

The Power of Working with Community Organizations: The Illinois FamilyCare Campaign—Effective Results Through Collaboration

By John Bouman

Scenes from the Illinois FamilyCare campaign:

A bipartisan group of state legislators, administrators, and governor's office policy staff convene to agree on a program model for FamilyCare, clearing away partisan issues and reducing the debate to a straightforward issue of funding.

A dozen children, using little red wagons, deliver to Gov. George Ryan some 70,000 postcards expressing support for FamilyCare, a health insurance expansion that will cover the children's uninsured working parents. News photographers and reporters are present and report on the event, and FamilyCare receives widespread favorable media attention.

In October 2002 some 30,000 working poor Illinois parents became eligible for health insurance through a newly created program called FamilyCare. Amidst allegations of influence peddling and other scandals rocking the state administration, a high-stakes election year, and unprecedented budget shortfalls, this outcome was unlikely. In each of the next two years a new administration extended coverage to 77,000 more working parents. In the context of an ever-worsening state fiscal crisis, this expanded health coverage was equally unlikely. To a significant extent, these outcomes, like the vignettes above from the FamilyCare campaign, were the result of a very successful collaboration between community organizations and advocacy groups.¹

Such collaboration can be productive in helping both kinds of organizations reach shared goals, but it does not routinely happen. The proverbial “failure to communicate”—to understand each other’s views of how to bring about change and of the way the world works—commonly prevents collaborative work. In fact, organizers and lawyers/advocates often work at cross-purposes, butt heads, and frustrate one another’s efforts.²

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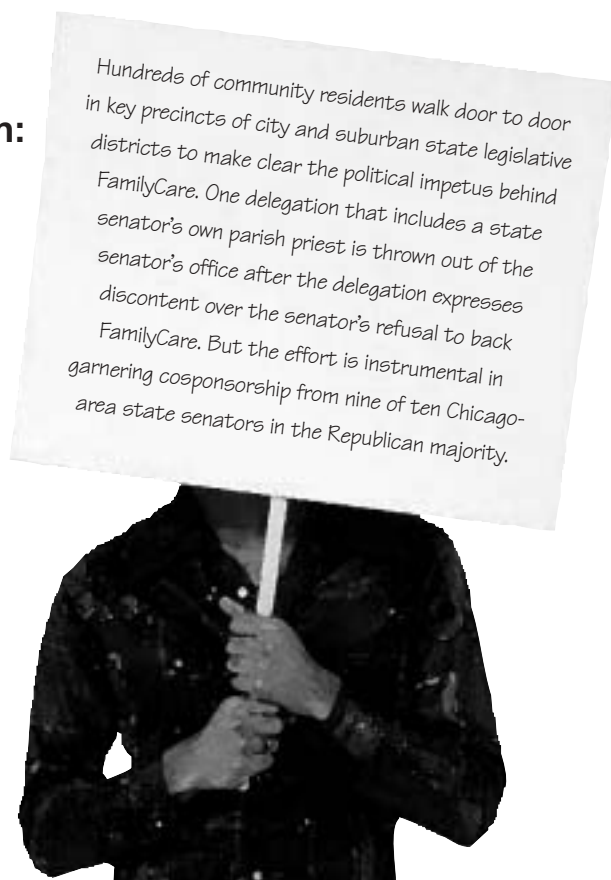
¹FamilyCare is an initiative on which many and widely varied supporting groups continue to play key roles. Materials about FamilyCare, including a full list of supporting organizations, are available at www.povertylaw.org/advocacy/familycare_materials.cfm. In this article I describe one relationship within that wider effort because it contains lessons that may be useful for a successful collaboration between community organizations and lawyers or policy advocates.

²I use the term “lawyers/advocates” to refer to lawyers and policy advocates interchangeably—legal aid and other public interest lawyers, nonlawyer advocates, and those who engage in either direct service or policy advocacy.

Scenes from the Illinois FamilyCare campaign:

A complex legislative strategy results in bipartisan groups sponsoring FamilyCare in both Illinois legislative bodies: 88 in the House, where the measure passes 115-to-0, and 30 in the Senate, where fiscal conservatives block the bill in committee. Late in the session, Governor Ryan announces support at a grassroots lobby day, but the measure remains stalled.

Nevertheless, the following year the governor wins legislative approval for FamilyCare in the midst of the worst state budget crisis in two generations and obtains an ambitious federal waiver that secures federal FamilyCare funding amid very tricky political currents in Washington. That fall Illinois launches the program.



Hundreds of community residents walk door to door in key precincts of city and suburban state legislative districts to make clear the political impetus behind FamilyCare. One delegation that includes a state senator's own parish priest is thrown out of the senator's office after the delegation expresses discontent over the senator's refusal to back FamilyCare. But the effort is instrumental in garnering cosponsorship from nine of ten Chicago-area state senators in the Republican majority.

Legal aid lawyers, for example, tell stories like this: A client is sued for eviction and seeks representation. The lawyer negotiates an excellent settlement, acquiring for the client substantial time to move, waiver of rent for several months, and an amount of money paid to the client. The client considers and happily accepts the deal. However, after later meetings with an organizer who has been trying to organize the building to force the landlord to make repairs and improvements, the client joins the tenants' union and reneges on the deal. The lawyer, constrained by promises made to opposing counsel and the court, withdraws from representation. The client is evicted. To the lawyer, this looks like outrageous interference with the attorney-client relationship and bad advice manifestly

counter to the client's best interests. Any contact between lawyer and organizer is not communication at all but a shouting match. Repetition of such experiences creates an aura of distrust, resulting in mutual avoidance.

A big part of this problem is that most lawyers/advocates are never taught about community organizing either in school or in practical training offered formally by their employing organizations (and related national training groups) or informally by supervisors and professional mentors.³ It is not a standard part of legal education generally or of (most) legal services training in particular. This is also true of the training offered in many graduate schools for public policy and in organizations that employ non-

³This has been especially true in recent years. During the early years of the Legal Services Corporation (LSC), however, explicit discussion of the relationship between poverty law and community organizing was much more common. In 1981 LSC's advocacy training and development unit published *The Law and Direct Citizen Action: A Guide for Trainers and Training Responsible Persons*; the authors were lawyers associated with the Institute for Social Justice, the research and training arm of the Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now (Acorn), a community organization described *infra*. The manual introduces lawyers and organizers to each other's perspectives and discusses the "organizing handles" that various legal tools and remedies offer. One of its authors is Marcia Henry, now a CLEARINGHOUSE REVIEW legal editor, who in 1979 conceived and conducted, through Acorn's Institute for Social Justice, a training series entitled "Organizing Perspectives for Lawyers" in ten cities; much of the material and experience from those sessions were adapted for the LSC manual. In the early 1980s LSC also sponsored a series of "Multi-Forum Advocacy Trainings" that focused on how poverty lawyers could collaborate with community organizations.

lawyer policy advocates. As a result, most lawyers/advocates do not understand what organizers are trying to do or the tactics that they deploy. That makes communication difficult, not only preventing active cooperation but also often producing conflict.

My intent in this article is to use a case study to promote, among advocates, the benefits of collaboration with community organizations and their organizers and leaders. Since few lawyers/advocates are likely to have much information about community organizing in general, I begin with the profession's principles and practices that inform an advocate's interactions with organizers.⁴

I. Basics of Community Organizing

The roots of most leading community organizing models, with related training institutes and umbrella organizations, can be traced, some more directly than others, to Saul Alinsky's work in Chicago in the 1930s and 1940s.⁵ Generally community organizations have the twin goals of building citizen power and developing citizen leaders to produce positive changes identified as important by citizens themselves.⁶ They take somewhat different approaches and deploy various methods of organizing and advocacy, but most employ individual conversations, well-planned group meetings, power analysis, and strategies to bring the group's power and agenda into the political arena. They tend to be "multiissue"; an assessment of what will contribute most to building the organization determines the issue that is the focus of activi-

ty at a given time. Public activities, often called "actions," focus on an individual "target" who has the power to meet the organization's demands; actions involve media, pressure, and confrontation. Community organizations stress the creation of tension with the target, based on the theory that those in power never "give" anything away but only relinquish things when confronted with opposing power (some refer to this dynamic as "polarization"). In most organizing theories the citizen leaders must make decisions, exert leadership, and be the public face of the organization. A central tenet is that organizers remain behind the scenes and do not do what the organization's members can do for themselves. These experiences develop leaders and build the perception and the reality of organizational power.

The Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF), which Saul Alinsky founded in 1940, is one of the leading organizing institutions. It describes its work as follows:

The leaders and organizers of the Industrial Areas Foundation build organizations whose primary purpose is power—the ability to act—and whose chief product is social change.... The IAF is non-ideological and strictly non-partisan, but proudly, publicly, and persistently political. The IAF builds a political base within society's rich and complex third sector—the sector of voluntary institutions that includes religious congregations, labor locals, homeowner groups, recovery

⁴As a twenty-nine-year legal services and policy advocacy lawyer, I claim no special knowledge about community organizing theory and practice. The major portion of my legal services career has been spent in the kind of mistrust and avoidance described in the foregoing text. Only relatively recently did ideas about the merit of organizing principles and the advantages of cooperation begin to penetrate, culminating in the experience of the FamilyCare campaign that I describe here. The information I present about community organizing is therefore very summary and comes from readily available general texts. It is a very diverse field with different theories and practices and even rivalries that cannot be described here. The organizers with whom I have worked have, no doubt, influenced my perspective. I encourage readers to develop their own understanding the way I did: through reading and especially in dialogue with organizers in their communities. Most organizing groups offer their own training programs, and many colleges and universities offer courses.

⁵A very good list of community organizing groups, community organizations, community organizing resources and umbrella organizations, and college syllabi for courses on community organizing can be found at <http://comm-org.utledo.edu>.

⁶In the context of most community-organizing efforts and for purposes of this article, the term "citizen" is used in a very generic sense to refer to people who live in the community. It does not refer in any technical way to U.S. citizenship or immigrant status, or lack of it. Some organizations have deliberately stopped using the term "citizen" because they believe that it conveys an exclusionary message in communities with immigrants.



groups, parents associations, settlement houses, immigrant societies, schools, seminaries, orders of men and women religious, and others. And then the leaders use that base to compete at times, to confront at times, and to cooperate at times with leaders in the public and private sectors. The IAF develops organizations that use power—organized people and organized money—in effective ways. The secret to the IAF’s success lies in its commitment to identify, recruit, train, and develop leaders in every corner of every community where IAF works. The IAF ... has a radical belief in the potential of the vast majority of people to grow and develop as leaders, to be full members of the body politic, to speak and act with others on their own behalf. And IAF does indeed use a radical tactic: the face-to-face, one-to-one individual meeting, whose purpose is to initiate a public relationship and to re-knit the frayed social fabric.⁷

Another organizing group with which many public interest lawyers/advocates have interacted is the Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now (Acorn). Although Acorn’s organizing style can also be traced to Alinsky, the connection is more attenuated; Acorn began in Arkansas in 1970 as a project of the National Welfare Rights Organization. While Acorn and IAF have many similarities, a major difference is that people “belong” to IAF-affiliated organizations through existing community institutions, usually churches, while Acorn members join the organization directly as individuals. Here is how Acorn describes itself:

ACORN ... is the nation’s largest community organization of low-

and moderate-income families, with over 150,000 member families organized into 800 neighborhood chapters in 65 cities across the country.... Our priorities include: better housing for first time homebuyers and tenants, living wages for low-wage workers, more investment in our communities from banks and governments, and better public schools. We achieve these goals by building community organizations that have the power to win changes—through direct action, negotiation, legislation, and voter participation.... ACORN members, not staff or lawyers or politicians, speak for and lead the organization. Many are new to community activism when they join but leadership development is at the core of ACORN’s organizing process. On-the-job and in formal training programs, ACORN members develop the skill and confidence to chart the organization’s course. From the neighborhood group level to the national board, ACORN leaders call the shots.⁸

Acorn aims its efforts at low- and moderate-income people and therefore, not surprisingly, identifies officially with issues that public interest lawyers and low-income advocates address. Because of this focus on a somewhat lower-income constituency, the work of public interest lawyers/advocates may overlap more with Acorn than with IAF groups. Like IAF, Acorn seeks to develop leaders and build power, and it will insist on its members “fronting” the public events, meetings with political officials, and formal statements in support of the initiatives. Enlisting Acorn or any community organization in support of an issue that it has not identified or given priority is probably difficult, although Acorn has allowed advocates with whom it has trust-

⁷See Industrial Areas Foundation, *Who Are We?*, at www.industrialareasfoundation.org/iafab/about/about.htm. See also SAUL ALINSKY, *REVELLE FOR RADICALS* (1946) and *RULES FOR RADICALS* (1972); EDWARD CHAMBERS, *ROOTS FOR RADICALS* (2004). Chambers succeeded Alinsky as head of the Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF) in the early 1980s and still serves as its lead organizer.

⁸See Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now, *Who Is ACORN*, at www.acorn.org/index.php?id=2.

ing relationships to help in identification and prioritization.⁹

Several points in IAF's and Acorn's descriptions of themselves shed light on what happens when organizers interact with lawyers/advocates, as in the unfortunate story of the eviction case described earlier. First, the organizer's primary goal is to build citizen power. Winning on an issue is a means to that end, and the organization pursues the issue only when doing so will help build power for the organization to wield on behalf of its members. An organization that views its work in this way is not likely simply to sign onto any old issue that a lawyer/advocate is marketing. This is particularly true if the path to victory is through a courtroom—an arena where organization members have little power and reliance on which therefore is seen by most organizers as counterproductive to developing leadership and to members' confidence in their capacity to make change.

The organization is unlikely to interrupt member-initiated and -led efforts in order to cooperate with a lawyer's view of what an individual client should do (as in the eviction case). Nor is it likely to ask a lawyer/advocate or any other person not a part of the organization to "front" organizational events or speak for the organization in any public forum, no matter how much more expert or more effective the lawyer/advocate may be. This factor often causes friction between community organizations and even lawyers who are actually working with them (e.g., a pro bono attorney working with a group on a zoning issue). Wanting to do the talking is

lawyers' nature, and we tend to become frustrated when others who seem to us to know less are tapped instead, especially when the job those others do is not as "good." Moreover, the lawyer's typical mode of operation is to hear a client's problem and deploy a strategy to fix or ameliorate it, often without the client's active participation and rarely with the client in the lead. Even in a trial or a real estate transaction, while the client makes certain decisions, the lawyer controls the advocacy. This is antithetical to organizing principles dictating that the community people act for themselves.

Perhaps more important, but somewhat more subtle, the core organizing tool (at least of IAF-inspired organizations) is the "relational" one-on-one meeting, where people get to know one another and share what activates their interest and passion. Professional organizers use this tool to recruit leaders, who then use relational meetings to add more leaders. This is a frustrating kind of meeting for lawyers used to result-oriented business meetings, positional negotiations, compressed time demands, and unequal power relationships (in which the lawyer has the power and is being asked for help). Without understanding the purpose of the relational meeting, most lawyers will regard it as a waste of time and will not participate constructively, if at all. Yet understanding and participating in the relational meetings is probably as important as anything else in forming a trusting and productive relationship between a lawyer and a community organizer or a citizen leader from a community organization.¹⁰

⁹Lawyers/advocates for low-income people also may encounter "intermediary" organizations that serve as a bridge between community organizations and policy groups. One of the best known of these is the Center for Community Change, which organizes nationally on antipoverty and justice issues. It supports community organizations, supplies them with policy expertise, trains organizers, and puts together grassroots coalitions on national antipoverty policy issues (such as the National Campaign for Jobs and Income Support). See www.communitychange.org.

¹⁰See CHAMBERS, *supra* note 7, at 44–54 (describing the relational meeting and its position at the core of IAF organizing principles as "the most radical thing we teach"). To sum up a highly developed concept, the relational meeting is a half-hour conversation with a potential leader ("leader" meaning someone with followers) or someone with a certain amount of power. "When a good relational meeting occurs, two people connect in a way that transcends ordinary everyday talk. Both have the opportunity to pause and reflect on their personal experience regarding the tension between the world as it is and the world as it should be. And in that moment a new public relationship may be born, through which both will gain power...." *Id.* at 53.

II. Organizers and Lawyers/Advocates— a Powerful Combination

Community groups and their organizing staff have skills and assets that overlap somewhat with, but are often highly complementary to, those of public interest lawyers/advocates. These complementary skills and assets, when deployed together in campaigns to win positive change, can be very effective. The strengths of one group meet the needs of the other, and the overall effort is much more nearly complete, strategic, and hard-hitting.

Community organizers and groups can collect powerful human stories from their grassroots members and member organizations to legitimize and portray the issues in the media and other forums. This can solve a constant problem that lawyers/advocates face when challenged to produce such stories in connection with advocacy efforts (for reporters, committee hearings, or policymakers who need convincing that a problem is “real”). Even frontline legal aid attorneys can find themselves unable to produce a powerful individual story on demand, and the predicament is heightened for advocacy organizations that are not “on the ground”; indeed, the difficulty is inherent in such organizations’ nature as they house advocates and experts, not direct service workers. Collaboration with a community group can resolve this chronic advocacy problem.

Community organizers and groups have practical insights on public policy problems and possible solutions. They are experts on the facts: what problems are “real” and what proposed solutions will actually help. Policy advocates who are not located in communities or who lack significant direct service capacity often need this “ground level” perspective.

Community organizations have the ability, rarely found within public interest law or advocacy organizations, to “fill a room” for media events or public gatherings aimed at public officials. They can also mobilize grassroots district-level meetings with officials in their home

offices, make presentations to reporters and editors of local media, and engage in precinct-level political work. They always have “real people” (their leaders) ready to speak publicly.

As part of their regular work, community organizers develop relationships with a wide network of groups and individuals, including unlikely allies to whom lawyers/advocates may not themselves be able to reach out successfully. Organizers are highly likely to have media contacts that supplement those of the lawyers and advocates. Because their use of large groups of citizens and media have the potential to affect elections, community groups also can exert a forceful influence on politicians—or at least raise concerns in politicians’ minds. Because community organizations have this apparent voter power, they can be more confrontational with politicians than lawyers/advocates may be willing or able to be.

Finally, community organizers are trained in skills that are not usually taught in law school or public policy school—power analysis, time management, group dynamics, media approaches, and general prioritizing and planning (i.e., the dictionary definition of being “organized”). These are valuable additions to strategic thinking on legal issues and public policy campaigns and to the skill sets of the lawyers and advocates.

For their part, lawyers and other professional advocates usually have technical knowledge of complex substantive issues (laws and regulations, court precedents, research, and best practices), financing methods and funding streams, and the mysteries of the legal process and policy-making (deadlines, requirements for written papers, statutes of limitations, ways to play the process) that is far beyond that possessed within most community groups. Lawyers and advocates also often have strategic and tactical experience and judgment in legal disputes and public policy campaigns that community organizers and groups can tap to inform their own planning decisions. Many lawyers/advocates have earned their own public credibility and have established relationships with key

administrators, policymakers, opinion leaders, reporters, and allies in the advocacy world. Despite a certain amount of overlap (e.g., in relationships and media contacts), community groups tend to lack most of these assets.

As noted above, however, community organizers and the leaders they develop, for the most part, live in a different world from that of lawyers/advocates. The basic work styles and operating assumptions of the two worlds are not only different but also often antithetical. Bridging these two “cultures” is difficult and requires building strong relationships between individuals who are from either culture and perceive the value of the collaboration. No matter what the issue or the circumstances may be, the success of any attempted collaboration will usually boil down to the interactions between the specific people involved. The effort is worth it because the collaboration between such highly complementary forces can enhance opportunities to accomplish change.

III. Case Study: The Illinois FamilyCare Campaign

The Illinois FamilyCare campaign benefited immensely from fruitful collaboration between a leading law and policy advocacy center and an ambitious new community organization. The Chicago-based Sargent Shriver National Center on Poverty Law has been the lead advocacy organization on the FamilyCare initiative since FamilyCare’s inception.¹¹ United Power for Action and Justice is an IAF-organized Chicago area metropolitanwide

organization of over 300 dues-paying member organizations, including congregations, other religious bodies, neighborhood organizations, and unions. United Power became the most important grassroots supporter of FamilyCare in Cook County and a coleader of the statewide effort.¹²

The Shriver Center derives its advocacy agenda from numerous sources of community information, and the lack of health care for low-wage working people was high on the list of problems in 1999 and 2000.¹³ The Shriver Center’s own perspective on this issue flowed from its policy and systemic work on welfare and workforce reform. Health insurance was the aspect of welfare reform that was the most ironic and perverse—people who achieved their goals and did what society demanded by working their way off welfare received a “booby” prize: they lost their health insurance (Medicaid), which was still tied to receiving welfare. Countless client stories and information from allies who provide direct services identified this issue as a high priority.

The Shriver Center’s policy research uncovered several potential ways to attract federal funds to help pay for state expansion of coverage for the working poor, and we identified precedents from other states. To open its advocacy strategy, the Shriver Center used its credibility and relationships to convene a bipartisan working group of legislators, administrators, and policy staff from the governor’s office to devise an agreed-upon model for the program; the Shriver Center initially put aside the matter of whether and

¹¹See Sargent Shriver National Center on Poverty Law, About Us—Policy Development and Advocacy, www.poverty-law.org/aboutnpl/index.cfm?action=show_advocacy.

¹²See generally www.united-power.org. The United Power website contains somewhat dated material, but the founding statement is current: “Our Purpose is to create a broad-based organization whose goal is to build relational power for collective actions in the name of justice and the common good. We are an organization of other organizations, weaving together the city and its suburbs. We are inclusive, embracing the full diversity of metropolitan Chicago. As part of civil society, we are non-partisan: moderates, conservatives, liberals and radicals committed to acting on our social values and working for a just society by standing for the whole. We are generational: originating, not just reacting, and sustaining as a legacy for the future our dedication to fostering public life.” www.united-power.org/MainFrameset.htm. See also CHAMBERS, *supra* note 7, at 112–20 (describing the thinking and organizing that produced United Power, its founding meeting in October 1997, and its subsequent action on the FamilyCare campaign, among other issues).

¹³E.g., John Bouman, *Ryan’s Final Budget Should Address Four Essential Issues to Fill Gaps in Departments of Human Services and Public Aid Budget Requests*, ILLINOIS WELFARE NEWS (Sargent Shriver National Center on Poverty Law, Chicago, Ill.), April 1999, available at www.povertylaw.org/advocacy/iwn/index.cfm?action=show_article&id=307.

how to fund it, and drafted model legislation.¹⁴ On another track, we began organizing an ad hoc coalition of friends and likely allies on welfare reform and workforce issues inside and outside the legislature to support the initiative. This coalition contained many advocacy organizations and some organizations with grassroots capacity, but none was a large-scale community-based organization with a large grassroots membership.

The Shriver Center and the growing ad hoc coalition promoted the issue in the spring 2000 session of the Illinois General Assembly. We knew it was too soon for a bill to pass, but we seized the opportunity to use committee hearings to begin debate and otherwise educate legislators and the public, to talk up the issue and the proposed solution, and to begin to make the issue a higher priority for the incumbent administration.¹⁵ The issue garnered much interest and a certain amount of “traction,” but it would need more political impetus the following year to achieve a breakthrough.

At about the same time United Power marshaled its members for a metropolitanwide setting of priorities for focusing its citizen-based resources on action for meaningful change.¹⁶ One of the metropolitanwide issues chosen was the widespread lack of health insurance and resulting lack of access to health care. United Power had substantial numbers of active leaders in middle-class institutions (mostly congregations) in the suburbs as well as the city; their zeal for working on the health care issue came from values-based concerns raised in thousands of relational meetings. United Power developed a multifaceted approach to this problem, and one of the key facets of its approach was expansion of

health insurance for a large group of working poor. In support of this facet, United Power began to assemble research on lack of health insurance in Chicago and Illinois. In accordance with its organizing principles and power analysis, United Power also began to assemble important and often “unlikely” allies, including the Advocate Health System (the largest hospital chain in the state and the third largest employer of any kind) and Blue Cross Blue Shield of Illinois.

At this point United Power’s health task force, which contained some organizations and individuals familiar with the Shriver Center’s advocacy on FamilyCare, began to look at FamilyCare as a potential means to fulfill United Power’s goal of expanding health insurance. FamilyCare was attractive because it appeared to satisfy the organizers’ pragmatic calculation that the health insurance initiative must be both significant and achievable, and it had a running start—the technical model was “worked up” and costed out, and it had credible early momentum due to the Shriver Center’s expertise and advocacy work.¹⁷ What gave United Power organizers and leaders pause, however, and might have outweighed these advantages, was whether the FamilyCare proposal could be squared with the organizing priorities of building citizen power and developing leaders. United Power, consistent with its principles and purposes, would not simply “sign on.” It had to be in the lead in order for its goals to be achieved. Its leaders would have to be out in front. Otherwise, it would find another initiative to further its health care concerns.

This, the first of many decisive moments, had explosive potential; the organizer

¹⁴See John Bouman, *KidCare—An Opportunity to Insure Low-Income Working Parents*, ILLINOIS WELFARE NEWS (Sargent Shriver National Center on Poverty Law, Chicago, Ill.), March 2000, available at www.povertylaw.org/advocacy/iwn/index.cfm?action=show_article&id=168.

¹⁵At this time and until 2002 the administration was that of Republican Gov. George Ryan; the state Senate was also controlled by the Republicans; and the state House was controlled by the Democrats. In 2002 Rod Blagojevich became the first Democrat governor since the mid-1970s; the Democrats took over the Senate and retained control of the House.

¹⁶CHAMBERS, *supra* note 7, at 112–20.

¹⁷See John Bouman, *Illinois Can Expand Health Insurance to Working Poor—Plan Would Insure Parents of Children Covered Under KidCare or Medicaid*, ILLINOIS WELFARE NEWS (Sargent Shriver National Center on Poverty Law, Chicago, Ill.), October 2000 (noting that a costed-out proposal had been submitted to the governor’s office and legislative leaders), available at www.povertylaw.org/advocacy/iwn/index.cfm?action=show_article&id=70.

might make what an advocate could perceive as overbearing demands for leadership and even “take over” the initiative, and the advocate might react with pique and refusal. But that did not happen. The organizer made an effort to explain United Power’s agenda (citizen power and leadership, followed by health coverage for the uninsured), and the advocate, seeking to add allies and grassroots strength, struggled to appreciate what United Power could bring to the effort and to keep an open mind. Through an initial relational meeting, an ongoing series of conversations, and, more important, constant attention to personal relationships between key participants, the two organizations developed an alliance.¹⁸

The United Power lead organizer and I, as the Shriver Center’s lead advocate, thought through together and agreed on the composition of a strategy committee to steer the campaign. That committee included representatives of leading advocacy groups and powerful interests—the American Federation of Labor–Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO), the Chicagoland Chamber of Commerce, the City of Chicago, and religious leaders. The Shriver Center led the committee, but all-important strategic decisions were made jointly. This gave the campaign a critical strategic center, while power sharing cemented a growing trust between United Power and the Shriver Center.

United Power’s ceding of this measure of leadership was a pragmatic recognition of the Shriver Center’s advocacy acumen and its running start on the FamilyCare campaign but was also a sharing of “ownership” of the issue that United Power had developed in its own discernment process—a step not taken lightly due to the risk of loss of the organization’s public identification with the issue and sub-

sequent diluting of organizational power and citizen leadership. United Power also risked being unable to develop longer-term relationships with elected officials through its normal use of creative “tension” to confront elected officials. The group feared that the Shriver Center and other allies would try to veto such tactics and prefer their own more conciliatory methods that focused more on immediate results for FamilyCare than on building power relationships that a citizen group could deploy later on other issues.

For our part, the Shriver Center had to risk our own well-earned public ownership of the FamilyCare initiative and cede major recognition and stature to United Power in shared events and actions. We had to give United Power a full measure of real leadership within the larger FamilyCare coalition and thus risk the whole direction of the advocacy. For the Shriver Center, an organization dependent for its operating budget upon direct contributions and foundation grants based in large part on its successful policy advocacy, this was a potential sacrifice of essential capital. We also ran the risk that United Power might pursue confrontational tactics that would hinder the progress of FamilyCare and even damage our reputation as a nonconfrontational and nonpartisan policy organization.

Through constant reevaluation and communication, both organizations consistently concluded that the relationship was worth the risks and sacrifices. Both sides delivered on promises, rewarding mutual trust and easily justifying the risks and sacrifices. The result was a powerful collaboration.

The FamilyCare strategy group had both advocacy acumen and organizing expertise. Those complementary skills combined to enable the group to coordinate

¹⁸The organizer was relieved to find that I was not only an advocate but also a member of a congregation that was a dues-paying member of United Power; this made my role easier to square with the organizing objectives. Once I understood the importance of this connection, I regularly preceded presentations at United Power meetings by identifying myself first as a member of that congregation, then as an employee of the Shriver Center. The leaders from other United Power institutions were thus able to feel empowered by the Shriver Center’s expertise and to accept its leadership as part of their organization’s own growing power. I could “front” the issue on behalf of United Power by speaking as one of its own leaders. The relationship might have worked without this angle, but, according to the organizer, it made things much easier.

several concurrent tracks of action designed to peak at important decision points in the campaign, then regroup and adjust to peak again at the next decision point. The tracks included grassroots actions such as large rallies; media (news and editorial, print and electronic); advocacy before the executive branch, legislative leaders, and rank-and-file legislators; and continual coalition building. Various members of the coalition helped with the tracks where they had assets to deploy. United Power organizers added value to this strategic thinking, bringing expertise in power analysis and media and access to a host of relationships. And, in a burst of organizing energy, United Power directly provided or substantially assisted in

- a postcard drive that produced 70,000 postcards addressed to the governor and speaker of the house and demanding their support for FamilyCare;¹⁹
- large and very public events, including a rally of over 1,000 people and numerous policymakers at the State of Illinois Building in Chicago and timed to coincide with a key vote in the General Assembly;²⁰
- connections to unlikely allies such as the Advocate Health System and Blue Cross Blue Shield;
- direct access to likely allies that the Shriver Center alone might not have had the person power to cultivate, such as the leaders of religious denominations and other community groups;
- leadership in organizing an open letter to policymakers and the media and signed by 150 clergy and key religious leaders, including the Roman Catholic cardinal, the Jewish Federation, the Episcopal bishop, influential African American pastors, the Lutheran bishop, the leaders of the Council of Islamic Organizations, and the Methodist bishop;²¹

- excellent media work that prompted articles by influential op-ed writers and contributed greatly to formal editorial support from all Chicago-area dailies and the leading business weekly;
- strong turnout for state capitol activities, including at least two lobby days and numerous smaller meetings and events;
- ongoing gathering of individual stories of families struggling without health insurance and powerful public telling of those stories by members of those families; and
- active district-level advocacy in both suburbs and the city, directed at both parties, including a drive that featured hundreds of people canvassing door to door in key precincts of key legislators in the northwest and southwest suburbs (through this activity United Power constituents produced on-the-record support for the initiative from eight suburban Republican state senators).

Straining its own resources, the Shriver Center provided the complementary skills and activities that, when combined with the United Power activities, made the FamilyCare collaboration highly effective. These included

- organizing a statewide ad hoc coalition in support of FamilyCare to complement United Power's metropolitan Chicago assets (the coalition included grassroots operations, many organized over the years by policy advocacy organizations that had long relationships with the Shriver Center—e.g., the Champaign County Health Care Coalition; the Work, Welfare and Families Coalition; Voices for Illinois Children; Women Employed; the Day Care Action Council; the Illinois Maternal and Child Health Coalition; the American Cancer Society; the

¹⁹See Dan Kening, *Gov. Ryan Urged to Support Family Care Health-Insurance Bill*, CHICAGO TRIBUNE, Feb. 22, 2001.

²⁰See Nancy Ryan, *Backers Urge Ryan, State Senators to OK Family Care Bill*, CHICAGO TRIBUNE, April 1, 2001. See also Sabrina Walters, *Rally Backs FamilyCare Insurance*, CHICAGO SUN-TIMES, May 13, 2001 (describing large suburban rally).

²¹See Shamus Toomey, *Clergy Urges Vote on Health Insurance Bill*, CHICAGO DAILY HERALD, May 3, 2001 (describing related press conference).

March of Dimes; the Lutheran synods; and the Catholic Conference);

- a leadership role in activities—including appearances at community meetings, editorial board meetings, and press events—beyond the Chicago area;
- its own relationships with legislators, policymakers, and allies, including the AFL-CIO of Illinois, Chicagoland Chamber of Commerce, and Springfield Chamber of Commerce;
- technical research and writing, development of the health insurance model, production of campaign materials such as fact sheets, cost estimates, background memos, and testimony;
- coordination of the statewide effort and for the coalition a “face” known, credible, and trusted around the state and in Springfield.

As a result of the advocacy campaign FamilyCare emerged as House Bill 23 in the spring 2001 General Assembly session. The bill attracted 88 cosponsors in the House and passed 115 to 0.²² In the Senate it gained 29 cosponsors, including nine Republicans, in a chamber where 31 votes are needed to pass a bill. But the Republican Senate leadership followed an approach it took with many bills in the 1990s and refused to allow H.B. 23 out of committee, on the ground that the bill called for spending that had not been included in the governor’s original budget proposal at the beginning of the session. However, the issue remained alive in the budget negotiations. At a climactic United Power grassroots lobby day in the capitol during the last week of the session, Governor Ryan announced that he now supported FamilyCare and would include it in his budget agenda. However, it was too late to sway legislative leaders who were locked into other priorities,

and the final budget did not include FamilyCare. The Shriver Center quickly drafted a resolution calling on the Ryan administration to formulate and seek the federal waiver that would allow access to federal funds for FamilyCare, and the House, in one of its last official actions of the session, passed the resolution.²³

United Power, the Shriver Center, and the whole FamilyCare coalition had spent themselves intensely on this effort. FamilyCare had started the session as a long-shot big-ticket item with little formal support and no mention in the governor’s budget. During the session it gained support among a clear majority of rank-and-file legislators, a set of firmly committed legislators willing to champion the program as their highest priority, public expression of support from Governor Ryan backed by a resolution from the House urging him to seek the waiver, and editorial support from all the state’s major newspapers. When the General Assembly adjourned after its spring 2001 session without passing FamilyCare, despite the emotional outpouring of effort that led to high hopes for the bill, all the members of the coalition were disappointed. But we had built decisive momentum.²⁴

The momentum paid immediate dividends. The governor’s support proved to be real, and in late summer, citing the House resolution, he instructed the state Medicaid agency to begin drafting and negotiating the federal waiver necessary to attract federal funding for FamilyCare. In February 2002, at an event that a United Power member church hosted on Chicago’s southwest side, Governor Ryan announced the formal filing of the waiver application and his intent to include an appropriation for a program start-up in his fiscal year 2003 budget proposal, and this he did the following week.²⁵ Not at

²²The bill and its history are available on the state’s legislative website, www.legis.state.il.us/legislation/legisnet92/status/920HB0023.html.

²³House Resolution 427 is available at www.legis.state.il.us/legislation/legisnet92/status/920HR0427.html.

²⁴See John Bouman, *FamilyCare Falls Just Short at End of State Legislative Session but Gains Ryan’s Support for Future Passage*, ILLINOIS WELFARE NEWS (Sargent Shriver National Center on Poverty Law, Chicago, Ill.), June 2001.

²⁵See *Budget Talk Gets Extra Attention*, STATE JOURNAL-REGISTER, Feb. 20, 2002; Chad Anderson, *State Budget*, ROCKFORD REGISTER STAR, Feb. 20, 2002.

all clear was whether the governor would have followed this course without knowing that he could stage it in an important Chicago neighborhood before a full room of appreciative community residents with news cameras rolling. United Power's capacities in this regard were crucial.

Unlike the year before, in 2002 the governor included FamilyCare in his proposed budget. Our strategy turned to protecting that appropriation and shepherding the wording of accompanying legislative changes through the budgetary process. United Power helped secure favorable media coverage in this effort and continued to generate grassroots phone calls and letters.²⁶ Perhaps more important, the projection of citizen power exhibited the previous year continued to resonate in the state capitol. The General Assembly approved the budget and thus established FamilyCare as a new program in spite of extreme budget difficulties.²⁷ In September 2002 the federal government approved the Illinois waiver, and the program was launched the following month, with potential to expand parent eligibility to families with income up to 185 percent of the federal poverty level.²⁸ The initial phase covered nearly 30,000 very-low-income people by raising eligibility from 39 percent of the federal poverty level (the top level under the Medicaid program) to 49 percent.

The FamilyCare coalition promoted the program in the context of the 2002 gubernatorial campaign, and full implementation of FamilyCare became a centerpiece of that campaign for the Republican and Democrat candidates. The positioning of Shriver Center staff as experts during the campaign and in the new governor's transition committees helped this effort, again complementing United Power's rallies and campaign events at which the candidates were asked to and did commit to full implementation of FamilyCare.

The new governor, Rod Blagojevich, adopted FamilyCare as a cornerstone of his policy agenda and staked out public ownership of the program. In his first state-of-the-state-budget message in March 2003 he promised full implementation of the program over three years (the phase-in was necessitated by the state's historically devastating fiscal crisis). Amid severe budget austerity, the FamilyCare expansion is on schedule. The program's eligibility threshold increased to 90 percent of the federal poverty level effective July 2003, and to 133 percent effective September 2004, offering eligibility to over 200,000 parents. The ongoing campaign remains a cornerstone of United Power's agenda, and the organization responds promptly and in significant numbers to calls for contacts with the governor and legislators.

IV. Lessons from the FamilyCare Campaign

The FamilyCare initiative yields lessons for productive relationships between lawyers/advocates and community groups and organizers. Among these lessons:

- Community organizations and advocates can find important areas of agreement. They often pursue the same goals. If they can find ways to collaborate, their complementary tools can lead to powerful results.
- Each must understand the other's essential purpose. For lawyers/advocates, the organizing goals of building citizen power and developing leaders, while important in their own right, are primarily means to accomplishing a policy initiative or winning a case. For organizers, accomplishing a policy initiative or winning a case, while important, are primarily means to accomplish organizing goals. Understanding this distinction can help contextualize and explain areas of potential conflict, the types of accommodations each side

²⁶E.g., Editorial: *Keep Health Care for Poor in State Budget*, CHICAGO DAILY HERALD, May 2, 2002.

²⁷See John Bouman, *Governor's FamilyCare Proposal Is Included in the Budget; Federal Waiver Is Last Step to Start Program*, ILLINOIS WELFARE NEWS (Sargent Shriver National Center on Poverty Law, Chicago, Ill.), June 2002.

²⁸The Illinois FamilyCare waiver is available at the federal Centers for Medicaid and Medicare Services website, www.cms.hhs.gov/hifa/llhcfakcpc.asp.

may demand of the other, and the basis for peaceful coexistence when the concerns of organizers and lawyers seem to compete. This can be confusing for lawyers (and other advocates), who may engage in substantial activity that they consider “organizing” around specific issues and who may think they should be in sync with community organizers—it will help if lawyers/advocates understand that their core purpose is still the accomplishment of the issue goals and they still differ from organizing groups in that regard.

- The initiative must evolve through each organization’s own agenda setting. The willingness of each to cooperate will depend on the legitimacy of the issue in its own eyes. Organizations will not automatically sign onto preformed policy initiatives that they have not legitimized themselves.
- A “good cop–bad cop” dichotomy can be useful. United Power constituents were intentionally demanding and, at times, confrontational with their elected officials and through the media. The Shriver Center was the friendly policy expert, of necessity on good terms with all points on the political spectrum. Both roles were necessary, and each organization understood the importance of the other’s role and knew what the other was up to. Each understood that the other’s tactics need not be entirely consistent with its own but that coordination was necessary. This distribution of roles was consistent with each organization’s understanding of the sources of its own power, and the roles tapped into each organization’s strengths. And, understanding their shared goals and the need to coordinate their strategies, each organization was able to adapt its tactics to serve the common purpose while accommodating the other’s organizational needs.
- Constant and open communication, together with honoring commitments, keeps the collaboration together. These qualities constitute the glue that allows trust to develop. A successful collaboration of this type relies on organiza-

tions interacting through individuals who understand the relationships and policy making and have developed mutual trust. Understanding the principles of collaboration is important, but the success or failure depends on the actual interactions of individuals.

- Collaboration is beneficial. By associating itself with a highly skilled advocacy effort, United Power was able to deploy its citizen power to help achieve success. It had a stage in the state capitol where its power was showcased and recognized. Since 2001, United Power has not had to generate anything like the effort it generated that year on FamilyCare, but it has not had to—the power it projected that year still reverberates in the capitol. The Shriver Center, by associating itself with a strong community organization, was able to deploy grassroots power to help win a large policy victory that would otherwise have been very difficult. Over the course of FamilyCare’s implementation, which is not yet complete, that power has helped sustain the success even while the state budget crisis has deepened and other programs and agencies are experiencing cuts.

V. Final Thoughts—What About that Eviction Case?

Earlier I cited an example of the difficulties that can arise between organizers and legal aid attorneys. That example described a lawyer’s frustration with an organizer’s apparent interference with the attorney–client relationship; the interference appeared to damage the client’s interests. I used the example to show the antagonism, or at least mutual exasperation and distrust, that often arise between legal aid lawyers and organizers in order to discuss why those incidents occur and make the case that both sides can benefit from a better understanding. The eviction example is typical of direct case-by-case legal aid practice, while the case study (FamilyCare) is typical of policy advocacy. Do the lessons of the FamilyCare case study translate to the eviction example or other direct-service contexts?

The answer is absolutely yes. The context, of course, is different, and the scale is smaller. Yet the lessons are much the same. Knowing what motivates the organizer, and how approaches might differ, will still help the lawyer. If the lawyer is aware of the organizer's efforts to get tenants to become leaders in winning decent conditions from landlords, there may be ways to collaborate. A lawyer who knew that community resources were available to help establish a conditions defense to an eviction would likely evaluate the tenant's eviction case—and the advisability of the settlement—differently. A series of questions to the tenant-client about the organizing effort will reveal the client's true wishes—and can help the lawyer understand why a tenant-client, for fear of harming the organizing effort, might decide to forgo an individual agreement with the landlord—before

the lawyer obtains a settlement that the client eventually declines despite its merits.

As noted in the FamilyCare case study, there is no magic to this. It takes a concerted effort to establish communication, understand what each side offers the other, and sustain a relationship. It also takes a full understanding of what organizers and lawyers offer each other to appreciate why the attempt to communicate is worthwhile. The organizer is helped by an alliance with a technician of the laws and procedures governing landlord-tenant relations. The lawyer can “force” things by litigating or threatening to litigate—a way to project power that can be extremely useful to organizing if directed such that it serves organizing purposes (building citizen power, developing leaders). From the lawyer's point of view, the endless servicing of futile eviction cases while the larger housing issues are left unaffected can be frustrating. By aligning with a strong community organizing effort, the lawyer's work can accomplish the larger goals of preserving and improving the affordable housing stock, empowering clients, and getting them off the eviction carousel.

Those are the possibilities, but, as with the FamilyCare effort, the reality involves establishing a relationship where individuals communicate and establish trust. If it works out, there are substantial benefits for both sides.

[Editor's note: This article draws in part from an article written for the 2003 Annual Report of the Woods Fund of Chicago by John Bouman, Joshua Hoyt (an organizer for United Power during the events described in the article and currently executive director of the Illinois Coalition for Immigrant and Refugee Rights) and Matt McDermott (now an organizer for United Power and, during the events described here, lead organizer for the Southwest Organizing Project, a member organization of United Power).]

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Have something to say to other readers of CLEARINGHOUSE REVIEW about poverty, legal aid practice, issues affecting your work? Do you have advocacy success stories to share? Or less-than-successful-efforts-from-which-you-nonetheless-learned-valuable-lessons stories to share? Is there some aspect of poverty law practice you think should be done differently?

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We continue our primary focus on publishing the kind of articles for which we're known—those that bridge scholarly analysis and the front lines of poverty law. But the range of poverty law organizations has expanded far beyond the relatively cohesive group of programs funded by the Legal Services Corporation that formed the REVIEW's core readership for many years. We'd like to facilitate communication among readers who engage in poverty law practice from a variety of points of entry into the work. We're all part of an expanding universe, and we hope the REVIEW can be a vehicle through which practitioners in various parts of that universe challenge, inspire, and learn from one another.

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