Mayfair** builds relationships among their program participants as a way to identify common issues, such as environmental factors in the dramatic increase in diabetes.

Another commonality between the case study groups is their commitment to ask constituents to identify their own needs. This might happen on a one-to-one basis or through larger venues such as participatory action research or community discussions. A **Queens Community House** survey found that a credit union would help residents who were facing severe housing problems, so the group set out to open a local credit union branch. Among youth told **Family & Children’s Service** in Minneapolis that receiving credits for their dual language proficiency would help to reduce existing barriers to their academic success. After young people met with the superintendent, policy changes were made that could eventually serve as a model for high schools citywide.

As with any major organizational change, reorienting daily practice to include constituent participation and





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voices took **time and commitment** for both staff and board members. It was important to provide support, information, and sometimes new skills so that staff members were able to integrate new methods into their daily practice. At **Moving Forward Gulf Coast**, the founder was in emergency mode after Hurricane Katrina, but when she attended a training on movement building, the organization shifted gears to help people advocate to solve common problems.

All our case study groups noted that **funding** for constituent involvement is difficult to identify and even harder to sustain. Like so many others around the country, these organizations are trying to meet increasing need by doing more for less. That means there is little time to rethink the way they engage with those they serve. But all of the groups have a deep belief that moving to sustained client/constituent involvement would benefit their community in the long run.

To keep their commitment to integrating service and constituent voice, many of the organizations develop a set of **principles** to guide them, especially through difficult decisions. Many spent time with their board and staff members discussing organizational **values** that guide the work. For example, it turned out that several of the groups struggled over whether they should support initiatives sanctioning same-sex marriage, especially given the potential of such support causing rifts between constituent groups.

Many times the organization found it easier to integrate service and social change into new programs and then phase in the practices throughout the organization. Negotiating tensions was a key to success, particularly keeping an eye to the **long-term benefit** even when things were difficult.

These service organizations were looking to help individuals and they saw how supporting **individual transformation** was key to building a sense of power that could lead to larger change.

Finally, the case studies are meant to show that incorporating social change into a social service setting is a **process**. In the end, there was no one way to engage clients, train staff and board members, persuade funders of the impact, or work with other organizations in this effort. Though organizations struggled to find their own balance between social change activities and service delivery, there was enormous energy and commitment to this work, especially to the possibilities of finding a more democratic form of providing services and amplifying constituent voices.

# How to Use the Case Studies

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**C**ase studies are a learning tool. They are a way to enter and be a part of story that helps us understand more deeply how the work is done.

We deliberately chose groups from different parts of the country, with different approaches, focused on different target populations, and different in size and scope. We also looked for organizations that were in a process of change. Some organizations are further along, others have just started.

The case studies are an opportunity to learn what others are doing, but they can also stimulate your own thinking. Many educators—from Paulo Freire to Harvard Business School professors—use cases as a way to draw on the wisdom of groups to share knowledge and draw out larger lessons. We recommend reading and discussing these cases in a group and asking questions that help stimulate conversation (see Appendix A for suggested reflection questions). Think about the themes that

apply to your work: Where does it feel similar, where does it feel different from the groups here? Why? What are the larger issues that this type of work addresses? What are the solutions to some of the challenges raised in the cases? Discussions about the cases often provide important clues to what is needed to initiate and sustain constituent/client engagement work.

One final note: there are many ways that nonprofits (and especially nonprofit service groups) can engage their constituents. Some groups are focused on voter engagement, others are looking at building relationships with organizing groups or adding their own organizer, and still others are focusing on advocacy both by in-house experts and through amplifying constituent voices. We do not cover all the invention and interventions that are currently underway. What we do want to promote is our belief that constituent knowledge is important in many realms: to give good service, to make bigger change, and to contribute to a vibrant democracy.





# Case Study: Queens Community House

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## Organizational Profile/Quick Facts

<b>EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR</b>	Irma E. Rodriguez
<b>ADDRESS</b>	108-25 62 <sup>nd</sup> Drive, Forest Hills, NY 11375
<b>SERVICE AREA</b>	Queens
<b>MISSION STATEMENT</b>	<p>Queens Community House is committed to the personal growth of the diverse people it serves and to the creation of self-reliant, open, responsible communities.</p> <p>Established in the settlement house tradition, it embodies the core belief that all persons can and want to grow and that all can contribute. Through broad-based, innovative leadership, it offers programs and services which help all people improve their lives and work together to strengthen their communities.</p> <p>Queens Community House, located in Queens, is more than a social service provider: it is a welcoming, extended family for both new and long-time residents.</p>
<b>YEAR BEGAN</b>	1975
<b>PROGRAM AREAS</b>	Multi-Service
<b>CURRENT SOCIAL ACTION ISSUE AREAS</b>	Affordable Housing, Immigrant Rights, LGBT issues
<b>NUMBER OF STAFF</b>	164 full time (489 total)
<b>FY 08 BUDGET</b>	\$13,000,000
<b>FUNDING</b>	Public: 80%; Private: 10%; Individual: 10%

## Case Study: Queens Community House

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### Introduction

Hundreds of thousands of immigrants and advocates took to the streets of many U.S. cities on May 1, 2006, to demand immigration reform laws and to protest a widespread crackdown against undocumented immigrants. These protests propelled many immigrant-based social service organizations into action. Perhaps the most diverse protest took

place in Queens, New York, where an estimated 10,000 people drawing from the neighborhood's 70 nationalities formed human chains in response to the call for a national boycott and strike for immigrant rights. The local action spanned ten blocks directly in front of the Jackson Heights Center of the nonprofit Queens Community House.

Students of the English as a Second Language (ESL) program of Queens Community House built on this movement moment to strengthen their newly formed Community Action Group. Through their work, Queens Community House was able to activate its multiple community networks in support of immigration reform, play an important role in area immigrant rights coalitions, and purposefully engage the energy and activity of the mass protests around longer-term neighborhood organizing goals.

Organizing for immigrant rights is just one of several social action efforts that have taken root at Queens Community House with the participation of community residents from the organization's service programs. The group's services, organized under the program areas of Community, Older Adult, and Youth programs, range from pre-K to senior day services, from housing counseling to teen programs.

"We see services as a means, not just as an end," says Irma Rodriguez, Queens Community House's executive director. Rodriguez explains that the organization initiated the Jackson Heights Center's grassroots Community Action Group after considering how to keep up its history of integrating social services and social change despite increasing community fragmentation. Amid the realities of the organization's growing size, a conservative political climate, budget cuts, and burdensome funder stipulations in service delivery contracts, Rodriguez asked a critical question: "How do we build a sense of community?"

It was ten years earlier and through the organization's membership in the United Neighborhood Houses (UNH) settlement house network that Rodriguez first reflected on how to fuse social services and social justice more strategically within the changing organization. The organizing work in Jackson Heights represents the result of years of subsequent groundwork by the organization to examine its values and reconfigure staff roles so that staff identify as both service providers and community builders. This case study gives an account of that process, beginning with a short history of the founding of Queens Community House and the challenging context that led to the organization's resurgence of social action.



"We didn't just want to see community building as an add-on, it had to become an integral part of our jobs."

— IRMA RODRIGUEZ

## Building Community Through Organization's Founding

In the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century, settlement houses played an important role in the development of New York City through social reform and service. Queens Community House, founded in 1975, came late to the settlement house movement. It began when New York City attempted to bring “scattered site” public housing to the fairly stable, middle-class neighborhood of Forest Hills, Queens. Vocal resident opposition to the public housing plan grew into a community controversy. Ultimately, the future New York State governor, Mario Cuomo, successfully mediated a compromise between the city and neighborhood residents. The compromise allowed the city to build the first low-income public housing cooperative in the country by including a community center that would be open to the entire neighborhood. It was from this community center (first called the Forest Hills Community House) that Queens Community House began.

Because the initial struggle to create the public housing and community center required an intensive community-building effort, the values of inclusion and social justice were essential building blocks in the organization's foundation. Many of the organization's initial hires, including the current executive director, Irma Rodriguez, were graduates of NYC's Hunter College School of Social Work, one of the few programs in the country with a dedicated community organizing track. Social workers from this program are trained in the tools of structure and power analysis at the macro level. With such dynamic staff who embodied a commitment to social justice and an understanding of community building, Queens Community House was destined

to offer more than the recreational activities and social services of a typical community center. The organization soon became a hub of neighborhood social action.

Mary Abbate, the Assistant Executive Director of Community Programs at Queens Community House and a Hunter College Social Work program graduate, describes what it was like when she first began at the organization in 1986: “Four programs ran out of one office; we celebrated but also made fun of our few resources. There was passion and humor that came out of a tremendous respect for people. What evolved was that we didn't want to just act upon something, we wanted to be part of something.” At the time, the organization focused on supporting residents to form family daycare co-ops, educating homeless families on their rights, and helping tenants organize against co-op conversions throughout the neighborhood. “We asked people to get involved to learn about the systems they were in and to work with an organizer as well as a case manager. We would hold discussions and ask, ‘Who owns the wealth? Who's contributing to affordable housing policy?’”

## Facing New Challenges to Social Action

Queens Community House's strong reputation for quality services to children, youth, families, and older adults allowed the organization to win increasingly competitive contracts. The organization now reaches more than 20,000 residents yearly at 21 different sites and employs over 450 full- and part-time staff. However, this enormous expansion from the original Forest Hills Community Center also created new

## Case Study: Queens Community House

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challenges to fostering a sense of community within the agency and maintaining social justice activities. Moreover, constant budget fights and contract challenges at the city level affected nearly all of the organization's programs, and much of the advocacy work became focused on maintaining funding for the service programs.

By the late 1990s, city funding to the community service program shifted from a focus on building-wide tenant organizing to individual tenant emergency response. Queens Community House became more involved in the crisis-driven and staff-intensive work of eviction prevention. Although the organization's strong sense of community had emerged in part through its intrinsically group-centered organizing work with residents, the individual nature of emergency cases made it difficult to bring people together to solve problems collectively. The community services program's caseloads grew to more than 300 cases per program staff person.

"The settlement house movement had been pushed away from social action and into social services, into [government] contracts and grants that required organizations to do more with less," Rodriguez explains. Decreasing levels of concerted grassroots organizing work by settlement houses and other nonprofits became more apparent as coalitions lost power to affect city policy. "I would go to neighborhood-based organizing coalition meetings and organizers would say, 'The housing movement's dropped dead, everyone is busy providing services.' Then I would go to the settlement house coalition meetings and the executive directors would say, 'We've lost our roots, we've lost our base to organize for children and public health.'"

United Neighborhood Houses, a coalition of 35 settlement houses throughout New York City, provides a forum for groups to advocate together on common issues. Rodriguez initiated the coalition's community-building committee in 1995 as an attempt to reinvigorate the social action mission of settlement members. "Community-building efforts among settlement houses had always waxed and waned with funding, but I say 'You do community building because you want to do it [regardless of funding],' " says Rodriguez.

Representatives from about a dozen settlement organizations participated in the committee discussions, one goal of which was for groups to think more deeply about how to address community building and social action within their own houses. At an annual retreat of settlement executive directors in 1995, one organization presented the dilemma of whether to spend discretionary funding on a fundraising position or an organizer. "Through these conversations," Rodriguez relates, "I realized that Queens Community House needed to hire a community organizer and at the same time turn existing [service] staff into organizers. Sometimes our external partnership work brings us to rethinking our internal work." She turned her attention from the coalition's committee to direct the conversation of community building and social action within the organization.

### **Developing a Strategy of Reciprocity and Hiring a Community Building Director**

In the short term, Rodriguez decided that their community organizer would not be doing the

traditional work of launching community campaigns. She explains, “You can’t organize a community that doesn’t exist. We needed to create a sense of community where organizing could happen.” Instead, in 1996 Queens Community House hired its first Director of Community Building, Dennis Redmond, also a graduate of Hunter College’s Social Work program (Dennis is now Director of Staff Development). Redmond’s challenge was to move staff members who identified with individual programs to identify with the agency as a whole. He also set out to create a common understanding of the term “community building” across programs. Redmond began by looking at how the organization’s clients or participants could be viewed differently by employing the concept of reciprocity (see box).

“Reciprocity emphasizes that we’re not just here to provide: it’s a two-way street,” explains Rodriguez. That is, Queens Community House staff offered services but they also believed that the recipients had something to offer. Letting program participants know that they had something to give helped

level the playing field between the provider and client. Redmond showcased the concept through a computer-training program in which participants were asked if they would like to give back by becoming voluntary instructors after completing their own classes. He viewed the program as an important success: “There was 80 percent give-back by the participants, and residents created support networks with each other.”

At the same time, Redmond kept his eyes on building community among the organization’s staff. In 1996, he launched an internal Community Building Committee comprised of staff from the organization’s three central departments: Youth Programs, Seniors Programs, and Community Programs. With the committee, Redmond carried out a series of garden parties with community residents and staff, coordinated annual retreats, and began an agency-wide newsletter to keep the multiple sites connected to one another’s work. The committee saw the staff development and retreats along with new staff orientations as critical to developing a sense

## RECIPROCITY

Reciprocity is the practice of giving and receiving for mutual benefit. In the community organization context, reciprocity acknowledges community members’ assets and involves individuals as actors in contributing to the organization. For example, reciprocity may involve the mutual exchange of services: the community member receives a service and in return participates in voluntary work with the organization. Likewise, the community member may share the skills acquired from participating in the organization’s programs with additional community participants. Reciprocity demonstrates mutual dependence between the organization and the community that participates in its services. Bonding and trust develop through transparent, reciprocal relationships. Power relations potentially shift through the process of valuing the contributions of community members and demonstrating mutual reliance.

## Case Study: Queens Community House

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of cohesiveness among staff spread across a large borough. These activities also provided opportunities to reinforce organizational philosophy and practice regarding community building.

“We didn’t just want to see community building as an add-on,” says Rodriguez. “It had to again become an integral part of our jobs.” In 2002, the organization added commitment to community building to each staff person’s yearly self-evaluation as one of 15 agency-wide standards. Programs also amended job descriptions to reflect the standard. Staff-orientation packages were updated to include more specific background information regarding community-building expectations.

Orientation packages for new staff emphasize the community-building perspective that, “What matters is not only what we do, but also *how* we do it.” Reflecting the committee’s efforts to form a working definition of community building, the staff handbook lays out the following actions and underlying principles of employee efforts to foster community building:

- Advance local leadership (everyone has something to offer);
- Promote resident participation in programs and civic affairs (people are more than their problems);
- Build social networks (neighbors helping neighbors);
- Develop common ground across different neighborhood constituencies (building understanding across culture, race, religion, and age);

- Strengthen the neighborhood’s institutional infrastructure (collaboration); and
- Connect neighborhood interests to external resources and decision makers (advocacy).

One aim and outcome of explicitly incorporating community building into each job description was for staff to see the value of their work not only in terms of caseloads but also through the quality of their relationships with residents. It also supported the notion that staff time spent at community events and coalition meetings counts as an integral part of their job. As a result, staff began to see themselves as community builders as well as service providers. As anticipated, the various community-building activities led to a stronger sense of collective identity within the agency, and the networks of relationships born out of community building became the foundation for developing targeted social action. After establishing community-building outcomes, the next steps were to further extend and deepen relationships among community residents by spearheading several new constituency-led projects.

### Identifying Areas for New Energy

In 2004, Queens Community House hired Zoe Sullivan, a job developer with experience in community organizing, to work with the Jackson Heights ESL program, which had been recently adopted from another agency. The organization saw the new program as an opportunity to include a focused organizing component. “We found that it was easier to incorporate community building and social action into new initiatives than into long-standing programs,” recalls Rodriguez.

Sullivan brought together graduates from the ESL program who had participated in her hands-on multimedia and interactive job readiness workshops. The group decided to investigate community concerns relating to their economic opportunities. Residents found that the banks in the area were not serving immigrant workers' needs, and they documented their findings with a survey of 1,000 residents. Through partnerships with neighborhood businesses and a Manhattan-based credit union, the group decided to raise funds to start their own branch of the credit union.

Based on the performance of this resident-led committee, Queens Community House received funding to hire a community organizer to form the Community Action Group at the Jackson Heights Center. Rodriguez believed the organization could strengthen community building by integrating leadership development and action into its educational programming. Students who completed the ESL program were eager to continue the relationships they made in their classes and to practice their English skills in group settings. "We saw it as a golden opportunity for organizing," says Rodriguez.

By chance, ESL student Uzma Munir met the new community organizer, Hannah Weinstock, at the Jackson Heights Center in 2005. Weinstock recalls, "We met on the elevator on Uzma's way to ESL class. I told her what I did, and Uzma had the biggest smile. She said that was exactly what she had always dreamt of doing in Pakistan, but never had the opportunity there."

Munir became a founding member of the Community Action Group and was one of ten elected steering

committee members who helped to build the group's current membership to more than 50 core grassroots leaders. Although several of the group's strongest leaders emerged from the 2006 immigration protests, the Community Action Group now identifies new leaders through the 600 students, representing more than 70 nationalities, who participate daily (several thousand participate yearly) in the free ESL classes offered by Queens Community House. The core leaders carry out the activities of the Action Group's three work committees, which have expanded from the issue of immigrant rights to include affordable housing and a campaign to improve public parks.

The Action Group's work builds upon the conversations and community-building efforts to strengthen the organization's capacity for social action that began ten years prior. Following the success of these activities, Rodriguez was eager to broaden the conversation of social change with more people from the organization.

### **Reaching Out Through Retreats to Name Values and Build from Current Work**

In 2006, Redmond organized an all-day staff retreat focused on the concept of community building; more than 250 staff persons from all locations of the agency attended. In small groups, staff discussed their relationship to resident participants. Through group exercises and consensus they identified three core agency-wide values: community, diversity, and respect (see box). Participants were encouraged to identify values that reflected their work. To Rodriguez, it helped fortify efforts for program staff to see their

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work not only as service but as intrinsically part of community building.

Queens Community House looked for ways to continue to involve staff in the conversation following the 2006 retreat. Rodriguez convened a cross-departmental and cross-site Building Movement Committee composed of staff involved in social action, direct service providers, and members of the management team. The committee took its name from the Building Movement Project after deciding to follow the framework of the Project's *Social Services and Social Change: A Process Guide*. Introducing the Guide to the committee, Rodriguez said, "It's come closest to helping us create a language to better articulate to our participants, 'This is who we are, this is what we want to do and why we do it.'" This committee revived the organization's earlier Community-Building Committee and brought together a new generation of staff, including

Weinstock, with senior staff members who had a strong sense of the organization's history of social justice work.

The following year, the Building Movement Committee collaborated with Redmond to spearhead another all-day Queens Community House staff gathering. This time the focus was social action. "As with community building, there was no common definition of what was meant by social action," says Redmond. The Building Movement Committee hoped that the staff discussions would help clarify what issues the organization should; they also hoped to situate the organization's social justice work on a continuum of social change, which Redmond describes as "ranging from basic human services to radical social transformation."

Some staff were nervous about the retreat. Redmond explains, "There was some fear that taking on

### CORE VALUES

Organizations often craft their core values and principles through strategic planning processes or retreats involving board, staff, and constituents. Core values reflect ideals and attitudes, such as respect, diversity, and justice. Principles connect core values to action. An example of a principle around the core value of democracy might be, "We are committed to the active participation of our members in the organization's processes of decision making through active consultation, and consensus when possible." Values and principles create a framework or a set of belief statements that can help guide decisions ranging from program development and campaign strategy to staff pay scales. Mission-driven organizations generally have strongly articulated values that are embraced by the people who run the group's day-to-day work. At Queens Community House, the organization held a one-day retreat to identify their three core values. These stated values became a foundation for affirming existing community action. Examples of the exercises used during the Queens Community House staff retreat to frame the values discussion can be found in the Additional Web Resources section of Appendix B.



the discussion of social action would expose our differences, making it harder to move forward; fear of disillusioning understandings; fear that talking specifics could threaten camaraderie.” Rather than avoid the hard questions, however, the staff were moved and engaged by the small group discussion. “Actually,” Redmond relates, “people enjoyed it. There was an electric attitude as people took different stands. It became a freeing process.”

At the retreat, different programs reported on their social action work. For example, young people in Queen Community House’s Generation Q, the only drop-in center for LGBT youth in Queens, talked about their leading role in campaigning for the Dignity for All Students Act (DASA), proposed state anti-bullying legislation. The youth department also trains participants from its programs across the borough for annual visits and testimony before the state legislature in support of the NYC Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP). Although Queens Community House does not receive funding directly from this program, because it employs SYEP participants it has a vested interest in the city maintaining and expanding the program.

The Community Services Program gave an account of its work out of the Jackson Heights Center. Staff reported on the credit union efforts and the Community Action Group’s campaign for publicly funded affordable housing in the borough’s community development plans. The Jackson Heights Center is also home of the Queens branch of Senior Action in a Gay Environment (SAGE). In addition to casework around health services, the SAGE project staff described their work mobilizing hundreds of members in support of gay marriage legislation.

These social action examples made it clear that social action already played a substantive role in the organization’s programs, as participants are seen as contributors with their own skills, networks, and differentiated perspectives, far from the contractual language of cases and service units. The range of activities demonstrates that community action has grown not in spite of Queens Community House’s focus on service but as a direct outcome of *how* services were being developed within different programs. The community-building approach within service programs set the stage for social action.

The 2007 social action retreat demonstrated the community-building perspective at work. In addition to the campaigns they described, many of the service programs reported incorporating the community-building notion of reciprocity and no longer focusing on triage services. Social action efforts did not rely on staff-driven advocacy, and new staff had been hired to help organize residents around issues identified by the participants themselves.

### **Acknowledging Community and Conflicts**

Despite all of this work, and the shared values it implied, it was difficult for the staff to see the social action goals and tactics as part of a coherent organizational strategy rather than solely connected to isolated programs or individual staff initiatives. The retreat also surfaced both new information and points of friction. “There were three or four issues staff were already involved with that other staff didn’t know about, and that even management team members from other departments weren’t

## Case Study: Queens Community House

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aware of,” Redmond says. The social action retreat discussions were designed to be participatory, and staff did not shy from debate. Differences surfaced that still have not been resolved. For example, some staff expressed disagreement with SAGE’s gay marriage campaign issue, and were unsure to what extent the retreat as a decision-making forum on the social action issues presented. This kind of decision making, however, was not the intent of the retreat.

To address potential conflicts at the retreat, a member of the Building Movement Committee was assigned as facilitator for each small group discussion and encouraged the staff participants to frame debates within the organization’s core values of diversity, community, and respect. Rodriguez explains, “We discussed how some issues would be worked on by specific resident-led groups, and others would be worked on as an agency through conversations across programs and with board input.” Redmond saw the process as part of an effort for different programs to share their resources and

skills: “It’s not just about agency authorization [for social action]; it’s about agency support.”

### Continuing the Conversation

The staff retreat flagged three concerns that also appeared at subsequent discussions held by the Building Movement Committee: the need for agency-wide information about existing social action within the organization; the need to establish criteria for how decisions are made, or could be made; and the need for more board involvement, as discussed in the Building Movement Project’s *Process Guide*. But the committee found that the *Guide*’s steps required a serious time commitment. Because committee participants were on different levels of developing social action in their programs, and while despite the fact that the overarching premise of developing a coordinated and agency-wide approach to social action remained, the Building Movement Committee did not choose to serve as that vehicle, and eventually it disbanded.

Nonetheless, the work continues via the new Board Social Action Committee. The board plans to build this committee by inviting constituent leaders from Queens Community House’s organizing campaigns to become members and by encouraging interested staff to participate. Rodriguez expects that the board’s responsibility to the entire organization and its bird’s-eye vantage will help address the questions around how to create an agency-wide framework for conducting social action.

Rodriguez would like the board to help establish ground rules around how to approach social action campaigns and coalition work in light of potential repercussions with public officials and funders.

Some officials are important allies to the organization by supporting its service work, but are potentially on the wrong side of community decisions affecting community constituents. Rodriguez describes the matter as an issue of transparency and honesty. Susan Matloff-Nieves, Assistant Executive Director of Youth Programs, explains, “We’ve never toned something down because of our issues. We have what we call ‘critical friends’ in the city; when we’re working on an issue, we might tell the city agency first of our plans. We’re known as a group that will give an on-the-record quote. . . In fact, we’ll be contacted by policy makers who just want to know our honest feedback on something, knowing we’ll do it constructively—looking at the big picture, not just our own interests.”

The organization’s new impetus on constituent-led social action does not preclude staff-driven advocacy. At the same time that the organization feels its way towards balancing constituency-led social action and staff-led advocacy, new cuts to social services activate staff as professional advocates. Staff-led advocacy work intensifies during periods of budget crises. Naomi Altman, Assistant Executive Director of Senior Programs, explains, “We’ve spent a lot of time in advocacy coalitions fighting contract adjustments that would collapse senior services from integrated community programs into service silos, while applying for those contracts at the same time.”

The organization is also looking for creative responses to program policies that present obstacles for social action. For example, new administrative requirements from funders create a dampening effect for youth-led advocacy. According to Matloff-Nieves, “Now our Youth Programs Director has to sit down at the end of the day and enter in each young

person they worked with that day, and that could be several hundred young people. But there’s no extra funding for the data entry time. That ties people up, uses time that could be spent on issue analysis and organizing.”

Queens Community House continues to grapple with how to most effectively respond to these issues. This process involves thinking about long-term strategy and who participates in decisions around issues and tactics, including who presents the organization’s goals to city officials. Despite these challenges, the organization’s deepening relationship with its constituents increasingly influences its overall direction of social change. Much of the organization’s ongoing response to program-specific issues engages participants and other community residents and groups in broader community efforts.

## Rising Social Action

The work at Queens Community House continues to evolve, both within the organization and in partnership with other groups. The 2006 immigration mobilizations helped connect the Community Action Group organizers to the ongoing training and peer-to-peer support of the New York Immigration Coalition and the NYC-based Social Justice Leadership Project. The Jackson Heights organizers invite youth workers and SAGE staff to organizing training opportunities and vice-versa. Housing counselors provide organizers of the Community Action Group’s affordable housing campaign with information on existing services for their outreach materials. In the past, more than 200 senior participant-volunteers testified before the New York State Assembly about cuts to senior services. Seniors also participated in

## Case Study: Queens Community House

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letter-writing campaigns in support of the Summer Youth Employment program. This year, Youth Program staff and staff from the Senior Programs will consult on how to activate young people to support seniors advocating to save the city's senior centers.

There are other new signs that residents have become interdependently involved in services and in organizing efforts, specifically through the Community Services Program. For example, the organization's housing department moved away from triage services in 2007 and returned to tenant organizing after learning from numerous residents in its counseling services of illegal lease terminations. Staff discovered that a single management company had illegally threatened tenants with eviction in 20 different buildings. The organization's housing department staff were invited to attend a meeting organized by one of the residents and to their surprise found that the group's leader had already visited Queens Community House for case management services. The housing department staff worked with the tenant leader to help develop the group campaign with support and guidance from the housing director, another graduate of Hunter's Social Work program. This effort later connected to citywide efforts regarding the practice of predatory equity, in which equity firms buy up rent-regulated apartments and force tenants out so they can convert the units to market rate.

Abbate comments on striking a balance among funding priorities, agency program interests, and constituency concerns. "It doesn't matter where on the spectrum we start, whether it's jumping into campaign work or getting people together to throw a community party, it's what your goals are that matter, and finding roles for people, and having them

feel connected so that they respect each other. Then people will be receptive to working on the issues that they care about and that the organization cares about."

Even with strong grassroots leadership, the Community Action Group recognizes that community achievements also require strong alliances. Presently, Community Action Group leaders participate in a coalition called Queens for Affordable Housing, which they helped to create. This group is currently fighting the public subsidy of market-rate development at two development sites in Queens. Uzma Munir, who since joining the group has given testimony at four housing development hearings, observes, "I don't think just about me. I think about the Queens people, and this is public land. We are part of the public, so we must make the change."

Not unlike the settlement house organizers in the early years of the last century, Queens Community House begins this new century actively engaging in collective analysis and looking inward to reexamine the organization's voice and its approach to change. In active collaboration with participants, the organization renews its commitment to service, justice, and first and foremost, community.

Members of the Community Action Group themselves speak directly to the renewed relationship of service and change at Queens Community House. When a representative of the Mayor's office of immigrant services met with the group's Steering Committee about ESL services, she asked, "Why did you come here to learn English?" Several leaders responded, "To know our rights!"



# Case Study: Somos Mayfair

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## Organizational Profile/Quick Facts

<b>EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR</b>	Jaime Alvarado
<b>ADDRESS</b>	370-B S. King Rd. San José, CA 95116
<b>SERVICE AREA</b>	Mayfair neighborhood; a subset of 95116 zip code area
<b>MISSION STATEMENT</b>	Somos Mayfair cultivates the dreams and power of the people of Mayfair through cultural activism, social services and community organizing. We are generations of immigrants, rooted in a vibrant community, who nurture healthy families and speak out for justice in Silicon Valley.
<b>YEAR BEGAN</b>	1996
<b>PROGRAM AREAS</b>	Community Engagement, Family Support, Civic Action
<b>CURRENT SOCIAL ACTION ISSUE AREAS</b>	Community Health, Electoral Participation
<b>NUMBER OF STAFF</b>	12 full time (13 total)
<b>FY 08 BUDGET</b>	\$1,300,000
<b>FUNDING</b>	Public: 55%; Private: 40%; Individual: 5%

## Case Study: Somos Mayfair

*Y así como todo cambia  
Que yo cambie no es extraño...*

*Pero no cambia mi amor  
Por mas lejo que me encuentre  
Ni el recuerdo ni el dolor  
De mi pueblo y de mi gente*

*Lo que cambió ayer  
Tendrá que cambiar mañana  
Así como cambio yo  
En esta tierra lejana*

*Cambia, todo cambia...*

*—Mercedes Sosa*

*And as everything else changes  
that I would change is nothing  
strange...*

*But my love doesn't change  
no matter how far I find myself.  
Nor do my memories or my pain  
for my people.*

*What changed yesterday  
will have to change again tomorrow.  
Just as I change  
in this far-off land.*

*Change, everything changes...*

*—Mercedes Sosa*

### Introduction

Change, everything changes. The lyrics repeat and crescendo as members of the theater group

*Familias Unidas de Mayfair* (Mayfair Families United), a project of the nonprofit Somos Mayfair, complete their rehearsal of *¡Somos Mujeres, Somos Vida!* (We Are Women, We Are Life!). In this original piece, the ten-woman community ensemble brings the audience across borders, exploring broken relationships, the violence of poverty, and the isolation of raising children in



a foreign country. Each woman steps forward and performs a part of her own story, which forms a shared narrative of the *Familias Unidas* members.

One member, Velia, states, “I remember my country, which is so very poor. I remember the causes of the injustice, of the oppression. I remember the poverty and the sacrifice of mothers... living many times without food or clothing to cover their children. That’s why so many of us migrated, to give our children a better life.” In Velia’s closing scene she tells the audience, “Everything changed in my life when I realized that I have a voice. I have the power to change.” The lines resonate not as performance, but as a living claim to the individuals’ collective experiences, strengths, and hopes. There are



tears at the end, making clear that the members' participation in the theater has become a powerful journey itself and that their stories deeply resonate.

The Somos Mayfair theater group rehearses in the same church in the east San José, California neighborhood of Mayfair that Robert Kennedy visited in 1968, and where labor leader César Chávez held community assemblies in the late 1950s. Although none of the women of *Familias Unidas* lived in Mayfair during Chávez's time, his message of *¡Sí Se Puede!* (Yes, We Can!) endures with his image and his name on a Mayfair public elementary school, community murals, and a city plaza. It is the name of an annual march and a citywide holiday. A few blocks from the church a plaque marks the Mayfair residence where members of the Chávez family still live.

The greater Mayfair neighborhood of 20,000 people has changed since the time when Chávez first learned community organizing there. Waves of new immigrants, including Mexicans, Central Americans, South Asians, Cambodians, and Vietnamese have arrived. No longer a community of migrant farm workers, San José attracts most low-income immigrants for the construction and service work that grew from the information technology boom in nearby Silicon Valley. During Chávez's time, residents called the neighborhood "*Sal Si Puedes*" ("Get out if you can"). The meaning behind the name was twofold: it referred both to the common experience of a car getting stuck in the mud following floods on the unpaved streets and to the aspirations of many residents to escape the barrio. Though roads have been paved, the neighborhood's nickname remains, referring to residents' disillusionment from overcrowded housing, low-wage jobs, poor schools, and crime.

How might residents of Mayfair overcome the message of *Sal Si Puedes* and once again bring possibility to the *¡Sí Se Puede!* call for justice? The staff and leaders of Somos Mayfair respond to this inherent question in their changing strategy. "We are challenging ourselves to do our work differently, longer-term and with a larger frame," explains Jaime Alvarado, Somos Mayfair's executive director.

Alvarado, who lives in the same Mayfair house of his childhood, was raised in a culture of community activism and politics. His father, José Alvarado, was a prominent Mexican radio announcer in the 1950s who organized in Mayfair alongside Chávez. His mother, Blanca Alvarado, was the first Chicana elected to the San José City Council and the first to serve as chairperson of the Santa Clara County Board of Supervisors. Alvarado sees both the work and opportunity of Somos Mayfair to be in affirming, deepening, and elevating Mayfair's ongoing narrative of community-led social change.

This case study examines Somos Mayfair as an organization in transition from its 1996 start as the foundation-sponsored Mayfair Improvement Initiative to reduce poverty. The organization's focus is on social change, based on an interconnected program strategy that combines peer-to-peer social services, cultural activism, and community organizing. Somos Mayfair's efforts today build on the efforts from the organization's early days.

## Case Study: Somos Mayfair

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### Learning from Experience

In 2004, the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation's Comprehensive Community Initiative completed its \$4.5 million, eight-year investment in poverty reduction within Mayfair. Mayfair had been the first of three neighborhoods chosen to participate in the partnership between Hewlett and three Bay Area-based community foundations. The Mayfair Improvement Initiative was founded to implement neighborhood projects identified by community residents to enhance their quality of life and to address issues of poverty. The infusion of funding led to new networks of support for the Mayfair neighborhood.

There were many positive outcomes to Mayfair as a result of the Initiative. Services to children, families, and seniors were strengthened, and a host of improvement projects—from sidewalk repair to community gardening and mural painting—took place. Low-income housing was built and job training and economic development projects begun.



New partnerships were created across organizations and foundations.

Three years before the Hewlett funding was scheduled to end, the Mayfair Improvement Initiative board and staff began to take stock of their successful projects and garner lessons learned about their impact on community change. With support from the Silicon Valley Community Foundation, the Initiative and its partners underwent a deliberate transition process that led to a new look at community action—and a transformed organization.

One challenge, according to Alvarado, who joined the Initiative in 1999 and became its executive director in 2004, was that the original Hewlett Foundation funding resulted in diffuse community efforts. “The foundation and community partners convened hundreds of Mayfair residents to come up with issues, and at the end of the day there were 70 different projects. Every idea stayed in the [Initiative’s] plan, which meant we tried to be all things to all people.”

Several other lessons surfaced in the evaluation of the multiyear program. For example, the people originally consulted to identify community needs were homeowners and other more established residents, leaving out the vast majority of neighborhood people, renters who were more recent arrivals and largely undocumented immigrants. Though the neighborhood was poor overall, these different groups had different needs.

Moreover, although the original process of the Initiative emphasized resident leadership, ultimately the organization had become staff-driven. The scale and scope of the resident-informed workplan





required strong organizational capacity and structure. The Initiative's staff administered the distribution of much of the foundation money to service providers in the neighborhood to assist in carrying out the workplan. As a result, few residents continued their involvement in the projects. "The community participants became clients, and a handful became [Initiative] board members," says Alvarado.

Another lesson learned was that poverty reduction and system change require a policy agenda, not only improvement projects. Such an agenda would also require sustained community input and leadership to move it forward. "We did some organizing and campaign work, but only because individual staff members led some isolated actions, but it wasn't the direct intention of the Initiative," Alvarado explains.

These lessons and the changing times led to a new way of thinking about the Mayfair Improvement Initiative, building on their past successes and looking toward the future.



### Transforming to Somos Mayfair

In 2007, the board and staff changed the organization's name to Somos Mayfair (We Are Mayfair), reflecting its new orientation toward community building, and held a community festival to celebrate. The Spanish word *Somos* asserts the organization's identification with the Latino community base, which is the target population for its programs and services. "Mayfair" denotes a continuing focus on the neighborhood scale. A festival announcement describes the name Somos

## POPULAR EDUCATION

Popular education was made famous by the Brazilian educator Paulo Freire, and was used extensively in the U.S. during the civil rights movement as a literacy tool. It is a way to teach adults, especially those from the least advantaged communities. This form of education helps to develop constituents as active participants in civic life... Popular education is based on the lived experience of those participating in the learning and incorporates nontraditional methods of learning such as theater, poetry, music, and visual arts. The model continues to be developed and promoted today by groups like the Highlander Research and Education Center, Colectivo Flatlander, and Project South.

(Adapted from *Social Service & Social Change: A Process Guide*, The Building Movement Project)

## Case Study: Somos Mayfair

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Mayfair as “an affirmation, an embrace, a challenge, a call and response.” The name contrasts with the Mayfair Improvement Initiative, which, the organization wrote, “no longer accurately conveys our mission or our values. The term ‘improvement’ seemed to focus on that which was wrong about our community and the term ‘initiative’ implied to many that our commitment was only for the short-term.”

Alvarado and his team envisioned a community-based organization that engaged residents not as recipients but as actors in their own community. Resident involvement, responsibility, and ownership in the organization became important elements for transforming the community through its own voice and power. Through the transition, Alvarado brought on new staff who had extensive background in constituent-led projects and social movement networks. They brought to the organization additional skills in popular theater, popular education, and community organizing.

The transition involved performance evaluations, reports on lessons learned, and developing strategy, goal-setting, and new workplans. It demanded taking a hard look at efforts tested in the early years, and holding onto the Initiative’s successful core *promotor* program which is based on the best-practices of peer-to-peer education. But the process itself began from a distinctly different dynamic than the more typical strategic planning effort. Alvarado and Associate Director Rebecca Bauen wanted the process to reflect the values and mode of action that they hoped would also guide the organization’s relationship with the community. The approach they envisioned would be based on popular education and lead to relationship building to develop and affirm community identity by, with, and for Mayfair

residents. Through group dialogue to analyze oppression it was hoped participants would come to name the root causes of common issues for action.

In a series of popular education workshops, the staff and board created a social-movement timeline incorporating the stories of the area’s native peoples, *bracero* farm workers, railroad workers, César Chávez, the efforts of the Mayfair Initiative, and other popular movements. Staff named the challenges of their current work and their desires for how their work would affect future Mayfair generations. Power-analysis exercises enabled participants to identify modes of inequality and root causes of oppression. Through this process of acknowledging both the legacy and possibility for social justice in their community, the staff and board also established social change as the foundation for the organization’s transitioning direction. Much of the transition was already underway, beginning, in part, when Alvarado first became executive director. The strategic planning process provided a forum for clarifying and affirming the developing program model. There was little debate within Somos about the continuing work ahead.

Somos Mayfair now focuses on three core program areas: Community Engagement, Family Support, and Civic Action. This new structure provides a clearer way for people to see where they fit in and what they can do. All three programs primarily involve women with children. Women’s involvement stems in part from the success of the Initiative’s *promotores* outreach and casework with families. Alvarado explains that although some men are involved (for example, fathers in family services), women tend to be more receptive to participating in Somos’ programs. “Women are where the immediate



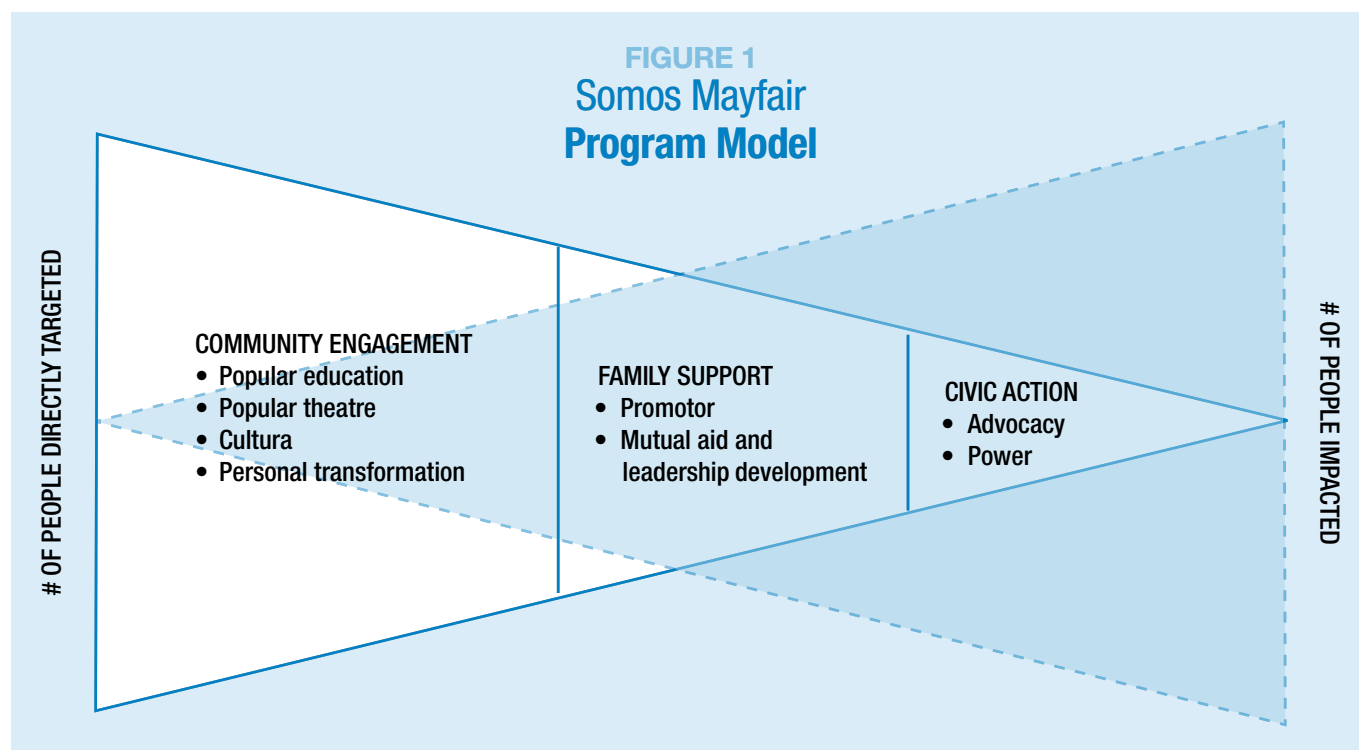
opportunity is,” he says, “because they’re interested, willing, more inclined to engage in participatory processes.” The organization’s direction also includes a strategic interest in affecting the lives of the community’s children. “With the Initiative we did everything for everybody,” explains Alvarado. “When funding was going to sunset, we knew we needed to focus. With a focus on kids, we could rally community-wide support for the next generation. Now, we are focused on immigrant families with young children.”

In 2008, the board and staff of Somos Mayfair changed the organization’s mission statement to align with this new direction. By telling their stories through culture, providing peer-to-peer family support, and building on the Mayfair movement legacy, the organization engages its new mission:

Somos Mayfair cultivates the dreams and power of the people of Mayfair through cultural activism, social services and community organizing. We are generations of immigrants, rooted in a vibrant community, who nurture healthy families and speak out for justice in Silicon Valley.

### Demonstrating Interdependence and Impact: “Not a One-Way Strategy”

The three programs that emerged from Somos Mayfair’s transition planning were distinct but interdependent components of an overall social justice strategy. Figure 1 provides a conceptual map of the number of people involved in the program areas in relation to the programs’ potential community impact. As shown in the diagram, the programs touch on the lives of the wider Mayfair



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community at increasing scale. The Community Engagement Program, depicted at the left side of the diagram, reaches a wide range of people through popular theater activities, and focuses on personal transformation. Nearly every family involved in the Family Support Program, which sits at the center of the program diagram, is directly and deeply affected by its services. The core group of leaders involved in the civic action program have the potential to impact the greatest number of people through systemic policy change.

“Everything is geared for people to take action for themselves, their families, and ultimately for the whole community,” says Associate Director Bauen. Theater work, story-telling support groups, and participatory action research are all examples of approaches based on popular education and reflected in Somos’ three program areas. Bauen explains, “Our approach is to start where people are and then build on their sense of power and skills. We’ve developed our departments to get at the psychological barriers to change as well as the structural barriers. Ultimately, it’s actually

very spiritual: we try to integrate all of these things through relationships and through tradition, celebration, and ritual.”

The program areas’ three core competencies—cultural activism, the *promotor* model of social services, and community organizing—each include attention to the stability and wellness of the individual participants through activities that emphasize one-on-one or small group dialogue. Although there are multiple entry points and referrals between the programs, many of the current resident leaders of the Community Engagement work and the Civic Action Program first developed a relationship with the organization through the Family Support Program.

### Seeding Change: The *Promotores* Model

Somos’ direct service Family Support Program is named *Siembra*, meaning planting seeds. Bauen describes *Siembra* as a pathway to the other programs: “The work of the Family Support Program

## PROMOTORES

In Spanish, *promotor/a* refers to someone who advances a cause. The *promotor* model of peer-to-peer community health advisement originated in Latin America and was first popularized in the United States after it showed success in improving health status within migrant and Navajo communities in the 1950s and 1960s. Now used in the United States primarily for health promotion activities among Latinos, *promotores* typically act as much more than educators or advisors. As trusted community members engaging in culturally and linguistically relevant outreach, *promotores* break isolation and reinforce existing social networks, reaching populations missed by traditional service delivery. Oftentimes, *promotores* have spurred organizing efforts around health access and other community issues.



is to prepare people to be engaged and active in the other two areas of cultural activism and civic engagement. The approach of peer support, building on assets, is consistent with our overall values. Participants see that they are part of something bigger than themselves, and increasingly understand what the organization is about.” The work of the *Siembra* program is carried out by staff *promotores* (see box).

“*Promotores* became the signature project of the Mayfair Improvement Initiative,” says Alvarado. “Many considered the program the most successful part of the Initiative. At that time they were really active in the streets, in home visits and church visits.” *Promotores* continue to play a central role in the organization, but the model has changed to employ a smaller staff that uses the case management model rather than a singular focus on health outreach. The case management services incorporate assessment tools for identifying quality outcomes and long-term effect, deepening the impact of the services.

Pamela Gudiño, the Family Support Program Director, explains that the *promotores* act on an expansive view of health beyond illness and disease. “We look at the social determinants of health,” explains Gudiño, “which are mental, spiritual, environmental, and economic. Health is an area that is as broad as you want to make it. Our work involves the whole person, family, and community.”

“We want people to partner with us to solve problems,” says Jesus Dora Moya, who began as a *promotora* with the original Initiative. Lead *promotora* Diana Jauregui points out that participants often come to *promotores* with a particular question, which becomes an entry point into case management for

dealing with a larger problem. “Usually a mother comes to us about her child,” she says. “That leads to talking about the relationship between the parent and the child, and the entire family. A lot of times we find out there’s domestic violence going on.” The role of the *promotor* in case management is to help address immediate crises, such as abuse or urgent housing and food needs, as well as to work with families on longer-term plans. “The direct service component helps stabilize parents and families so that they can move from the day-to-day toward their longer-term hopes and dreams,” explains Bauen. “Often that is centered on their children and their future success in school.”

The shift to the focus on case management has also led Somos to develop a professional *promotor* staff team. Throughout the country, *promotores* programs have debated the pros and cons of professionalization. Unlike traditional *promotor* models, most Somos *promotores* are salaried, full-time staff; four *promotores* and one intern serve more than 200 families annually. But in 2008, Somos also began developing opportunities for volunteer community *promotores* to work alongside staff in promoting community health while they learn leadership skills and educate and support their community.

The work of the *promotores* is largely funded by the FIRST 5 Commission of Santa Clara County, a voter-mandated initiative that focuses on leveraging, distributing, and overseeing public resources for community-based services to children aged 0-5. FIRST 5 also funds several other community-based organizations that work together to coordinate services in the Mayfair area.

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Gudiño, whose background includes farmworker organizing and government social services and who has a Master of Public Health degree, speaks to the question of specialization in the FIRST 5 model: “There’s tension there because in the end there’s a focus on the number of cases, and that may or may not be what the community needs or wants. Other organizations in the [FIRST 5] collaborative don’t necessarily have a social justice orientation and are working at the level of individual change only, so people may not see their work as part of a social justice movement in the way that we do here at Somos Mayfair. While we’re not always in agreement, we’re in a position to influence others.” As FIRST 5 looks to change its funding guidelines, Somos plans to participate in discussions on how community resources can be maximized through innovative and social justice-oriented approaches. FIRST 5 seems to be listening: the collaborative has already established a community engagement program, partly as a result of Somos’ successful example. Recently, FIRST 5 invited representatives from Somos to demonstrate their theater work to other partner organizations.

Somos has a track record of going beyond the requisite services mandated by funding sources to respond creatively to community needs. For example, one of the ways that Somos balances the pressures of professionalization and the traditional values of relationship building of *promotor* models is through the formation of support groups. Bauen explains, “This just burst forth in the last year, the commonalities that *promotores* found in individual families around issues of oppression and domestic violence. All these issues were keeping people from going to their English classes and to other programs

and services. We brought together 15 women in our first support group. They came regularly on Thursdays for three hours, and we said, ‘We need to keep doing this.’”

Gudiño understands service and justice efforts in the organization as mutually reinforcing: “We can incorporate questions of systems and structures into our support groups. We don’t need to be doing a specific civic action project to talk about systemic issues; we can do that within our *promotor* work.” One of the opportunities presented by the *promotores* to families during their goal-setting process is to become involved in Somos cultural activities and civic action campaigns.

However, Gudiño explains, the *promotores*’ work often ends up being immediate crisis response: “In the day-to-day work, the *promotores* feel caught up with the families and drawn in emotionally, and it’s intensive. It’s hard for them to also have a big picture that’s ‘Power to the people,’ but it’s important to come back to that.” The leadership and staff at Somos are also aware of the “compassion fatigue” many *promotores* experience due mainly to their continual exposure to trauma. Somos plans to make health and wellness of the *promotores* staff an immediate priority by exploring how other organizations help assess signs of vicariously reproduced trauma and how to prevent burnout.

### Uniting Families Through Community Engagement

While Family Support Program *promotores* grapple with how to maintain the larger frame of social justice and deal with compassion fatigue, staff of Somos’ Community Engagement and Civic Action



programs also contend with the tensions inherent in integrating a micro and macro approach to community issues. The theater and civic action work must balance individual participant needs with collective efforts aimed at wider community education and action.

With the organization transitioning from the Initiative's programs, staff piloted a new approach to community education through popular theater. The first production, *¡Hasta La Vista Baby!* (See You Later, Baby!), depicted the relentless daily struggles of many immigrants, such as not having a driver's license and facing job loss, evictions, and language barriers. The production's popularity attested to the audience members' identification with the stories. When the community saw their own struggles reflected back to them, trust was developed, and they began to share their experiences in public dialogues. This process led to the recruitment of community residents as actors, dissolving the barriers between actor and audience, educator and resident. Community engagement through theater became formalized as one of three Somos program areas.

Since the start-up of the theater program, Mayfair residents have become the leaders of the Community Engagement Program's theater ensemble, *Familias Unidas de Mayfair* (Mayfair Families United). Some of the participants come from the audience, others join the theater group after being involved in one of Somos' other programs. Participants develop theater pieces based on their own stories, evoking powerful life issues and repressed emotions through the creative process. The participants act not only as cultural activists but also as a support group for one another. Arturo

Gómez, who spearheaded Somos' theater work, describes the difference between this work and the farm workers' movement. He was involved with in the past: "When I came to California in the 1970s, I joined the UFW's (United Farm Workers') *Teatro Campesino*. It was to raise awareness of the campaigns. What we are doing here is different. While it is also about educating people about their rights, it is fundamentally about opening a process for change in the individual and about group connection through community dialogue."

The cultural engagement work brings together a large number of community residents in dialogue and analysis around issues such as school readiness, immigration, obesity, diabetes, and domestic violence. Aryeh Shell, Somos' Program Director of Community Engagement, explains, "[The theater is] reflecting people's lives as they are, reflecting problems as they are....The purpose is not to give answers or tell people what to do, but to use the stories to generate dialogue and analysis so that people can come up with their own solutions. It is ultimately more empowering and transformative. Based on the principles of popular education, we have a series of questions that we ask the audience following a skit: What did you see? How do you relate to it personally? What are the causes of this problem? And, what can we do about it?"

Several of the women's stories presented in the production *¡Somos Mujeres, Somos Vida!* relate to their experiences in abusive relationships. "The theater piece provides an opportunity for women facing similar issues to know that they are not alone and that they, too, can speak out or take action to stop the cycle of violence," says Shell. Through the Community Engagement Program, theater

## Case Study: Somos Mayfair

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participants bring issues such as domestic violence, which have long been hidden under social taboos of silence, into the public discourse. Often the performances are followed by workshops around the issue. Audience members also receive Somos brochures and are invited to join Somos programs and events. Performances and discussions take place at health fairs, rallies, and community gatherings within and outside the Mayfair community.

The Community Engagement Program is part of Somos' commitment to preserving cultural traditions that are in danger of being lost to the pressures of assimilation, it supports the women of *Familias Unidas* organize annual community celebrations, including *La Posada* (Christmas) and Mother's Day. In 2008, Somos Mayfair organized its first Day of the Dead celebration (a traditional holiday primarily in Mexico) with a five-hour cultural program of music, poetry, and theater performances. The community and staff built a collective altar and shared food, song, and stories to honor their ancestors. The social and cultural bonds developed through such events build community and help establish relationships of shared values and mutual trust that are the basis for organizing around social justice.

### Widening the Frame Through Civic Action

Somos' Civic Action Program holds the greatest prospect of touching the lives of the greatest

number of residents because of its emphasis on systemic change. The program's grassroots leadership group, *Madres Activas de Mayfair* (Active Mayfair Mothers), began in 2007 when 16 women conducted a participatory action research project to identify community barriers to health, with a focus on the structural causes of diabetes, a disease that program participants in case management, support group, and theater activities often raised concern about. Somos now provides direct services to increase health access for Latino families, organizes wellness activities, and tours a theater piece to raise awareness about diabetes prevention. With the launch of *Madres Activas* and a participatory action research process (see box), the organization extended and deepened its approach to address the issue not only as an individual concern, but as a community problem with community solutions.

The action research participants divided into two groups to explore the environmental issues that contribute to diabetes in the Mayfair neighborhood. Half of the action research participants used photography to document and analyze aspects of the community that represent both opportunities and obstacles to safe exercise. The other half surveyed 100 parents at four elementary schools about the quality of school lunches. Teresa, a participant in both the Family Support and Community Engagement programs who also joined the *Madres Activas* leadership group, explains, "I know that my daughters aren't always getting nutritious food at school. A lot of people talked about that. . . . In my family we don't eat junk food anymore, I try to make healthier meals. I wanted the [*Madres Activas*] group to work around the school nutrition issue. But the issue of safe places in the community for exercise





also came up. Then we saw the opportunity with the Mayfair Community Center.”

Based on their research analysis, the *Madres Activas* members decided to organize for community involvement in the City’s plans for the newly built Mayfair Community Center, slated to re-open in 2009. Their presence would ensure that there were voices at the table to advocate for health and wellness policies at the community center. The campaign results could potentially affect the entire neighborhood through the addition of free programming open to the public.

The participatory action research project, and the subsequent steps of implementing their campaign against city resistance to community input, requires a commitment of involvement by the *Madres Activas* members. Like Teresa, many of the project’s leaders were recruited to the group by Somos program staff through the Family Support and Community Engagement programs. The continuing strength of participant involvement in the campaign stems from the fact that *Madres Activas* largely grew from existing relationships, building on and deepening



ties among program participants and between participants and staff.

The sustained involvement of women in the leadership group also reflects the program’s attention to both individual and group organizing needs. Through support group activities integrated into the *Madres Activas* efforts, the Civic Action Program draws on leaders’ personal connections to health issues as a motivating source for continued involvement.

## PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH

Participatory action research is based on the concept of praxis, or the synthesis of reflection and action. Participants affected by issues of community concern identify questions for one-on-one and small group discussions with other residents also affected by the issues. Research and discussion tools may include surveys, photography, and video. As a group of peers, the participants conduct the research and analysis themselves. The results inform strategy for community-led action around the issues they identify. See Appendix B: Additional Web Resources for more information on Participatory Action Research.

## Case Study: Somos Mayfair



Alvarado explains that since the Civic Action Program began at Somos with the *Madres Activas* leaders, the group has incorporated support elements in their efforts to overcome systemic obstacles to community health: “When we started the civic action group, we created space for personal check-ins and a support group within the organizing team. We do this in order for our organizing work to be more effective, to secure advocacy wins for the community. But in order to get those wins we have to care for one another along the way, tend to our most human needs for emotional and spiritual support.

Luisa Chavarín is a veteran *promotora* with experience in community organizing whose position falls under Somos’ Civic Action Program. Chavarín facilitates much of the support work of the *Madres Activas* leadership group, “Sometimes we need to be crying with them; if they need more support we bring the agenda to support them. At the beginning they just wanted a space to share, a place where they feel free to speak. They don’t have it any other place.

They might not even have enough money to buy food. Maybe their husbands are working two shifts, and they can’t even talk with their partners about what’s happening.”

Combining individual support and collective action, however, requires balancing the group’s time and keeping sight of the group’s civic action goals. Evangelina Nevárez is Somos’ Program Director for Civic Action. She states, “Initially my vision was that there’s triage care and then [program participants] come to civic action, but I learned that people involved in Family Support aren’t necessarily ready to get involved in organizing... We’re feeling our way through it.” Recognizing the challenges facing individual members, *Madres Activas* meetings alternate between support group and organizing agendas.

Nevárez comes to the civic action work from a background in labor organizing rather than social services. “[*Madres Activas* participants] learned to support one another and are creating a cohesive group,” she explains. “Now they’re evolving more into an organizing model. They’re using all of that sadness and hurt about what’s happening in our lives and trying to transform that into the *coraje* or anger that makes us turn our feelings into action.”

### Spearheading the Mayfair Votes! Campaign

While continuing the *Madres Activas* campaign for health and wellness programs in the Mayfair Community Center, the Civic Action Program also launched a very different form of organizing in the fall of 2008—a voter registration campaign, called Mayfair Votes! The campaign reflected a broad



community effort to register and mobilize voters around the state and local referenda in the November 2008 general election. Nevárez says that the first step in the electoral work was to create a bigger leadership pool for registration outreach. Somos trained community members to do door knocking and used posters linking the organization's name with voter education.

The campaign also took a unique twist. With help from the Community Engagement Program, community leaders in the Mayfair Votes! campaign geared up for November 4<sup>th</sup> by transforming themselves into "*Super Amigos*" (Super Friends). Depicting Mexican wrestler action figures, community residents dressed as *Super Mamá*, *Super Inmigrante*, *Super Voto Latino*, *Super Voto Juvenil*, and *Super Futuro* and acted out the fight against the forces of apathy, poverty, and discrimination—the villains that try to keep them out of the civic process. The team traveled to community gatherings to perform and distributed voter information to passing traffic, encouraging people to register to vote.

Somos views electoral work not as an end itself but as a means to build an active base of resident leaders and broaden its networks with local and regional allies. Through the Mayfair Votes! campaign, the organization has involved young activists, including adult children of immigrants and more established Chicano residents from Mayfair and from the surrounding neighborhoods. The electoral work also provided an opportunity for Somos to build on its relationship with young adults at Evergreen Valley College, the school that partners with Somos to provide English as a Second Language classes in the Mayfair neighborhood. According to Nevárez, "A

large percentage of our community cannot vote, so we're reaching out to those who can, but with the message, 'Be my voice.' You are not just voting for yourself, but for many more who can't vote in the community."

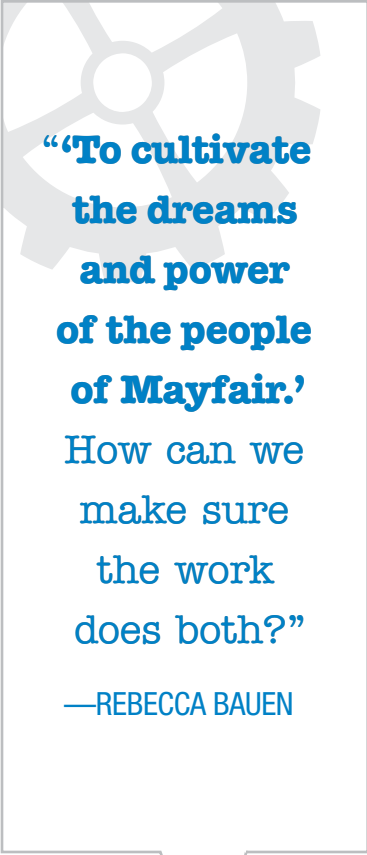
### Continuing Organizational Change

As part of the Mayfair Votes! campaign, Alvarado convened board and staff to hammer out organizational positions on California's 2008 statewide and local ballot initiatives. Alvarado expected that discussing controversial issues would raise questions of values, privilege, and power. The issue of gay marriage particularly—raised by Proposition 8, the highly contested proposition that would effectively ban gay marriage—was a personal and emotional issue for staff.

A month before the convening, Somos held a workshop with staff around LGBT issues facing immigrant and Chicano youth. Alvarado viewed the workshop and ensuing meeting on the ballot initiatives as part of an ongoing discussion to help inform collective analysis and more deeply explore the organization's values and vision for justice. Consistent with Somos' approach, some individual staff members chose to share their own personal stories and experiences with discrimination. At the ensuing convening, the board and staff voted to publicly oppose California's proposed gay marriage ban as well as to oppose a proposition that would impose a waiting period and parental consent for minors to obtain an abortion. Neither of these stands would be viewed as typical positions among Latino voters.

## Case Study: Somos Mayfair

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**“To cultivate  
the dreams  
and power  
of the people  
of Mayfair.’**

How can we  
make sure  
the work  
does both?”

—REBECCA BAUEN

Somos did not invite program participants to the meeting to decide on the organization’s ballot positions. Because of the personal nature of the issues at hand, the leadership decided to hold an internal discussion and vote in order to build a safe place for the relatively new staff and board to learn and come to their positions. (Half of the organization’s board members and two-thirds of the staff, including all the program directors, came to their positions during the transition.) Following the organization’s decision on the propositions, the Civic Action staff team and executive director met with the resident organizers of the Mayfair Votes! campaign to inform resident leaders about the reasons behind the organization’s stand on these particularly controversial propositions. In this regard, the organization

continues to move through a process of transition to its goal of resident-led organizing.

Associate Director Bauen remarks that the organization is its own theory of power evolving as it learns new lessons from its efforts. She asks, “If building power is the crux of this work, how do we define that, what specific slice of power are we going to address, and is building electoral power the way to do that? We have just refined our mission: ‘To cultivate the dreams and power of the people

of Mayfair.’ How can we make sure the work does both?”

Alvarado is transparent about the challenges of the organization’s transition, drawing on lessons learned from the Initiative. For example, several regional coalitions and alliances are eager to partner with Somos Mayfair and anticipate that the organization will be a primary driver of progressive organizing in the South Bay. But Alvarado is cautious about the need to build an active constituency before taking on new efforts, “We learned from our transition to not do everything, and that through narrowing we will effectively be able to strengthen the leadership of people to be able to tackle whatever issue.”

*Cambia, todo cambia.* Change, everything changes. The lives of the many people who participate in Somos Mayfair’s programs are changing. The Mayfair neighborhood is also changing. The organization is learning and changing as it embraces its new direction: to support a vision of both deep and broad individual and community transformation that will lead to better outcomes for children and families and to social justice for all.



# Case Study: Bread for the City

## Organizational Profile/Quick Facts

<b>EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR</b>	George A. Jones
<b>ADDRESS</b>	5 Seventh Street, NW, Washington, DC 20001
<b>SERVICE AREA</b>	Washington, D. C.
<b>MISSION STATEMENT</b>	The mission of Bread for the City is to provide vulnerable residents of Washington, D.C., with comprehensive services, including food, clothing, medical care, and legal and social services, in an atmosphere of dignity and respect. We recognize that all people share a common humanity, and that all are responsible to themselves and to society as a whole. Therefore, we promote the mutual collaboration of clients, volunteers, donors, staff, and other community partners to alleviate the suffering caused by poverty and to rectify the conditions that perpetuate it.
<b>YEAR BEGAN</b>	1974
<b>PROGRAM AREAS</b>	Food, Clothing, Social Services, Medical Care, Legal Assistance
<b>CURRENT SOCIAL ACTION ISSUE AREAS</b>	Affordable Housing; Access to Food/Nutrition; Access to Health Care; Income Support & Economic Development
<b>NUMBER OF STAFF</b>	60
<b>FY 08 BUDGET</b>	\$5.7 Million
<b>FUNDING</b>	Public: 28%; Private: 37%; Individual: 35%

## Case Study: Bread for the City

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### Introduction

In 2003, 54 low-income households from the Kelsey Gardens complex in Washington, D.C.'s historic and largely African-American Shaw neighborhood faced the threat of displacement. The Kelsey Gardens landlords sought to end their contract with the Section 8 rental subsidy program administered by the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and sell the property to developers who would erect a luxury high-rise. Coincidentally, the complex is located directly across the street from the Northwest office of the nonprofit organization Bread for the City.

The Kelsey Gardens situation was part of an increasing wave of displacement attempts throughout the District since the mid-1990s. More recently, in 2007, on the other side of the Anacostia River, owners of the Oak Hill complex in Southeast D.C. were pushing residents out to convert the buildings to market-rate condominiums. Hundreds of residents left, fleeing disrepair and infestation; others left after receiving a nominal buyout by the landlords. According to the *Washington Post's* 2008 investigative report, "Forced Out," the complex was nearly abandoned by the owners, who then issued unwarranted evictions in an effort to drive out the remaining tenants. The remaining 23 residents banded together to create an organizing and support group.

In both of these cases, Bread for the City's legal services leapt into action, preventing further loss of the city's affordable housing and helping to guide tenants in a critical legal strategy that ultimately stopped their displacement. Bread for the City's Executive Director, George Jones, says, "The

tenants who came from across the street were our clients and members of our community. They said, 'Hey, they're trying to sell our building.' It was the beginning of a tidal wave of developers and building owners in cahoots trying to sell the low-income housing market out from under poor people in the District. It was also a new beginning for us as we began to look at tenant legal services on a larger scale."

Since the neighbors from Kelsey Gardens came to Bread for the City for legal assistance, the organization's housing staff have become involved in 12 other buildings' campaigns. But it's not just on behalf of individual buildings that Bread for the City has made an impact. They also successfully advocated for legislation that prevents landlords from making tenants' living conditions unbearable, as at Oak Hill. In all these instances Bread for the City was doing more than providing a service; they were helping their constituents fight for their rights.

In both the Kelsey Gardens and Oak Hill efforts, Bread for the City played a key role as legal resource ally. To help them with advocacy, the Kelsey Gardens tenants partnered with neighborhood organizers from the nonprofit ONE DC to create a cohesive political strategy that included a protest before HUD and negotiations with the owner and developer. Relying on Bread for the City for legal help, the tenants of Oak Hill were largely self-organized; they created their own flyers, scheduled and facilitated their own meetings, and identified their demands without outside expertise.

This case study looks at Bread for the City's organization-wide effort to bridge services and social justice and their work to create a formal

structure for advocacy across programs. This description focuses on the process behind their advocacy program’s formation. The staff-led process has raised fundamental questions related to Bread’s vision for and role in social change work: How can different approaches, such as providing legal services, medical services, social services, or doing advocacy and organizing, reinforce social justice? Does the very concept of justice differ among these approaches? How can staff positions be structured to strengthen both service and justice goals, and how should staff interact with clients?

### **Bread for the City Beginnings: Service and Advocacy**

Bread for the City began in 1976 as a food and clothing distribution center founded by a group of churches called the Emmaus Fellowship, based on a Biblical call to feed the hungry and clothe the poor. The organization opened its doors just two years after activists from the Community for Creative Non-Violence and volunteer doctors started Zacchaeus Free Clinic to provide health care for the poor and homeless in the same Shaw neighborhood. The staff and volunteers of the two groups worked collaboratively, often with the same community residents, and in 1990 they co-founded a social work program. In 1995, the two organizations formally merged, keeping the name Bread for the City.

When George Jones began as executive director in 1996, his chief concern was to create a smooth transition for the joining organizations’ clients, staff, and board. Since the merger, the organization has grown from employing 32 to more than 60 full-

time staff located in two service sites in Northwest and Southeast D.C. Today, Bread for the City is the largest food pantry in the city and also provides clothing, social, medical, and legal services to 62,000 people annually.

Jones notes that, although there was no set advocacy agenda, he became Bread’s spokesperson on citywide advocacy issues directly relevant to the organization’s services: “All the advocacy was purely ad hoc when I began—not ineffective, but sort of just an afterthought that hadn’t quite gotten to the stage it now occupies with the agency.... There was a kind of implicit affirmation from the board that the staff could be out there speaking about things; the board had that spirit, and I think that’s what allowed the staff to have it too.”

One of the first successful advocacy initiatives Jones helped spearhead was for the DC Free Medical Assistance Act, a law that provides malpractice coverage to small medical clinics, encouraging community-based health services. Jones also became one of the strongest supporters of the DC Health Care Alliance, the city’s primary care insurance program. That program began in 2001 amid

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—GEORGE JONES

## Case Study: Bread for the City

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controversy around closing the city's only public indigent hospital in order to fund the program. Bread was in a position to benefit from the Alliance program, which would provide a revenue stream for its medical services to uninsured patients, including undocumented immigrants.

Reflecting back, Jones says that the issue provides insight into the organization's ad-hoc and non-integrated advocacy style at the time: "That issue is a good barometer for how much we've grown. Originally, advocacy was pretty well consolidated among a few of the leaders, and advocacy efforts were also siloed into the particular programs. So when it came to decide, for instance, whether to support the closure of the hospital or support the Alliance, the only people here who had much context for it were the medical director and me. So the reality of everybody became what we said it was, and there wasn't even a place for people to say 'That's not my experience.'"

Eight years after Bread's successful campaign for the insurance program, Jones says that the organization is in a stronger position to involve more voices in shaping its current advocacy agenda: "I think people are much better versed so that if that same thing happened now, for instance, many of our social workers would have a lot to say, and [they] would have the opportunity to speak up and be heard at monthly management team meetings, staff meetings, and as part of the Advocacy Task Force."

It would be difficult to determine if more participation by staff would have altered Jones's or Bread's official position on the heated healthcare issue at that time. What's clear is that for the last several years direct service staff have expressed greater interest in the intersections between direct service provision and social justice. Several social service staff members now participate in discussions with management about how advocacy is structured at the agency, focusing on the internal process as well as the issues being considered for the organization's advocacy agenda. Jones welcomes staff interest in advocacy efforts, but the actual process for involving staff has its challenges.

### Formalizing Advocacy

Like many nonprofit providers, Bread for the City is facing increased demands for services without similar increases in funding. To continue meeting their constituents' needs, the organization vigilantly seeks opportunities to find new revenue streams. In 2006, Bread for the City hired Stacey Long as Director of Government Relations and Partners, with the task to begin formalizing advocacy



while also focusing on policies directly affecting Bread's funding. Long's former position as the Deputy Director of the organization's Southeast office established her as an internal leader and demonstrated the organization's commitment to advocacy.

Around the time that Long took on her new role, a core group of service staff expressed interest in deepening advocacy work in the organization and looked for ways to become more involved in social justice efforts. One person who took particular interest in Bread's advocacy direction was Kendra Sudano, a social service case manager.

"I came to Bread [in 2005] with a background in economic justice organizing and immediately saw the potential of employing a rights-based justice framework in this direct service environment. I knew there would be challenges, ideologically and practically, but [I] felt it necessary to push the envelope and demand we take a stand on the issues behind the services, to locate our direct service work in context." Sudano hoped to raise questions of how the organization identified and prioritized services, engage in an internal analysis of why demands for services persistently increase, and discuss whether Bread had a responsibility to include the voices of community members in decision making at the organization.

Another staff person working in social services, Jessie Posilkin, Legal/Social Services Case Manager, also expressed interest in strengthening the organization's advocacy. Working closely with Long, Sudano and Posilkin (who has since left her position at Bread) assisted with the formation of Bread's Advocacy Task Force. The task force provides an opportunity for interested social service

staff to have a role in shaping the organization's advocacy approach. Representatives of different program areas attend the task force meetings, which Long coordinates. The group's initial goal was to understand the city's terrain of advocacy organizations, identify policy issues, and develop a coherent plan for implementing advocacy efforts based on staff input and participation. As the task force came together, Long worked with Jones to identify immediate advocacy priorities.

In the first year of her new position, Long attended key antipoverty coalition convenings throughout the city. Many of these coalitions included representation from other service organizations with programs similar to Bread's. However, Long soon discovered that there was a conflict about the purpose of her work. Bread's leadership saw advocacy primarily as a way to increase the organization's revenue. But the advocacy coalitions Long attended were looking at systemic policy changes, which were not always compatible with that goal. For example, Bread sought consistent and guaranteed funding from the city to pay for the services the organization provides. Long explains, "I knew that Bread for the City was interested in acquiring earmarks in the city budget, for example from the Department of Health, and yet I was surrounded by advocates who were focused on promoting budget transparency and adamantly pushing the [City] Council to eliminate earmarks altogether." To add to the confusion, Bread's own Advocacy Task Force disagreed with the organization's focus on earmarks and increasing healthcare reimbursement levels. When the Advocacy Task Force reviewed the organization's proposed policy goals for the year, Long remembers

## Case Study: Bread for the City

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staff participants saying, “Whoa, this is totally off the mark in terms of what we’ve been talking about lately for social justice.”

Long was in the midst of completing a strategic plan laying out the policy goals to increase organizational revenue when she and Jones agreed that the advocacy strategy would not work as a vehicle for funding. Long recalls, “George said, ‘Tear [the strategic plan] to shreds—start from scratch. Add to it, or change it, by all means, we want this to be an authentic helpful document; we want a living, breathing document. We don’t want it to just be something that we can say that we did and just check off a box.’ Things had changed, and we decided to just focus on advocacy. That’s when we got much more intentional.” Long was pleased with this shift in approach and saw in it an opportunity for broadening and deepening the internal conversation about how to develop the organization’s advocacy framework.

### **“What Do You Mean by ‘Justice?’”: Examining Power and Client Participation**

Long changed her title to Advocacy Director and Jones soon after devoted one of the organization’s quarterly all-staff meetings to revisit Bread’s mission statement and core values. The staff from both Bread centers met in a newly renovated recreational facility in Southeast D.C. They discussed the original mission of the organization and its current direction, including advocacy-related efforts such as support for affordable housing. Sudano co-facilitated the group discussion, which culminated with the entire staff voting to

add “justice” to Bread’s motto, which now reads: “Dignity. Respect. Service. Justice.”

Long says the meeting appeared to be a successful beginning, “I thought, ‘Great, now we can add “Justice” to the letterhead!’” But soon after the meeting, questions arose about what each staff member meant by “justice.” For example, among Bread’s medical care providers, the fact that the organization has the capacity to add only two new clients a day is an injustice; justice would demand increasing space and staff so District residents with no other options can exercise their basic right to healthcare. Likewise, Bread’s legal service providers consider access to government entitlements fundamental to justice. For the social workers, justice involves providing services with dignity and respect for each client.

“For some people, it all made sense,” says Long. “But for others it was like, ‘We’re not speaking the same language.’”

For Bread, the question of justice led to difficult conversations between members of the management team and the Advocacy Task Force around issues of power internal to the organization. In particular, the discussion of internal justice raised concern over perceptions of power imbalances in the organization’s relationship with the people it serves. As Long points out, “Some of the task force members were talking about justice in terms of challenging power and how it operates within the organization, because when you have those conversations between staff and management, what you’ll hear back from management is, ‘We’re really accessible, we don’t have a hierarchy, the executive director is involved,’ and all of those

things. Which is true, but it doesn't flesh out the big picture, which is the client piece: How engaged are they? How do we know we're doing the right thing without their participation?" Executive Director Jones, who is African American, points out that the different mindsets around social justice at Bread at times fall along racial lines, with African-American staff expressing a different approach to poverty relief than European-American staff. Creating an agency-wide working definition of justice would involve naming and unpacking these important internal racial dynamics as well as considering the clients' point of view.

At a meeting of the Advocacy Task Force, Sudano suggested that justice includes questioning and potentially reorganizing the way that services are delivered to create opportunities for clients' participation and feedback. For example, for a long time the agency grappled with the discrepancies between its medical clinic's advice that patients consume foods with a higher nutritional content to combat chronic illness such as hypertension and diabetes and its food pantry's offerings, many of which included donated canned goods high in sodium and items with trans fats. The food program recently decided to eliminate unhealthy food items from the grocery bags, but not before the agency conducted client surveys about food preferences and actively sought client feedback about the changes. Long says, "It's about fostering a different way of relating."

Jones and Long are looking at other ways that their constituents can be more active participants in the organization's work. The Advocacy Task Force created a list of local organizations that involve clients in pursuing advocacy and visited the

D.C. nonprofit So Others Might Eat (SOME). There they discussed how SOME created and supports their Advocacy Department and learned from their model of advocacy client involvement. Jones was especially impressed by SOME's website, particularly an interactive component allowing people to respond to current issues by writing to local officials online. Jones says that resources make a difference in what an agency can do: "The main difference between SOME and Bread is that they have a \$20 million budget and we are a \$5 million operation. Our advocacy program has just \$100,000 and that mostly covers salary."

Long wants to learn more from other organizations about client involvement. Bread's early attempt, before Long's time, at client involvement taught them that it takes a deliberate and serious focus to carry it out. Before the current advocacy program began, a Bread intern helped form a client-action group, Citizens Expressing Themselves, to prepare testimony in support of social services programs being reviewed in the city's budget. Although many of the members presented testimony at public hearings, the group disbanded because, in Long's view, when the staff intern left, it couldn't be sustained without being linked to a specific program or strategy.

"Things had changed, and we decided to just focus on advocacy. That's when we got much more intentional."

—STACEY LONG

## Case Study: Bread for the City

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Long thinks the organization needs to continue to learn about best practices and attain resources for a dedicated organizer position before bringing clients together again.

For the time being, there are client resource rooms in both Bread service sites that house a computer station, telephone, and directories to government office listings. Clients interested in acting on their own issues or in Bread advocacy efforts (such as calling or writing city officials to protest the District's purge of the Section 8 waiting list) may use the offices. However, due to limited staff time to inform the organization's client base about these resources, few people have learned about or used the rooms. Long hopes the offices will become more known and accessible to clients for advocacy purposes soon.

### Learning and Sharing from the U.S. Social Forum

In addition to visits with local organizations, several Bread staff members involved in the Advocacy Task Force, including Sudano, traveled to Atlanta in 2007 to immerse themselves in the learning opportunities of the first U.S. Social Forum (for more on the Social Forum, see box on page 67). Bread funded two case managers to attend; another paid her own way. After attending the Social Forum, Sudano reported back to the management team, a meeting that provided another opportunity to engage the question of what social justice means within the organization.

One staff member who attended the Social Forum worried that management were skeptical about the push by some staff members to increase

constituent involvement at the organization. She perceived a fear by some people that the organization would be seen as an agitator before city funding sources. A stated concern was that accelerating social change efforts would outstrip Bread's existing staff capacity and would take away from the quality of their services. At the Social Forum report-back meeting, Sudano situated Bread's advocacy efforts along a continuum of social change, a process that doesn't imply an overnight about-face from what Bread had already been doing. Sudano reported that they learned from diverse organizations at different points in their own processes of pursuing social change; there was no one set way or specific formula to adopt. Sudano's report back also affirmed rather than challenged Bread's existing strengths in services. The presentation and discussion helped create a positive framework for continuing the organization's commitment to advancing Bread's advocacy work. Long says the message was simple, "We're not trying to be like this group or like that group, we're trying to be like we are, but to be better in terms of how we're impacting people that we're working with." According to Long, the report back to management about the Social Forum had a positive effect: "I could see relief, like, 'Oh, OK, I get it,' or 'I see how this is just a start.'"

As a next step, management plans to hire a consultant to involve board and staff in a strategic planning effort around advocacy. The organization plans to use Building Movement Project's *Social Service and Social Change: A Process Guide* as a road map for initiating the strategic planning process and developing their social justice framework including helping clarify the board's role

in advocacy. Eventually, Jones hopes to broaden client involvement in the board structure once there is support to help them fully participate in leadership roles. Currently, two board members come from Bread's client base. Ultimately, Jones would like to create a majority client board, a requirement to becoming a Federally Qualified Health Center (FQHC).

## Balancing Service and Justice

The Advocacy Task Force's work to develop a social change strategy has been energizing but also straining for the direct service work, according to Jeannine Sanford, Bread for the City's Deputy Director: "Ten years ago when somebody got riled up about a particular issue here, that just meant that instead of a 50-hour week, they'd work 60 hours. The director would help figure out how to take a few cases off of your case load, and we'd try to squeeze a little time for that interest. Working on advocacy was sort of part of the culture, but not part of the programs directly."

Sanford suggests that the current focus on formalizing advocacy within the organization relates to a generational divide, in which most of its youngest members want their direct service positions imbued with social justice. "My feeling now," says Sanford, "is that people say, 'I want to do advocacy and social justice in my job, I want it to be within the hours I'm already working, and I'm not okay with it having to be an add-on.' So that just runs us into this generational head-scratching occasionally, where your job is to provide this particular direct service but you're really passionate



about a specific issue. Direct service is about social services, and we still need [staff] to do that."

Long concurs that there is tension for staff members who are inspired to be part of the advocacy work to balance their primary job responsibilities and their social justice passions: "My management style is to manage from people's strengths, or try to figure out what it is that excites a person," says Long. "But there are some bare minimum things that you've got to get done, you can't not do them. But at the same time, if there's a way to motivate people around a particular thing and get more out of them that way, then that's what we should be doing." Sanford says, "We often realize that sometimes we have people who are the right people on the bus, but they're not in the right seat." Funding constraints do not allow for people to switch seats very often, but Long is hopeful that the task force's work will continue to create opportunities for direct service staff to be involved in shaping the advocacy strategy.

## Case Study: Bread for the City

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### Synthesizing Advocacy and Organizing Through Community Lawyering

As seen in the examples of tenant association campaigns, legal services have played an important role in Bread's history of advocacy. Jones explains, "It was our legal clinic that was already the most palpable and dynamic force for advocacy here, and that's not surprising because in a lot of ways advocacy and legal counsel go hand-in-hand." While in the midst of discussions involving staff in shaping the advocacy program, Bread for the City identified funding for a community lawyering position. The position would also serve as a concrete example of how to explicitly bridge services and advocacy, while also involving constituents directly in social change.

Phylisa Carter, a resident of Southeast D.C., was hired for the organization's Community Lawyering Program in 2007 (see box). Carter's job is to identify what community leaders or organizations see as issues of importance and to engage them in legal strategy that addresses their issues.

In Southeast D.C., which has a history of being the most underserved section of the city, with high poverty, crime, and lack of public works, Carter explains that the first building block for community lawyering is building trust: "I've been going to resident meeting after meeting in public housing and at the ANC (Advisory Neighborhood Council), and I see people are just upset and angry and not organized...and it took a while to begin to see a pattern and to figure out who's who and what's what. The first thing to do is you have to show them that you're here—you're involved, and then they can begin to trust you. The second piece is to build a relationship with community leaders and discuss their self-interest. From there you determine if other people share similar concerns and put these leaders in a room together. This meeting determines if the interested parties are willing to act on a particular issue."

"Another idea is to look at our own lists, scrub our database and go back to the clients we already serve and see how we can possibly organize them to address certain issues," says Carter.

### COMMUNITY LAWYERING

"The community lawyering model stresses the power of people working together to address pervasive problems in their community. It differs from a traditional legal approach in which litigation takes center stage. In fact, some campaigns involving community lawyers may not lead to any legal action. Community lawyers instead see themselves as partners with the community in devising multiple strategies to hold government agencies accountable. An important outcome of the community lawyering approach is establishing enduring leadership skills among the affected individuals for the long term."

—Phylisa Carter, *Community Lawyer, Bread for the City*



## NETWORKED FOR SOCIAL CHANGE: MOVING TO WEB 2.0

For many service providers, Web tools such as Facebook, MySpace, YouTube, blogs, podcasting, and listservs, all create rapid communication systems for linking constituents and sharing analysis, news, and action steps. Social networking is especially popular among youth programs that develop their own membership sites with photos, music, and programmatic updates. Groups working with older generations, too, are increasingly using Web 2.0 resources to expand their networks. While facilitating rapid mass and intergroup communication, most Web tools also require consistent time and attention from the host organization, often for inviting and selecting contributors, ensuring posts remain relevant and current, and monitoring usage.

Working together, Long and Carter recently partnered with George Washington University's School of Public Policy to conduct surveys and focus groups with neighborhood organizations, churches, and social service groups around housing, healthcare, and food and nutrition. Affordable housing, including public housing residents' fears they would be displaced to make room for mixed-income developments, were among the most important issues of resident concern, according to Carter. Long and Carter also spoke with veteran organizers around characteristics of a good organizer, and heard back that the number one qualification should be that the person knows the community and can get out there talking to people. Carter thinks that, given the scarcity of organizers familiar with the communities in Southeast, at this point such a person would come from the grassroots rather than from a professional organizing background. Bread is still considering whether to create a partnership between the community lawyering project and another community organizing group or to develop their

own constituents as a base for taking action around community issues.

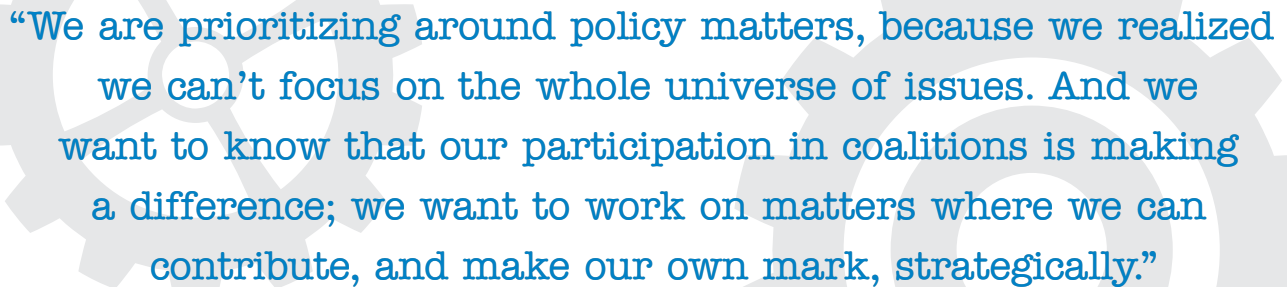
### Building on Staff Initiative

Bread for the City's Advocacy Program continues to build on the task force's ideas and to add new initiatives. "Beyond Bread," for example, an interactive public blog, started in the spring of 2008 around advocacy-related issues (see box). The blog creates an open forum where staff, fellow service providers, and community members beyond Bread's client base can consider how Bread fits into the many issues facing District residents. The blog also publishes information about Bread for the City services, profiles of the organization's clientele, and news and commentary about poverty-related matters in the city and the world at large. Recently, Bread launched a monthly email newsletter, "The Bread Bulletin," which they intend to use explicitly, but not exclusively, for advocacy and action alerts.

Little by little, Bread's Advocacy Program is taking shape. Long is now working with Bread for the

## Case Study: Bread for the City

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“We are prioritizing around policy matters, because we realized we can’t focus on the whole universe of issues. And we want to know that our participation in coalitions is making a difference; we want to work on matters where we can contribute, and make our own mark, strategically.”

—STACEY LONG

City’s directors and its Advocacy Task Force in developing next year’s advocacy strategy. “We are prioritizing around policy matters, because we realized we can’t focus on the whole universe of issues. And we want to know that our participation in coalitions is making a difference; we want to work on matters where we can contribute, and make our own mark, strategically.”

Jones considers the work ahead—deepening understanding and pursuing action around social justice—to be a long-term process, which he thinks will be more evolutionary than revolutionary.

He says that the best way to inform the advocacy agenda is through the staff’s relationships with clients: “At the heart of the concept is to be able for the client to see you as a person just like them—to see your strengths and weaknesses and see how you solve problems, but to also see you as a partner trying to struggle for social and economic justice with them. I’m at a place where I got into management, but we’re still small enough where I can have a relationship with the people we serve. That relationship is where social justice begins.”





# Case Study: Family & Children's Service

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## Organizational Profile/Quick Facts

<b>EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR</b>	Molly Greenman
<b>ADDRESS</b>	414 S. 8 <sup>th</sup> Street, Minneapolis, MN 55404
<b>SERVICE AREA</b>	Minneapolis-St. Paul metro area
<b>MISSION STATEMENT</b>	Building strong families, vital communities, and capable children
<b>YEAR BEGAN</b>	1878
<b>PROGRAM AREAS</b>	Counseling, Violence Reduction, Family and School Success, Public Policy and Civic Engagement
<b>CURRENT SOCIAL ACTION ISSUE AREAS</b>	Children's Mental Health, Immigration, Poverty Reduction, Prostitution, Domestic Violence, Affordable Housing
<b>NUMBER OF STAFF</b>	60 full time
<b>FY 08 BUDGET</b>	\$6 million
<b>FUNDING</b>	Public: 17.8%; Private: 54.8%; Individual: 7.2%; Fee and Other Income: 20.2%

## Case Study: Family & Children's Service

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### Introduction

It's a balmy summer evening in Minneapolis. The Powderhorn Park community room, which sits on the bank of one of the city's famed lakes, is buzzing as members of the Family & Children's Service M.O.V.E. Coalition Leadership Council begin to arrive for their monthly meeting. Two Somali women in colorful *hijab* squeeze by a group of Hmong youth with sculpted hair and funky glasses. An African-American woman holds the door for an Ecuadorian couple as they breeze into the room with a group of preteen Latino kids in tow. They nod in greeting to each other but their attention is elsewhere. Each of the 50 or so members streaming in is scanning the walls above the long folding tables that line the room, looking for the posted signs that will direct them to their work for the evening: "Community Peacekeeping Action Committee," "Immigrant Rights Action Committee (*El Grupo*)," "School Change Action Committee," "Tenants' Rights Action Committee."

Community members move toward their selected tables, where they greet each other warmly, offer brief introductions to newcomers, then quickly get down to business. The groups, each facilitated by a Family & Children's Service Community Organizer or a grassroots community leader from within the group, spend the next hour moving through their action committee's individual agenda. These agendas include everything from report backs on meetings with legislators and community groups to presentations on new issues that have arisen since the last meeting and workshop plans for the Coalition's annual Peace, Power and Unity Conference that will take place in the coming month. Members take turns offering ideas and updates, and the tone of the conversations swings back and forth

from tense and heated to lighthearted and excited. At the end of the hour, each group reviews the report that they'll share with the rest of the Coalition.

A Somali woman stands to offer the Community Peacekeeping Action Committee's report, pausing every few sentences to allow the lead organizers in each group to translate her words into English, Spanish, and Hmong. Each of the groups follows suit before the group as a whole moves on to a vote on a proposal to bring a new action committee into the Coalition—"A Rainbow After the Storm"—which will offer leadership development and community organizing opportunities to gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgendered, and queer youth and their allies. The proposal is accepted. At the meeting's conclusion, the coalition members line up to pile their plates high with the tamales, rice, beans, and *plantanos* that have just arrived. The focus has turned to food but the energy of the group remains palpable as members banter over the steaming tins.

In the light of Family & Children's Service's three-part theory of change—helping people solve problems, helping people prevent problems, and helping people change community conditions—the M.O.V.E. Coalition seems exactly the sort of programming that the organization would support and promote. Hearing the report backs from the various action committees, however, and getting a sense of the range of initiatives they're working on—from increasing access to community soccer fields to establishing an Ecuadorian consulate in Minneapolis—begs the question: Can space for community voice and a community-led agenda exist within the structure of a social service agency?

President and CEO of the nonprofit Family & Children's Service, Molly Greenman, offers her frank and succinct take on why she thinks the answer is yes. "We pay attention to the people we say we are here to serve and are informed by their knowledge of what they need to support their families. In order to do that you just need to be willing to change."

This case study tells the story of Family & Children's Service in Minneapolis and how their openness to change, coupled with a strong sense of organizational values, has allowed them to embed social change work deeply into their social services.

### A 130 Year-long Thread of Advocacy

The legacy of Family & Children's Service's community impact was chronicled in Dr. Celeste Raspanti's publication, *A Splendid Work: 125 Years* (2004). The piece highlights several examples of how the organization has taken a holistic approach to addressing community problems, including establishing community gardens throughout the city to grow food during the Second World War. "Maybe that's not technically considered advocating for systems change," says Greenman, "but it was advocating for communities in different ways than were traditionally thought of for a social work agency."

The agency takes this tradition seriously and integrates it into its principles and values as a guide for difficult and controversial decisions. For example, in 2006, staff members brought a proposal to the board of directors to include a focus on immigrant rights in the agency's public policy platform. The agency had developed strong relationships with immigrant community members through their

numerous community-building initiatives. It was clear that in order to fully support and address some of these residents' most critical issues, the organization needed to promote legislation that would help to protect immigrants from the persecution they were experiencing on a regular basis. John Till, the organization's Vice President, recalls questions from the board about focusing on immigrants: "Well, why immigrants? Why not all families?" Board members seemed apprehensive about taking so public a stance in support of policies that might protect undocumented immigrant children and families, an issue that had a mixed reception from the general public.

To respond to the board's concerns, Till and other staff members turned to Family & Children's Service's 130-year history. He explains: "We created tools (see Figure 1) that put policy work into the framework that there's always change going on out in the community and there's always different public responses to that demographic change. But what we've valued as part of our history and tradition is responding to local needs without judgment in an effort to strengthen children and families. We did that work



"What we've valued as part of our history and tradition is responding to local needs without judgment in an effort to strengthen children and families."

—JOHN TILL

## Case Study: Family & Children’s Service

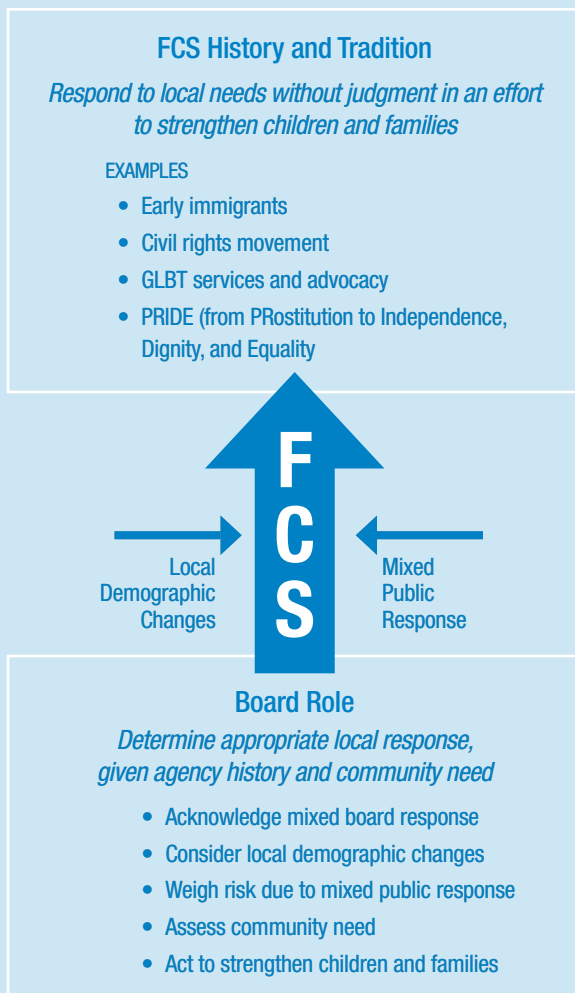
in the late 19th Century and early 20th Century with new immigrants, and then later on with the Civil Rights Movement, GLBT services, our PRIDE program (from P<sup>R</sup>ostitution to Independence, Dignity and Equality—a nationally-recognized and highly successful program run through FCS that helps women get out, and stay out, of

prostitution)—all of these things were considered controversial and there wasn’t full agreement in the community about what the response should be. But we decided to take a position based on what we heard from community members and what we felt was aligned with our values.”

These are values so ingrained in the culture of the organization that a former staff member, Jennifer Blevins, was still able to rattle them off six months after leaving the organization for a position directing a local neighborhood center. “The focus at Family & Children’s Service is on systems and not individual blame,” she recalled. “Getting people to the table, helping them to develop the expectation that they should be a part of the process, increasing the expectation that they have rights and deserve things in this society. We do that by having systems change and undoing racism goals built into every piece of our programming.”

Molly Greenman underscored this idea, pointing out that by deepening its emphasis on systemic change in recent years, Family & Children’s Service is building on the strongest foundations and longest-standing traditions of the field. “Having that change aspect in our mission makes us unique, but it reflects the tradition of social work—to help individuals succeed in society but also to *change* society in order to support a wide range of people. There’s always been a thread of advocacy and civic engagement since the founding of this organization. I think at different times in our history we’ve done more or less, but the fact that we’ve been able to maintain that for over 130 years is pretty incredible.”

**FIGURE 1**  
**Framework for Community Support**



## Linking Social Service and Social Change

Today, Family & Children's Service is a \$6 million organization with four locations serving the Twin Cities and more than 80 staff members. Each year the organization works with more than 31,000 community members through their four central programming areas: counseling, violence reduction, family and school success, and public policy and civic engagement. Through these program areas, community members have access to a broad array of services that reflect the first two tenets of the organization's mission: **to help people solve problems and to help people prevent problems.** Within the agency, clients play a critical role in determining how social services are provided, expanded, or modified through participation in advisory groups that convene regularly to evaluate and make recommendations to many of the programs. According to Greenman, "Even though we don't have a community-based board [of directors], much of our work has become informed by these advisory groups."

Over the past several years, the agency has also transformed a number of their traditional services to incorporate the third aspect of their mission: **to help people change community conditions.** One illustration of how Family & Children's Service is integrating social change models into their services is the Family Project. Through the Family Project families come together in groups to talk about issues that are important to them, help each other solve problems, and take action together on behalf of their children. Laurie Lindblad, director of the Family Project, describes how it works: "The groups are led by the participants, predominately parents, who



decide what the group is going to focus on and they set their goals."

Lindblad, who was hired eight years ago to develop new models for supporting and engaging parents, explains, "The Family Project has always been about trying to build social capital and create extended networks of support—natural networks that are sustainable and that folks can take advantage of and rely on even if our staff is not involved. It's community organizing at the intimate level, focused on relationship building."

The Family Project model has four basic components: relationship building, identifying strengths and capacities within individuals and their communities, bringing people together to share the load, and helping groups set achievable goals. But like so many of Family & Children's Service's programs, it's the "broad umbrella"—the goal to increase the safety and success of children and the community—that allows for this to be a truly community-driven program. As Lindblad puts it, "We know it's a

## Case Study: Family & Children’s Service

wonderfully broad umbrella but it allows schools, apartment complexes, and community centers to get on board with this. How [the program] looks in each individual group can be very different, as long as it fits under that umbrella goal.” Lindblad and Family Project staff depict the model as a circle in which any of the four components can serve as the entry point for the program (See Figure 2).

Adding to the strength and sustainability of the program is an openness to continuous evaluation and adjustment. According to Lindblad, developing the program is an ongoing practice: “I think, especially in American society, we have this need [for someone] to tell me the ‘right way to do this.’ There is a lot of ambiguity that you have to deal with when you’re doing community work. It requires you to find

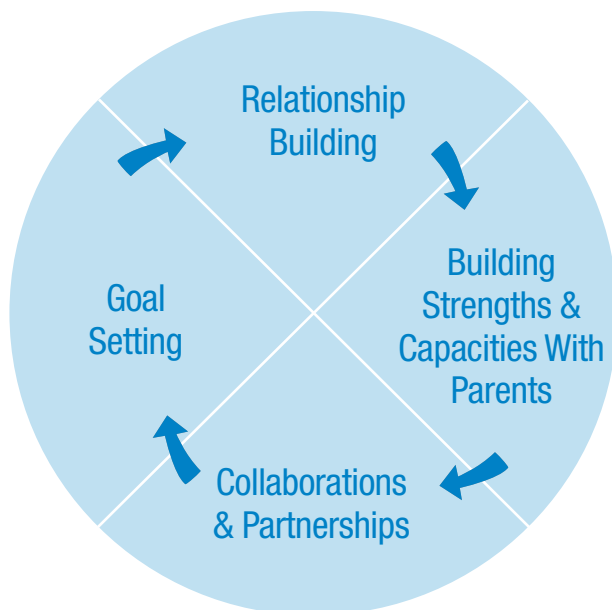
a comfort level with letting the right answers emerge from the people we are engaging, which can be very hard for some people. But the staff who do this work well love that dynamic. They love the unpredictability of it all, and also they have the tools to move it along.”

### Keeping the Basics and Strengthening Community Ties

Like many service organizations in the decades preceding the millennium, Family & Children’s Service experienced a marked shift toward individual case advocacy with a deeper focus on clinical social work. By the early 1990s, mental health services had become the sole services available to most community members out of the organization’s three sites. In 1992, however, during a strategic planning process, the executive leadership and board recognized that the communities the agency was serving had changed and continued to change. In order to fulfill their mission of strengthening children and families, the organization realized it needed to add “strengthening communities” as a strategic goal. Alongside their commitment to continue to provide services that met immediate needs, the agency saw the need to deepen its commitment to advocacy and systems change.

Around this time, the organization was opening a new site closer to many of the low-income families and communities that the organization served. The staff realized that this new center provided a prime opportunity to live out their renewed commitment and could serve as the model for community-centered programming that could be infused into all their programs. They also realized that in order to address the broader range of issues facing

**FIGURE 2**  
**The Family Project**  
**Core Principles/Components**



the community, the staff had to work at building relationships with the community.

“We had a whole initiative called the School Home Community Programming Initiative, and that allowed us to hire some staff to go to communities surrounding [the Family & Children’s Service] offices to find out what community members thought were the significant issues facing families and kids,” says Greenman. “What these [new staff members] did was they literally went door to door in identified neighborhoods and communities. In Bloomington (a first ring suburb), for example, they went to Section 8 housing facilities or community centers, held community meetings or focus groups, and just asked people what were the significant issues affecting families and kids in their community.” Several pressing community issues emerged through this process, so the staff developed a strategic approach. They distinguished the different issues according to ones that could be addressed by modifying or expanding existing services, those that would require new services, and those that could best be addressed by referring people to other resources.

Two issues stood out most prominently—jobs and affordable housing. So it was here, where there was energy and interest within the community that the organization decided to focus its community-strengthening programming.

The immediate result was the creation of two new agency programs: the Community Leadership Development Program and the Jobs and Affordable Housing Campaign (see box for funding information). The Community Leadership Development Program focused on providing training in community action to grassroots leaders who are low-income, persons of color, or new immigrants. Over six months, weekly training sessions allow the participants to build the skills and capacity to organize projects with individuals and families in their own communities. Participants are also provided with stipends and a mentor from a partnering community organization for additional support. Alumni of the program not only organize projects in their own communities, many also lend their leadership to other community-building initiatives within and outside of the organization.

## FUNDING FOR COMMUNITY STRENGTHENING PROGRAMS

Funding can often be a challenge for organizations interested in doing community-strengthening work. The initial funding that Family & Children’s Service received for the School Home Community Programming Initiative (SHCPI) allowed them both to assess what needed to change in local neighborhoods and to determine what programs needed to be developed to move that vision forward. The agency decided early on to diversify funding for these programs to ensure sustainability. As a result, funding support has come over the years from state and local government as well as from foundations with a specific interest in either access to and preservation of affordable housing, leadership development in low-income communities and communities of color, or social justice or racial and economic justice.

## Case Study: Family & Children's Service

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The second program, the Jobs and Affordable Housing Campaign, has seen some of the greatest evolution. What started as a campaign has developed into what is now called “Mobilizing and Organizing for Victory and Empowerment” or the M.O.V.E. Coalition described in the opening section of this case study. The Coalition model allows for members to focus on a broader array of issues through action committees that address such issues as community peacekeeping, welfare reform, immigrant rights, and tenant rights. The action committees meet individually to work on their specific areas and then come together monthly as a group to share progress and collaborate as needed.

Jennifer Blevins, who oversaw M.O.V.E.'s development, recalled being at the group's first annual Peace, Power and Unity Conference, where the discussion of the expansion initially came up. “The members talked about the fact that [focus on] jobs and affordable housing just didn't cover all of their concerns anymore,” she recalled. People

proposed additional issue areas they wanted the group to focus on, and those developed into the action committees. The decision to expand the work of the coalition beyond its original concept is another reflection of Family & Children's Service's commitment to a community-led approach. As Molly Greenman puts it, “What I'm proud of is that we changed the name rather than saying, ‘I'm sorry but we don't do that here. We only work on jobs and affordable housing.’”

The social change work has yielded strong new leaders and has had powerful outcomes within the community. Still, the significance of the tie between the organization's social service and social change work cannot be underestimated. Although most participants in the civic engagement initiatives originally connect with the agency through their desire to change things in their community rather than through the agency's services, staff has found that the beauty of their three-pronged approach is that it responds to the complex realities of families.

### TRACKING PERCEPTIONS

While it's important to make sure that there is a strong internal understanding of agency goals and values, it is also important to periodically investigate how those goals align with external perceptions of the agency's work. Family & Children's Service conducts a survey annually with community stakeholders—defined as organizational or institutional leaders who have to partner with the agency on their civic engagement programs. According to FCS Vice President Till, “The purpose of this effort is to be able to have a ‘reality check’ on our activities that includes not only staff and client perceptions but also perceptions of institutional partners.” The survey, which was developed by an outside consultant, requests that respondents rate the agency across dimensions including strengthening families, strengthening communities, diversity, cultural competency, and undoing racism. (For information on how to access this survey, see Appendix B: Additional Resources.)



“When we first moved here, [Family & Children’s Service] was one of the first organizations that lent us a hand to make it easy for us to be involved in the community. From there, five people from the group have opened up the doors for other types of opportunities: leadership in other organizations, leadership around gangs and drugs, even in other cities, thanks to the opportunity from FCS.”

—COMMUNITY MEMBER

Just like other families in Minnesota, the low-income families involved in M.O.V.E. and the Family Project sometimes experience serious problems, such as domestic violence, child abuse or neglect, or community violence. By working together to create community change, community members build strong relationships of trust with Family & Children’s Service community organizers; that trust often enables them to ask for help when needed. The organizers understand the agency’s services and can act as a bridge to Family & Children’s Service counselors, other direct service programs, and even other community resources and organizations, as appropriate.

This sentiment was underscored during a conversation with a community leader following a M.O.V.E. Coalition meeting (translated here from

the Spanish): “It wasn’t difficult for us to trust this organization,” the community leader said. “When we first moved here, [Family & Children’s Service] was one of the first organizations that lent us a hand to make it easy for us to be involved in the community. From there, five people from the group have opened up the doors for other types of opportunities: leadership in other organizations, leadership around gangs and drugs, even in other cities, thanks to the opportunity from FCS.”

### Getting Results

Many of Family & Children’s Service’s community-building initiatives have yielded individual, organizational, and community-wide results. One way the agency measures those results is through an annual survey, conducted for the last six years,

## Case Study: Family & Children's Service

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tracking the perceptions of stakeholder partners (see box). Although the organization has always tended to score solidly on the dimension of “cultural competency” in these assessments, the tracking shows that compared to six years ago, they are more likely to be viewed today as champions of racial and economic justice—a prominent goal of their social change work. The tracking also reveals that there is more awareness in the community of Family & Children's Service as a multicultural organization.

Some of the outcomes of FCS's work offer poignant illustrations of the positive impact of community-led initiatives in ways organizations and other stakeholders did not predict. One example came out of the School Change Action Committee of the M.O.V.E. Coalition. Originally, that group was made up mostly of immigrant and first-generation youth of different ethnicities. The organizers suggested the group lobby for a piece of federal legislation that would help undocumented youth become permanent residents, but group members had a different agenda. They decided to support the Hmong youth among them in a problem these youth identified.

“The Hmong youth in White Bear Lake—a mostly white suburban school district with fairly significant Hmong population—felt they weren't being prepared for college, that they were being given classes that were less meaningful and that their educational futures were at risk because of indifference,” recounted FCS Vice President Till. So the organizer working with the School Change Action Committee encouraged them to meet with the school superintendent. Till adds, “The traditional social service approach would be to [have a case worker] meet with the principal and say, ‘I hear this is what's going on. Is there anything that you can do about

it?’ My guess is that very little would have happened. The impact was that the superintendent got to meet the young people face to face. That was meaningful for him and that affected how he interacted with them. That's something that wouldn't have resulted from a more traditional human service approach.”

As a result, there has been a ripple effect with schools across the metro area. Steps are being taken in Minneapolis Public Schools that will allow students to be evaluated and receive credit toward high school graduation for written and oral fluency in their native languages. As Till put it, what came out of the experience in White Bear Lake was that the young people began to feel their own power—their own ability to make things happen—and started thinking about next steps. A conversation that started with students' dissatisfaction with their academic experience and a feeling that they weren't being heard is now moving to policy change. Till points out, “What comes next is something that is actually relevant to more than just the Hmong students. It's relevant to Somali students and Latino students and will grow from there.”

### Challenge of Sustainability

The dynamic, often responsive nature of such community-led work means that keeping a core group of leaders involved can be one of the biggest challenges. Jeff Bauer, the Director of Community and Systems Change at Family & Children's Service, explains how the M.O.V.E. Coalition is not immune to the difficulties common to many organizing groups, “A lot of people get very involved around a specific issue due to self-interest or because they're in crisis,” Bauer explains. “Once their issue is resolved, they

tend to go away.” In addition, each Action Committee tends to have a cultural affiliation—the Immigrant Rights Action Committee is mostly Latino and the meetings are held in Spanish while the Welfare Reform Action Committee is almost entirely Somali and takes place mostly in their native dialect.

Participants and organizers are looking to M.O.V.E.’s structure to address both of these issues. One arrangement that seems to be working is the establishment of the Leadership Council. The Leadership Council serves as a monthly space for coalition members to bring together the work of their individual action committees. Now that this model is in place, staff and group members are focused on how they can build the momentum of the coalition by creating leadership opportunities in the Leadership Council that are similar to those that exist in the individual action committees.

Funding has also been a challenge. Much of Family & Children’s Service’s current community-building work was sparked through a 1992 McKnight Foundation grant, and McKnight continues to offer significant support for this work. However, other significant funding for the agency’s advocacy has come from their local United Way, which has now shifted its focus to fewer, narrower outcomes through direct services and will be discontinuing their support. Greenman explains, “By supporting our public policy and community-building work to the tune of \$290,000, United Way gave us what we needed to support the infrastructure and then draw in foundation money and sometimes government contracts for projects directed at changing needs. That foundation no longer exists after January 1, 2009.”



In the midst of these financial challenges, it becomes even more apparent how central FCS’s social change work has become. Rather than scaling back on these initiatives, staff is looking to their community-building initiatives as the framework for their fundraising. As Bauer puts it, “I write grants now based on what the committees are working on—they set my fundraising agenda.” Greenman adds that the organization has also become better at figuring out ways to communicate the value of their social change work to even the unlikeliest of funders: “We had a contract with a housing management company at one point for the work that we were doing organizing tenants. The tenants were getting what they needed and in turn becoming better tenants. The police calls were going down and the tenants were staying so there was less turnover. We could translate that into measurable return on investment.”

“In interviews, we used to ask questions like ‘What is racism? Why are people poor?’—fairly ideological questions that generally put left-wing white folks at an advantage because they faced less risk in giving frank answers... By switching to more of a behavior-based set of questions, candidates were able to focus on the nature of the work to be done and interviewers could more accurately assess the candidates’ cultural competency and community-building skills.”

—JOHN TILL

### **Organizational Structure that Reflects Community Involvement**

The evolution of Family & Children's Service's organizational structure offers strong evidence of the agency's willingness to embrace change internally as well as externally. As in many groups, some changes in FCS structure have been the result of strategic planning or shifts in funding. But for the most part, organizational changes have come about through ongoing reflection on what structure would help the agency better enact their values and work more effectively toward their social change goals.

One example is how the agency has brought together its Public Policy Program and its Community and Systems Change efforts. When the agency made the move to increase its focus on strengthening

communities, it already had a strong Public Policy department staffed by a group of professional advocates handling its legislative advocacy. For years, Family & Children's Service's formal public policy advocacy was a separate affair from much of the agency's community-building work. Even when housed in the same department, the issues addressed through the organization's community organizing initiatives seldom affected the organization's formal policy advocacy agenda, which was often focused on other issues related to the well-being of children and families. As community initiatives grew in size and scope, however, so too did the intersections between them and policy advocacy. In 2008, Vice President Till brought together the directors of Public Policy and of Community and Systems Change in order to

strengthen efforts to integrate the work of the two departments. Now, the critical focus is to implement systems, lines of communication, and connections between the grassroots and the “grass-tops,” or formal policy advocates, that will allow the agency’s public policy and civic engagement efforts to be fully integrated.

As Till puts it, “What I’ve never respected particularly are organizations that use community members as mouthpieces for an agenda that they were not invited to help develop. It’s not very organic and it’s not very compelling to legislators if those folks aren’t around very often. What we’re trying to do, especially in immigrant communities, is explode out the number of leaders that are known to legislators. We’re really trying to amplify the voices of M.O.V.E. participants. It’s in its early stages, but the departments coming together really set the groundwork.”

As the agency looks to deepen its relationships with the community even further, it is also aware of the importance of developing a staff that reflects the community it serves. Although the staff is increasingly more diverse, Greenman acknowledges that the top positions are not: “Internally, we’re doing a good job of developing talent, but the management structure is still predominantly Euro-American, highly educated, middle-class people.”

Still, much of the progress FCS has made in diversifying its staff over the years has stemmed not only from recruiting a more diverse applicant pool but also from reframing their entire process—from interviewing to personnel management and support post-hire. Till shared one example of how something as simple as changing the way questions were posed during the hiring process could help to reveal

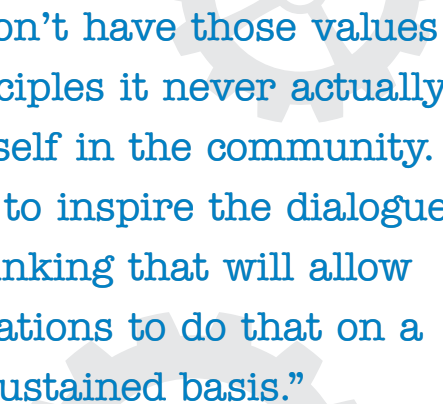
the assets of diverse candidates. “In interviews, we used to ask questions like ‘What is racism? Why are people poor?’—fairly ideological questions that generally put left-wing white folks at an advantage because they faced less risk in giving frank answers to those questions or were better prepared to give the answers that people wanted to hear.”

By switching to more of a behavior-based set of questions such as, “Suppose you have to work in a community where you’re not recognized as a member of that community. What do you need to do in order to make connections or move work forward?” candidates were able to focus on the nature of the work to be done and interviewers could more accurately assess the candidates’ cultural competency and community-building skills. They could also get a more accurate sense of how the candidates had approached challenging situations in the past. Asking questions in this way also helped to address a shortcoming of the agency’s early attempts to diversify the staff, in which they often hired people who shared the same ethnicity as the communities they were hoping to reach without determining what sort of support they might need to succeed once on board.

The current, more refined approach to hiring and supporting diverse staff members has resulted in staff who have had a transformational impact on the agency’s community-building work. Participation in the M.O.V.E. Coalition, for example, has increased significantly in recent months; many staff members point to the work of organizer Maria Zavala, who is Latina, as instrumental in drawing in many of the community members who have since taken on leadership with the group. Several coalition members echoed the value of having someone like Zavala as a

## Case Study: Family & Children's Service

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“If you don’t have those values and principles it never actually roots itself in the community. We want to inspire the dialogue and thinking that will allow organizations to do that on a sustained basis.”

—MOLLY GREENMAN

model for leadership, including one participant who shared, “Over the past four months, immigration has come knocking on doors to send parents to their countries, leaving behind the children. Who is going to support them? Who is going to help them? If there are more people that are doing what Maria is doing, I think it would be a very strong world. That’s why I’m here.”

### **Creating Systemic Change: Minneapolis and Beyond**

As Family & Children’s Service consistently strives to improve its own ability to facilitate systemic change, the agency is also looking for opportunities to affect social change beyond Minneapolis.

One way they are spreading the work of the organization is by sharing their models with outside

groups through workshops about their organization’s values and approach, showing some of the concrete skills and tools that Family & Children’s Service has developed to support its civic engagement initiatives. In 2005, for example, the McKnight Foundation challenged FCS to expand the reach of the Family Project model without adding more staff. In response, they used their experiences over the previous four years to create a curriculum and formal training model. Since then, the agency has trained more than 700 parents, community members, and staff from schools and other service organizations. Lindblad explains that they try to focus on strategic partnerships to increase the impact of the trainings they offer. “One thing we’ve done with the schools is to try and implement it systemically,” she explains, “by getting the entire school district to promote diffusion in all of the district’s schools of this approach to engage parents. Currently, we’re working with seven school districts on that system wide approach.”

Beyond sharing program models, Family & Children’s Service is working to position itself as an organization that encourages other groups to think differently about the systemic changes that social service agencies can help foster in a community. As Greenman puts it, “When I think about how we do our work and the difference from other organizations that don’t have that staying power or are not as effective, I think it’s that they see things as a service, an activity, a program. If you don’t have those values and principles it never actually roots itself in the community. We want to inspire the dialogue and thinking that will allow organizations to do that [root change in the community] on a sustained basis.”

# Case Study: Moving Forward Gulf Coast

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## Organizational Profile/Quick Facts

<b>EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR</b>	Trupania Bonner
<b>ADDRESS</b>	620 Oak Harbor Blvd., Ste. 201A, Slidell, Louisiana 70458
<b>SERVICE AREA</b>	Southeast Louisiana, Mississippi Gulf Coast, Mobile County, Alabama
<b>MISSION STATEMENT</b>	Moving Forward is dedicated to rebuilding a better Gulf Coast through the vision of its residents. By providing volunteer-based relief, Moving Forward strives for community empowerment and fosters collaborative efforts through community advocacy, training and creative programming.
<b>YEAR BEGAN</b>	2006
<b>PROGRAM AREAS</b>	Video Advocacy, Immigration Legal Services, Community Organizing.
<b>CURRENT SOCIAL ACTION ISSUE AREAS</b>	Disaster Recovery, Black/Brown Relations, Community Participation in hurricane recovery.
<b>NUMBER OF STAFF</b>	1 (full time)
<b>FY 08 BUDGET</b>	\$95,000
<b>FUNDING</b>	Public: 95%; Private: 0%; Individual: 5%

## Case Study: Moving Forward Gulf Coast

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### Introduction

When the eye of Hurricane Katrina overcame her hometown of Slidell, Louisiana in 2005, 20 miles northwest of New Orleans, Colette Pichon Battle was residing a safe distance away in Washington, D.C. But she wouldn't remain in what she remembers as her comfortable life as a corporate lawyer for much longer. Immediately after the storm, Pichon Battle flew home, where she found her neighborhood of Bayou Vincent, one of Louisiana's few remaining Creole enclaves, recovering from being inundated by more than eight feet of water. That's when she made a promise to her family and community to stay and help rebuild the Gulf Coast. With that decision, Pichon Battle became one of the hundreds of thousands of Gulf Coast residents without housing and facing an uncertain future. Determined to strengthen the response efforts, Pichon Battle moved into her family's FEMA trailer and launched the organization Moving Forward Gulf Coast, Inc.

This case study presents lessons of a different type of nonprofit. Moving Forward Gulf Coast began in an emergency marked by initial chaos. Meeting immediate and dire needs through direct service was the organization's first imperative. But the founders of Moving Forward also realized that lasting change would have to be systemic. Through new networks and a brief respite for reflection, they found a way that their small and under-resourced group could actually do systems change by bringing people together through video advocacy. Although Moving Forward continues to identify and provide needed services, their services now act as a vehicle for advocacy work and leadership development.

### Organizing the Southern Way: Through Trust and Kinship

Moving Forward Gulf Coast began out of a cramped FEMA trailer with a small circle of friends who first gave each other emotional support, then moved quickly to action. They started the group out of necessity to help with the distribution of food, clothing, and other basic humanitarian supplies to people affected by the hurricane. "If I've got gloves and you've got goggles, and we have a relationship, then let's get to work together," says Pichon Battle of the emergency response mode in the first year following the storm. Everyone involved with Moving Forward worked as a volunteer that first year, assisting residents to fill out FEMA forms and making personal contacts throughout the country to facilitate the distribution of supplies. Pichon Battle explains: "We weren't people who started off in the nonprofit world, and at first we had no foundation support. We had only steady friendships through that disaster. There is real trust among people who go back generations."

Community roots run deep for Pichon Battle, whose kinship connections had helped her pay for law school with support from community fish fry dinners and collections. The diaspora resulting from Hurricane Katrina broke apart such family support networks, making recovery efforts, such as housing reconstruction and employment opportunities, even more daunting for those remaining and those returning. Moreover, funding of nonprofit activity is much lower in Louisiana than the national average; following Katrina, the community-based groups across the region were struggling to redevelop infrastructure. "Excluding the churches, we were the only nonprofit in Slidell," says Pichon Battle. As



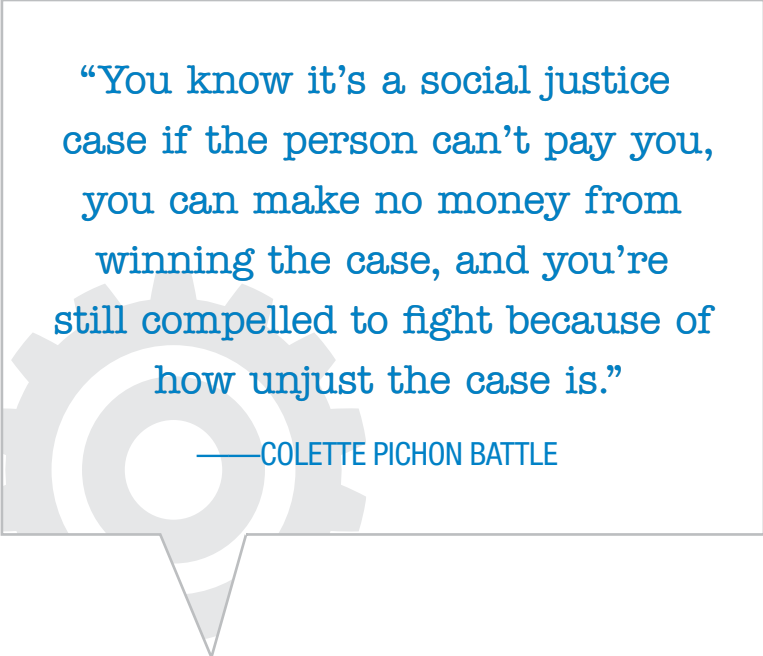
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one of only two African-American attorneys in her entire parish (county), Pichon Battle became a vital resource for residents displaced, disoriented, and increasingly distrustful of outside aid workers.

### Responding to Disaster with Basic Services

Pinchon Battle acted as a bridge-builder between the group of friends who began Moving Forward and her institutional ties within and beyond the Gulf Coast. With contacts spanning corporations, universities, and national nonprofits, she was able to connect local people with incoming resources. The first grant awarded to Moving Forward enabled them to provide environmentally sound clean-up materials to homeowners around the Gulf Coast region. “There would be five layers of mold growing on top of each other in the houses that were flooded,” recalls Pichon Battle. “People were cleaning with bleach that would then go directly to the waterways. These are the same waterways where people fish.” With a donation of nontoxic microorganisms for mold clean-up and a partnership with the United Steelworkers of America, Moving Forward convened residents from Slidell and throughout the Gulf Coast region, including Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana, for a series of health and safety classes related to mold removal and home construction.

Nearly a year after Moving Forward began, the organization raised funding to hire New Orleans resident Trupania Bonner as executive director and rent office space in Slidell. Pichon Battle became the president of the board and remained an active volunteer with the organization. The new space provided enough room for the organization to host



“You know it’s a social justice case if the person can’t pay you, you can make no money from winning the case, and you’re still compelled to fight because of how unjust the case is.”

—COLETTE PICHON BATTLE

the program Match Makers for Justice, which brought law students from around the country to Slidell and other parts of the Gulf Coast to help connect residents with legal rights resources. Pichon Battle had already been putting her own legal talents to work on what she calls social justice cases. “You know it’s a social justice case if the person can’t pay you, you can make no money from winning the case, and you’re still compelled to fight because of how unjust the case is,” she says.

Many of the legal cases Moving Forward took on during its first two years dealt directly with FEMA funding: “People were being pushed through 30-page applications,” explained Pichon Battle. “They knew their story, but not how to present it on paper. Oftentimes they would pre-qualify for a federal grant and receive it, only to learn later that FEMA accused them of fraud because they had previously lived with family members who were now across the country

## Case Study: Moving Forward Gulf Coast

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also applying. We were doing appeal after appeal to FEMA, who said they had to return the money.”

Countless other needs for legal services around social injustices emerged among the hurricane survivors, not directly as a result of the broken levees, but from the decisions made in the hurricane’s aftermath. For example, illegal evictions in the New Orleans area grew to an estimated 20,000 in the months following Katrina. One example Pichon Battle recalls is of an elderly white woman. “She was living in a shed after being evicted from her housing complex,” says Pichon Battle. “She gathered other people with disabilities from the housing complex facing unlawful evictions, and we interviewed them and helped them with their legal work. It became a community campaign.” The residents became an example to Pichon Battle and Executive Director Bonner of how to provide services differently so that people could begin to advocate for themselves. Pichon Battle says, “People expect the lawyer is going to get angry and do something about their issue. [However,] we saw people coming together to be self-advocates, and they started petitions for their own state policy campaign. We helped them in legal matters and helped organize them to do the rest.”

Bonner came with experience in using film to depict injustice and saw the importance of exposing the issue of the senior group facing eviction to a larger audience. He felt he could initiate a deeper conversation among the hurricane survivors by using video as an advocacy tool. “When I came into Moving Forward Gulf Coast I was involved in a film project called *Ghetto Exodus* about police abuse and drug turf wars in [New Orleans] public housing,” Bonner explains. “I see video as a straightforward and user-friendly way to get the truth out there while involving

people in that process of telling their story and being heard. It’s a way to get people to see other people just like them facing the same issue and to provide them with information they need to take action.”

### Advocating Through Media

Moving Forward’s first experiments with video advocacy coincided with Pichon Battle being at the edge of burnout: “We were just trying to maintain,” she recalls. “At one point I had to be hospitalized from exhaustion... It didn’t make sense to help people over and over again coming from the same situation. It was making us physically ill. We had to change the situation from the roots.”

Through support from the nonprofit Project South, a leadership development organization that partners with progressive nonprofits throughout the U.S. South, Moving Forward began to consider the potential of media advocacy seriously and how to shape their work strategically within a social justice framework (see box). Pichon Battle remembers, “When we started Moving Forward Gulf Coast, I didn’t even know what the word ‘organizer’ meant... I was invited to BAM! in 2006 [Project South’s Building a Movement training] and I didn’t know what it was really about. I didn’t even understand the words. Popular education? Community organizer? What does that mean? Every so often I had to ask [the trainers], what is that word you’re using?”

Although she didn’t consider herself a social justice organizer at the time, Pichon Battle began to see Moving Forward’s work as based on the relationships needed for social justice efforts: “My understanding now is that there’s no way there’s only one kind of organizing. Here in the South it’s about getting to

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know people and beginning with that relationship.” Through the popular education training they got from Project South, board and staff began to consider the possibility of changing the nature of Moving Forward’s work to integrate advocacy into the organization’s direct service efforts.

They turned to Project South staff for help in creating a strategic plan and identifying relevant issues for using video advocacy as a popular education tool. “People were getting upset about decisions with FEMA, especially around public housing demolitions. But mostly they were getting angry about not being heard,” says Bonner. So Moving Forward linked

its emergency and legal services to organizing and advocacy through video. This medium would specifically target folks who were purposely kept out of the region and for whom reading is not a primary means of information gathering.

The first advocacy video produced by the program, *The Fight for Affordable Housing in New Orleans Post-Katrina*, brings the voices of renters, including public housing tenants, to the foreground. “The damage done to us wasn’t by Katrina, it was by HUD,” states one tenant filmed by Bonner during a community housing hearing on the fate of New Orleans’ public housing projects. The video includes individual

## POST-KATRINA ORGANIZING: EXPLORING RELATIONSHIPS & RACE WITH PROJECT SOUTH

Project South conducted their Building a Movement (BAM) workshops in the Gulf Coast in April 2006. “Colette [Pichon Battle] was one of 25 people who attended, all of whom worked in marginalized communities,” notes Stephanie Guilloud from Project South. “They were emerging leaders who had no name for what they were doing. When we arrived, the level of physical, spiritual, intellectual pain was so intense. Colette talked about how the deep mold was making everybody sick.”

Though they talked about technical skills, the BAM meetings stressed political analysis and the importance of building relationships. In addition, because race is at the center of Project South’s training, especially the historical significance of movement building across different communities, Project South staff brought BAM participants to both the Southeast Social Forum—one of the regional gathering to U.S. Social Forum—and then to the Forum itself. At both events they were able to engage with groups that offered powerful examples of cross-community work.

Guilloud stresses, “[The BAM participants] were able to build relationships to each other and to us that are still strong.” Working across these boundaries began to change the way Moving Forward Gulf Coast saw its work, and the support it received made it possible for them to approach their work differently as well. Moving Forward now views their work through a frame that affirms their role as movement connectors, bringing grassroots leaders together and working for system change.

## Case Study: Moving Forward Gulf Coast

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“Without the voices of the next generation, we’re just a bunch of egos in the room with no real grasp of the consequence of our actions.”

—TRUPANIA BONNER

interviews with residents who originally came to Moving Forward for legal help, shows residents giving community testimony, and provides expert advice for tenants as well as resource information. Policy makers’ phone numbers at the end of each segment provided a way for residents to respond directly on the issues. “We showed the video all over, not just here, but in Houston at churches and to community groups where people who were displaced got together. We had people take out their cell phones and begin calling their representatives to support Maxine Waters’ HR1227 (the Gulf Coast Hurricane Housing Recovery Act of 2007) after the viewings. That was how closely tied the video was to taking action,” explains Bonner. In a highly politicized atmosphere, the House bill, which had strong language for preserving public housing, ultimately didn’t pass. Despite this defeat, the campaign activated Gulf Coast residents whose voices were heard through

public hearings, housing occupations, and street protests, now permanently documented in the Moving Forward video.

“Making the first video was a real learning experience,” says Pichon Battle. “We brought

different community people together to help plan who should be in it and what our message would be. We used tools we learned from Project South to come to consensus about which issues to choose.” Pichon Battle facilitated brainstorming sessions that included board and staff members along with residents identified through services and community activism to create lists of possible issues to depict. Participants discussed the importance of each possible issue area in relationship to the breadth and depth of community concern and impact as well as the organization’s expertise and capacity. Using the activity of dot-mocracy, participants voted on what should be covered in the video advocacy series by placing stickers next to their chosen issues. Bonner remarks, “We’re in the process of making the second video now on the privatization of the public education system in New Orleans.”

As part of their relationship building, Moving Forward was invited to partner with a New Orleans-based youth group over the summer of 2008. Bonner led a two-week video advocacy training with 15- and 16-year-old youth, who produced a mini-film series called *Voices of Katrina: Time to Speak Up!* “Part of what I do is try to get young people involved in making their own videos through workshops on interviewing and editing,” says Bonner. “Without the voices of the next generation, we’re just a bunch of egos in the room with no real grasp of the consequence of our actions.”

### Bridging the Divides

Moving Forward now provides fewer direct services than when it began. The mold-remediation program has completed its course, and the organization

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receives fewer supply donations for distribution. At the same time, the group continues to increase its capacity for advocacy. In the summer of 2008, the organization's legal support services were provided by student law interns supervised by Pichon Battle. "After the first two years we transitioned from response and recovery to rebuilding and sustainability," says Pichon Battle. "You could feel the change, a shift of priorities." Needs on the ground helped spur Moving Forward's shift from providing services responding to the disaster to engaging in advocacy work responding to the rapidly changing political landscape.

Like many groups across the country, Moving Forward's social justice focus was bolstered by its involvement in the 2007 U.S. Social Forum (see box). The Gulf Coast regional organizing preparations for the Forum provided an opportunity for community workers to deepen bonds and work more closely on social justice concerns. Reconstruction of the Gulf

Coast was a focus of the Forum, which took place in Atlanta, where more than 10,000 progressive activists and organizers of grassroots organizations throughout the country gathered for workshops and forums to develop movement strategy. Bonner remarks, "For the past 30 years people have been working out of their silos in the Gulf Coast. After the storm, people actually found each other. The U.S. Social Forum helped to bring us together. Everyone was there."

The impact of the Forum began when Moving Forward hosted a crab boil at a St. Tammany Parish bayou, bringing a hundred Creole community residents together to meet the Forum's Southwest delegation, which stopped to tour Gulf Coast areas and connect with its residents on their way to the convening in Atlanta. "The going on was real," recalls Bonner. "We had a crab cookout with Black and Brown people on the Bayou. The people from the Southwest were mostly Latinos, and we held

## U.S. SOCIAL FORUM

The first U.S. Social Forum, in Atlanta, brought together 10,000 community leaders, activists, and organizers for five days in June and July 2007. Under the banner, "Another World is Possible, Another U.S. is necessary!" the gathering reflected the principles of the annual World Social Forum, which was established by the global justice movement in Porto Alegre, Brazil in 2001. The U.S. Social Forum was especially remarkable for the overwhelming participation of women, people of color, and youth representing today's movement builders. More than a thousand workshops organized by a range of groups covered the nuts and bolts organizing tools, wellness, leadership development, and strategy around a range of key movement issues, from the local neighborhood to the global scale. Reconstruction after Katrina; ending the occupation of Iraq; indigenous, LGBTQ, workers, and immigrant rights were prominent issues and themes discussed.

Adapted from [www.ussf2007.org](http://www.ussf2007.org)

## Case Study: Moving Forward Gulf Coast

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story circles on the grounds where that Creole community's church once stood but was washed away by Katrina.”

The relationship between African Americans and Latinos is a central concern to Moving Forward, explains Pichon Battle: “Some white activists from outside the area have been very paternalistic to African-American organizers on the ground, rubbing the issue of Latinos and creating tension. There has not been an effective approach that incorporates the dismal working conditions that existed pre-Katrina for Black workers and there is not enough being done to bring these two groups of workers together. In the aftermath of Katrina, Latinos had been living in shipping containers and out of trucks because this is how workers are valued in the Deep South. The wage-an-hour abuse by employers continues to run rampant.” Pichon Battle hopes to use her experience as an immigration lawyer to help bridge what divides African-Americans and Latino immigrant leaders by bringing to bear her special understanding of the common housing and worker exploitation issues that plague both the immigrant and African-American communities.

“Right now it's such a new community here that they really don't have any established leaders to work with,” Pichon Battle explains of minority residents. “One of the videos we're planning will look at issues in common between four different families who are African American, Latino, Vietnamese, and working-class white, with a focus on immigrant legal rights and resources. We want it to be available in the three different languages for different audiences.”

Since the U.S. Social Forum, Bonner and Pichon Battle have each continued to play a role as

connectors between groups and individual community leaders. The U.S. Social Forum participants in the New Orleans area convene a monthly roundtable discussion, where local groups from the surrounding region share information on campaigns. “My push, which is always our push, is to look at the regional scale, how to join together to be stronger throughout the entire Gulf Coast,” says Pichon Battle. Moving Forward has helped to convene groups of individual leaders independent of the organization, such as Black Men United for Change, a women's salon, 1200 Gulf Coast Women (connecting displaced women), and the Gulf Coast Leadership Network. Pichon Battle explains that individual relationships are crucial to forging political alliances in a region where friendships and kin connections are paramount to establishing community trust. “If I get a call from you to help organize a campaign at City Council and I don't know you, I'll politely listen,” she explains. “But if I love you, I will do whatever it takes because your cause is my cause.”

Individual leadership networks also create spaces to raise issues of generational and racial tension, says Pichon Battle: “There are meetings that need to have everyone in the room looking just like me (African American) so that we can deal with hard questions, like how some of the leaders from the civil rights generation see themselves as the vanguard. This isn't going to happen with white people in the room. Then comes the meetings with both Black and white [organizers], and we have to also deal honestly with the issue of race, privilege, and access. I have found that within my own generation, conversations about social justice in general look a lot more racially diverse—and that's a good thing. I am in a group of

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women activists, and that room is very colorful. We bond around being women in this disaster zone at this time, and at some point you get to realize, 'She's willing to learn and I'm willing to learn, too.'"

### Continuing Moving Forward

There are other videos being planned in the Moving Forward Gulf Coast's Recovery and Restore series, including films on issues such as educational justice, immigrant justice, the criminal justice system, and environmental health and justice for brown communities. Bonner expects the videos will feed into policy campaigns by coalitions and stimulate conversations about systemic issues among people coming to Moving Forward seeking legal assistance. Such conversations have already occurred as Moving Forward's video advocacy on New Orleans's public housing campaigns led the organization to help further catalyze direct action around this issue. In August 2008, on the eve of Hurricane Gustav, Bonner co-chaired the New Orleans regional efforts for the third anniversary commemoration of Hurricane Katrina, one of eight multicity actions to bring attention to issues coordinated by the national Right to the City Alliance. "We're working closely with Safe Streets Strong Communities (a New Orleans-based nonprofit) to put the spotlight on what's happening in New Orleans as a microcosm of how poor people are being driven out of public housing nationally," says Bonner. "We're helping to fuel a movement by getting people united around their own specific needs. There's no glory here, just the continued fight against privatization. The victories will be home-bred."

The bonds between Pichon Battle and Bonner have grown through their experience in supporting one another through disaster and through their continued commitment to their communities. That commitment has also grown beyond the realm of their work with Moving Forward—the couple married in 2007.

In the next period of time, Moving Forward Gulf Coast will focus on coordinating volunteer legal services, producing the video on education, and continuing to deepen relationships among organizers on the ground. Although funding support has been sporadic for Moving Forward, Bonner and Pichon Battle continue to develop the organization as a community resource and partner in regional alliances as part of their steadfast commitment to their friends and family to rebuild their communities. But their sights are larger than the familial relations they have worked so hard to restore and build. As Pichon Battle explains, "We've found that this video project allows people to speak in their own voices and be heard all over the region and the country."

# Conclusion

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**T**hese five case studies offer examples of how the divide between service, organizing, civic engagement, and advocacy can be bridged in many different ways. Here we focus on the service provider. Some partner with other organizations in coalitions, which is how Bread for the City began to expand and understand how advocacy supported social change. Others find ways to integrate new practices into their daily work, such as Queens Community House's use of reciprocity or Moving Forward Gulf Coast's use of video advocacy. There will be groups that turn to long-standing cultural and community traditions, as Somos Mayfair did by incorporating the *promotores* model or the way Family & Children's Service looked back on their 130-year history of advocating with and for their community.



As organizations listen more closely to the communities they serve and offer them support to build their own sense of power and participation, the connection between solving individual and community problems is strengthened. Service providers are often the first ones to reach communities that have been marginalized because of income, race, geography, education, disaster, and a host of other interrelated issues. And they can provide important avenues for communities to come together.

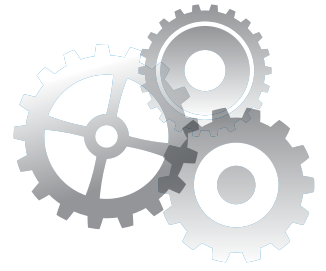
We are also finding organizers interested in providing services, advocacy groups that want to partner with service networks, and intermediaries bridging the gap. Over the next decades these divides may blur in unanticipated ways, offering groups new ways to work together.

To help you move the process of integrating advocacy and service in your own organization by discussing how the case studies compare to your work, we have provided reflection questions in Appendix A to help frame your discussions.

We also urge you to check out the Additional Resources in Appendix B to learn more about the work of the organizations profiled here. At the Building Movement Project website ([www.buildingmovement.org](http://www.buildingmovement.org)) you can also find more information about these groups and how other service organizations are integrating client voice and civic participation into their daily operations.

Nonprofit service groups have an important role to play in supporting civic engagement and citizenship—and we hope these case studies offer a place to start.





# Appendix A: Reflection Questions

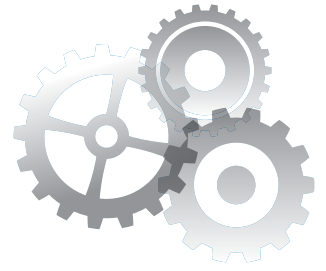
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In the introduction, we discussed how case studies deepen our understanding of our work and can move us to action. We see the cases in this report not simply as examples but as sites for learning. To that end, we have listed some general questions for reflection here. These questions can help draw out key lessons and takeaways from the organizations profiled in this text and offer ways to reflect on the work of your own organization. We suggest case discussions take place in a group where peer-to-peer learning can occur.

## Questions for Discussion

1. There are many ways nonprofit service organizations can affect social change—methods include advocacy, voter engagement, organizing, and so on. The common thread in all of these case studies is constituent participation.
  - a. What do the case study organizations gain by engaging their clients/communities?
  - b. How are their approaches similar and where do they differ?
  - c. Do you find certain methods more or less effective? Are there ways they could be more effective?
  - d. What is the role of relationship building in this work?
2. A common problem facing these organizations is balancing sustainability with their goal of building constituent voice. For some groups, showcasing this work is a way to raise funds; for others, the work is being integrated even as funding is cut.
  - a. How do the service groups in these cases handle the dilemma of doing work that is not necessarily paid for by their funders?
  - b. What are the “costs” of integrating constituent participation into service delivery? What are the benefits?
  - c. What are the ways these groups show measurable outcomes for constituent engagement? What more could they do?
3. Principles and values often guided the decisions in the case study organizations.
  - a. What is the role of principles and values in these organizations? When are they explicit and in what cases are there implicit guiding principles?
  - b. Do the principles and values help organizations and what are the other ways they could be used?

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- c. Are there disadvantages of having a set of principles in this work?
1. We noticed that many of the constituents in the cases went through a transformation process—a change in the way they see themselves and the world around them—and in some cases so did staff members.
    - a. What role does transformation play in constituent engagement and is it necessary in integrating service and social change?
    - b. Are there ways that service providers are particularly well equipped to engage constituents in a transformative process? Where is this a stretch for these groups?
    - c. What new skills do staffers need to engage clients/constituents in this way?
  5. In all the cases, the organizations had to find the right entry point for their own work and community. In larger groups, the work often started in one small area and spread to other programs.
    - a. Are there entry points that are not explored in these cases?
    - b. What are the hazards of starting small and building up?
    - c. Are there certain populations left out of the cases that should have been included?
    - d. Does this work seem doable in the settings in which you have done or do your work?



# Appendix B: Additional Resources

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**F**or additional information about the organizations profiled in these case studies along with downloadable tools and exercises used by the groups, visit the online version of *Making Social*

*Change: Case Studies of Nonprofit Service Providers* at [www.buildingmovement.org](http://www.buildingmovement.org).

We also encourage you to consult the following Building Movement Project resources and publications for additional frameworks for approaching social change work.

## ***Social Service and Social Change: A Process Guide (2006)***

This guidebook was developed for staff and board members of nonprofit service organizations who are interested in learning how to incorporate progressive social change values and practices into their work. It introduces a step-by-step process for nonprofit organizations that can be used to identify how groups can address systemic problems through social change work within the context of their usual services and activities. The process proposed in this guide can help organizations decide which strategies and actions will work best for them.

## ***Social Service and Social Change: Toolkit (2009)***

This publication provides dynamic exercises and engagement models for organizations ready to take the process of incorporating social change models into traditional service work to the next level. The toolkit is targeted to service providers but written to be useful

to all groups interested in this area. The goals of the toolkit are to:

- Reinvigorate the nonprofit sector as a site for social change;
- Help organizations identify where their work currently fits along the continuum between charity and empowerment; and
- Encourage organizations, boards, and funders to see this transformation process as doable.

Opportunities for learning, reflection, and evaluation are consistent throughout the chapters, along with tools and models that focus on culturally relevant models of engagement.

## **The Building Movement Project eNewsletter**

Stay up to date on the work of the Building Movement Project and featured movement-building organizations by signing up for the monthly Building Movement Project eNewsletter at [www.buildingmovement.org](http://www.buildingmovement.org).

For additional information about the Building Movement Project and for more resources about our other project areas (General Changes in Nonprofit Leadership, On the Commons, and Movement Building in Nonprofit Organizations), please visit us online.

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## Web Resources

To download the materials listed here, visit the *Making Social Change: Case Studies of Nonprofit Service Providers* report page at [www.buildingmovement.org](http://www.buildingmovement.org).

### Queens Community House

[www.QueensCommunityHouse.org](http://www.QueensCommunityHouse.org)

- **Identifying Values**—A step by step exercise used during a community building retreat.
- **Community Building Orientation**—A section from the pages of the staff orientation guide.
- **Community Building Staff Evaluation**—Explains the broad expectations for staff involvement in community building and how these goals fit into individual work performance review.

### Somos Mayfair

[www.SomosMayfair.org](http://www.SomosMayfair.org)

- **Social Movement Time-Line**—presents the workshop discussion in which the organization's staff and board draw upon the legacy of historical social movements to connect their work to the ongoing struggle for social justice.
- **Action Research**—an example from the participatory action research module used to identify community needs and organizing issues.

### Bread for the City

[www.BreadForTheCity.org](http://www.BreadForTheCity.org)

- **Beyond Bread**—The organization's blog that provides ongoing information and analysis on advocacy related issues and campaigns.
- **Community Lawyering**—Additional information on this innovative strategy for putting legal skills in the service of community led change.

### Moving Forward Gulf Coast, Inc

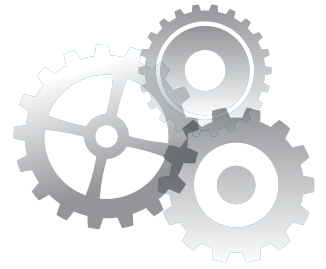
[www.MovingForwardGC.org](http://www.MovingForwardGC.org)

- **Recover and Restore**—Clips from the organization's video advocacy series.
- **Dotmocracy**—An example of a decision making exercise tool used in Project South BAM sessions and adapted by Moving Forward.

### Family & Children's Service

[www.EveryFamilyMatters.org](http://www.EveryFamilyMatters.org)

- **FCS Public Policy and Civic Engagement Programs**—Descriptions of the FCS programs which focus on "helping to change community conditions and address disparities, engaging community members to join together, develop leadership skills, and increase civic involvement."
- **Diagram Distinguishing Public Policy and Community Issues**—This diagram offers an illustration of how an issue or idea might make its way toward become a public policy issue for the organization.
- **FCS Stakeholder Survey**—This is the full version of the questionnaire referenced on page 54 which Family & Children's Service collects annually from its partners to gauge stakeholder perceptions of the effectiveness of their agency in addressing various community issues
- **Addressing Cultural Conflicts in Multicultural Coalitions**—This document offers a summary of the various approaches to addressing multicultural conflict that FCS has utilized through their work in multicultural coalitions.



# Appendix C: Methodology

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The Building Movement Project solicited study participants for *Social Services and Social Change: Case Studies* through a widely distributed electronic mail invitation and embedded Web-based survey instrument. The notice was sent initially to a Building Movement Project database of practitioners, including service providers and organizers, as well as to foundations, intermediary groups, and individuals in the U.S. All contacts were also asked to forward the email solicitation to potential nonprofit sector participants providing social services and involved in social change. As a result, 52 survey respondents provided organizational profile information between the period of January and March 2008. The Building Movement Project research team (this report's authors along with Frances Kunreuther and Caroline McAndrews of Building Movement) followed up with all respondents by telephone during March and April 2008 to conduct preliminary interviews using a questionnaire format.

Final case study selection was based on purposeful sampling to find a diverse group and was not designed to make comparative conclusions. Selection criteria looked for organizations demonstrating the following characteristics:

- Social services (at the micro—individual or family—level; i.e. case management, direct assistance)
- Social change work (self-defined by organization within broad framework for addressing root causes of community problems that can be solved)
- Institutional commitment to social change (including leadership by organization's director and/or board)

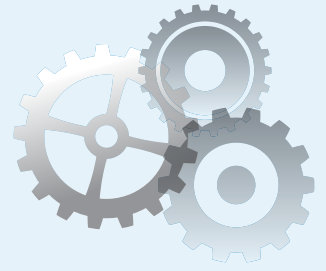
The research team chose study organizations to reflect variance of constituency representations (gender, age, race, ethnicity, immigration), program issue areas, scale of services (neighborhood, regional), geographic location, organizational size and age, and exposure to Building Movement Project's *Social Service and Social Change: A Process Guide*.

Using these criteria, the research team chose five organizations. Each group agreed to participate in two consecutive days of onsite interviews and participant observations conducted by two members of the research team over the period of late May through August 2008. About five interviews per organization took place, always including the executive director. The vast majority of interviews took place with individual staff members in private offices. Interviews consisted of individuals' interpretation and clarification of organizational records, open-ended conversation about professional and organizational background (no established questionnaire), and responses to pre-determined questions. Four of the five organizations included one-on-one and group discussions with constituents. The research team did not request interviews with members of the organizations' board of directors due to differences in levels of boards' engagement. Most interviews were digitally recorded. Marnie Brady, a white woman in her 30s, conducted onsite interviews with participants from Somos Mayfair, Moving Forward Gulf Coast, and Bread for the City. Brady conducted two group and two individual interviews in Spanish. Trish Tchume, an African-American woman in her 30s, conducted onsite interviews with the Family & Children's Service, where

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one group interview involved interpretation provided by a member of the M.O.V.E. Coalition. Both team members jointly carried out onsite interviews and participant observations with staff and constituents at Queens Community House.

The interviewers conducted qualitative analysis based on organizational materials, interview and participant observation notes, transcriptions, and follow-up communication by email and phone with participants for clarification purposes. The research team reviewed all drafts and shared case study drafts with the respective executive directors of each study group for general comments and informational clarification. In addition, four external reviewers—a Building Movement Project project team member, an associate professor of sociology, a researcher on community building, and a regional director of a statewide intermediary group for children and family services—provided feedback on all initial drafts.



# Acknowledgments

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Although these narratives were developed through the contributions of many people connected with each organization, we would specifically like to thank the following individuals and groups for assisting in coordinating and participating in interviews and gathering additional information:

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- **Somos Mayfair:** Jaime Alvarado, Rebecca Bauen, Aryeh Shell, Arturo Gómez, Pamela Gudiño, Josefina Carrillo, Diana Jauregui, Angelica Lujano, Jesus Dora Moya, Evangelina Nevarez, Luisa Chavarin, Karla Reyes, and members of the *Familias Unidas de Mayfair* (Mayfair Families United) theater group.
- **Bread for the City:** George Jones, Stacey Long, Jeannine Sanford, Phylisa Carter, Rebecca Lindhurst, Tracy Knight, Kendra Sudano, Matt Siemer, and Greg Bloom.
- **Family & Children's Service:** Molly Greenman, John Till, Laurie Lindblad, Jeff Bauer, Jennifer Blevins, and the members of the M.O.V.E. Coalition.

- **Moving Forward Gulf Coast:** Colette Pichon Battle and Trupania Bonner.

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Finally, we wish to acknowledge the many, many community leaders connected to these profiled organizations whose vision, energy, wisdom, and talents served as the inspiration for this report and will continue to serve as the cornerstone in the movement for progressive social change.



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