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SOCIAL POLICY RESEARCH ASSOCIATES

Report on the Second Round of the Quality Child Care Initiative (QCCI)

Final Report

Chapter 3. QCCI Support for Advocacy/Parent Voices

This file contains Chapter 3 of the full report. The complete text of the report and an *Executive Summary* are posted on the web site of Action Alliance for Children at www.4children.org/QCCI.htm.

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III. QCCI SUPPORT FOR ADVOCACY/PARENT VOICES

INTRODUCTION

As described in the overview of the strategic framework for Round 2, the QCCI Leadership Team decided to continue to support advocacy via two activities: advocacy grants focused on securing funding for local compensation and retention initiatives (as described in the previous chapter), and four mini-grants designed to support the organizational development and maturation of local chapters of Parent Voices.

As part of its second round funding, QCCI awarded a total of \$80,000 to support Parent Voices, including \$20,000 to each of the Parent Voices chapters in San Francisco, Contra Costa, and Alameda Counties, and \$20,000 to the California Child Care Resource and Referral Network, to act as a coordinator of chapter efforts in planning and implementing a “parent summit.”

DESCRIPTION OF FUNDED PROJECT

During the first round of QCCI funding, Parent Voices had received support for a project that helped parents to react to an existing, state-level legislative agenda. The Parent Voices chapter organizers decided to focus the new project on proactive rather than reactive involvement in order to ensure that parent concerns were known to legislators and included on the legislative agenda. Thus, the new Parent Action for Child Care Today (PACCT) project was designed to develop and promote a parents’ platform that would influence the local and state legislative agenda in support of quality child care.

With the \$80,000 received from QCCI, Parent Voices undertook an ambitious project that included: (1) recruiting and involving parents in planning a Parent Summit at which parents’ priority issues relating to child care would be communicated to key state and local decisionmakers in a public setting, (2) developing a Parent Voices platform, and (3) carrying out a political action in September 2001 to promote the platform. Since the Parent Summit was successfully completed on September 29, 2001, Parent Voices has continued to be an active discussant on key state

During its second round of QCCI funding, Parent Voices focused on developing and promoting a more proactive agenda at the state level.

budget decisions affecting the availability of set-aside funding for continued child care subsidies for former CalWORKs families who had recently left the welfare rolls.

Planning and Organizing a Parent Action

The PACCT project was designed to recruit parents as advocates and raise the visibility of the Parent Voices organization statewide.

The Parent Action for Child Care Today (PACCT) project was designed to accomplish two organizational goals. First, PACCT was intended to provide a focus that would be used at the local level to recruit parents to participate in Parent Voices and get them involved in planning and advocacy activities. Second, by coordinating individual chapter activities around a unified regional Parent Summit, PACCT was intended to increase the visibility and stature of the Parent Voices organization statewide and help it raise parents' child care concerns to the top of the agenda for local and state policy-makers in California.

The QCCI grants to the three local Bay Area chapters of Parent Voices enabled these chapters to pay staff salaries, offer stipends to participating parent advocates, and pay for rent, parent trainings, mailings and other tangible needs which all contributed to making PACCT a successful event. These expenditures enabled each chapter to undertake ongoing parent organizing and provide organizational support to parent volunteers. Support provided by local Parent Voices staff included making phone calls and one-on-one visits to parents and other child care stakeholders and facilitating discussions among parents about which child care issues most affect them.¹

Parents were involved at multiple levels and stages of PACCT planning. The event Planning Committee, made up of parents and staff, came together on a regular basis over a period of 18 months prior to the event. While Parent Voices had originally planned to establish sub-committees to plan different aspects of the event, the planning process

¹ The different Parent Voices chapters used a variety of different recruitment strategies. All chapters used mailing of notices as a primary outreach strategy. To follow-up on mailings, all project coordinators also contacted parents one-on-one, either by phone or through face-to-face meetings. One chapter offered stipends for parent involvement; other chapters depended on parents as volunteers.

ultimately was conducted by the Planning Committee as a whole, except for the Hospitality Committee, which developed detailed plans for the layout and decoration of the event site.

In the early stages of project planning, parents and project coordinators brainstormed the plan for the Parent Summit at local chapter and cross-chapter meetings. The process was termed “organic” by the lead coordinator because the meetings were meant to generate new ideas from all attendees, as Parent Voices is a “process-oriented group.” However, because the parents who attended the planning meetings changed over time, the open-and-flow process made it difficult to move forward in planning the event. An additional organizational challenge encountered during the planning meetings was the fact that all of the organizers and parents were considered to be equals. The Planning Committee did not designate leaders or create a decision-making hierarchy. The project coordinators felt strongly that Parent Voices needed to maintain an open organizational structure in order to truly reflect the interests of participating parents.

As September 29 drew closer, the Planning Committee reached some key decisions about the content and organization of the event. The group decided to invite Alice Walker as a keynote speaker. To maintain the action focus of the event and keep participants involved, the planners decided to include several different activity components, including: (1) small-group discussions of the Parent Voices’ platform, (2) a plenary session to obtain the support of key state and local officials for the Parent Voices’ platform, (3) a march in Downtown Oakland, and (4) a public rally at the Oakland City Hall.

The Governor’s announcement of proposed cuts in child care subsidies for parents who had recently left the welfare roles created the jolt needed to mobilize parents to get involved and attend the event. According to one of the project coordinators, there needs to be a sense of urgency in order to pull off such an event and secure high participation. During the months immediately before and after PACCT, the campaign against the Governor’s proposed budget cuts was an effective mobilizing

Parent Voices was challenged by the open-and-flow nature of its parent membership and the lack of a decision-making hierarchy.

The Governor’s proposed child care cuts created a compelling call to action that served as a primary catalyst for parent involvement in PACCT.

event that kept parents involved and sustained participation in local Parent Voices chapters.

Parents were given clear roles and responsibilities in order to ensure their sense of ownership and pride in PACCT.

As the event approached, parents helped to design flyers and written materials. Parents also helped write the chants to be used for the rally and march, took the necessary steps to secure a permit for the march, and sewed a quilt to be displayed on stage during the event. On the day of the event, parents acted as facilitators for the round table discussion, escorted attendees to the child care room, told their personal child care stories on stage, and participated in the legislative panel question-and-answer session. Part of the PACCT strategy for giving parents a sense of ownership, pride, and active participation was to ensure that parents had clear responsibilities and roles to play at the event. Furthermore, project coordinators recognized that not all parents would be interested in picking up a microphone and telling their story; many times parents were more comfortable helping to stuff envelopes. Consequently a variety of different jobs were made available to parents; some were visible to the public and some took place behind the scenes.

The Parent Voices Platform was drafted by the project coordinators based on the viewpoints that had been expressed by parents during chapter planning meetings. A unifying theme was concern about how proposed cuts in the state budget for subsidized child care would affect parents' lives. The parents' platform presented at the PACCT asked attending officials to support the following planks:

- Make quality child care affordable for all families.
- Ensure that low-income parents pay no more than 8% of their family's total income for child care.
- Consider Parent Voices' family budget profiles and share this information on the need for child care subsidies with legislative colleagues.
- Include parent testimony in discussions of all relevant policy issues.
- Make young children and their families a top priority on the legislative agenda.

- Support the statewide “Master Plan for Child Care” developed by State Senator Escutia (which calls for ending the waiting list).

Carrying Out the Parent Action

The PACCT was carried out on September 29, 2001. The action included a presentation by a keynote speaker, round table discussions with parents, an accountability session with legislators, and a rally and march in downtown Oakland. While some of the PACCT attendees had been involved in various stages of planning the event, a number were new to Parent Voices.² Parents who had been involved in planning said that participating in the event was a moving and powerful experience. Meeting other parents from outside the Bay Area helped to give faces to the families across the state who share similar child care challenges. In fact, Bay Area parents were overwhelmed by the dedication of those PACCT participants who had traveled long distances to attend—this statewide show of support for Parent Voices helped solidify its significance to active Bay Area parents who described the event as “successful and empowering.”

Project coordinators viewed PACCT as an important step for Parent Voices’ advocacy efforts. Overall, about 250 parents from across the state turned out to attend PACCT. While some of the Bay Area chapters of Parent Voices did not get as many parents to attend PACCT as they would have liked, the event was very successful in making Parent Voices visible to high-level decision makers. One project coordinator suggested that, in the past, Legislative Caucus members had viewed Parent Voices as a small Bay Area organization. The turnout of 250 parents from across the state at PACCT demonstrated to elected officials that Parent Voices represented a much broader and potentially much larger constituency. Among the elected officials present at PACCT were Oakland Mayor Jerry Brown, Congresswoman Lynn Woolsey, and Assembly Members Dion Aroner and Wilma Chan.

PACCT helped demonstrate to elected officials that Parent Voices had a much broader constituency than originally thought.

² In fact, the largest single group of attendees consisted of over 20 parents from Kern County who had heard about the PACCT and decided to charter a van and attend as a group.

Post-PACCT Activities

Since the Parent Action was held on September 29, 2001, members of Parent Voices have continued to play an active role in expressing the parent perspective on key state budget decisions, most importantly on Governor Davis' proposed reduction in state set-aside funding for subsidized child care for parents who had made the transition from welfare to work. Other activities included the following:

- Parents testified at the Women's Legislative Caucus hearings on proposed changes to the child care subsidy system.
- Parents participated in a vigil at the State Building in Oakland protesting the cuts being made to the child care subsidy system.
- Parents, child care providers, and children's advocates held a vigil at the San Francisco Civic Center to voice their concern about threatened cuts in child care funding.
- Parents went to Sacramento and met with the Governor's staff person to discuss their concerns over the proposed cuts in child care subsidies.

In each of the activities outlined above, Parent Voices has actively pursued decision makers who establish policies that affect families dependent on subsidies. As an organization, Parent Voices believes that the activities described above made a difference in the Governor's decision in December 2001 to restore the state set-aside for child care subsidies for thousands of working families through June 30, 2002.

SUMMARY OF PARENT VOICES PROJECT OUTCOMES AND LESSONS LEARNED

It was hoped that the QCCI-funded Parent Voices project would help further both advocacy and organization-building goals. Politically, it was hoped that parents would have the opportunity to tell decision makers about their interests and priorities on state budget issues affecting child care subsidies and influence what decisions were made on these issues. Organizationally, it was hoped that the recruitment of parents around planning and participating in PACCT would support the maturation of Parent Voices as an organization and help it build a sustainable base of active participants within individual county chapters.

Advocacy Outcomes

The Parent Voices PACCT project has enjoyed substantial success in helping parents to become active and influential participants in state-level policy discussions about quality child care. Using the Parent Summit advocacy event as a stepping stone, Parent Voices has created an expectation that parents should be consulted about the child care agenda and can be expected to participate in key public policy decisions affecting child care funding. During the Women’s Legislative Caucus in October 2001—organized in response to the first round of the Governor’s budget proposals—Parent Voices distributed a position paper outlining its stance on child care subsidies, parent payment, time limits, reimbursement rates, and eligibility. Parent Voices further developed this document during the spring of 2002 as a participant in discussions about the next phase of the Governor’s budget.

Parent Voices has created the expectation that parents should be consulted about the child care agenda and can be expected to participate in key policy discussions

Another positive development that has aided Parent Voices in advancing its advocacy efforts is the development of broad alliances between Parent Voices and other groups. Prior to PACCT, Parent Voices chapters tended to work independently of one another and of other groups. As a result of PACCT planning and Parent Voice’s participation in subsequent budget debates, the organization has now been collaborating with other child care, labor, faith-based organizations, and non-profit groups. As a result of the QCCI project, Parent Voices has been working closely with the Work and Family Coalition, Worthy Wages groups, and Children Now. Parent Voices has been able to leverage support from these organizations and further its mission.

Organization-Building Outcomes

The organization-building accomplishments of the QCCI-funded PACCT project have also been substantial. PACCT successfully engaged parents in multiple stages of event planning and development and succeeded in giving parents a voice as a result of the political platform disseminated at the Parent Summit. In addition to supporting focused activities of the existing Bay Area chapters of Parent Voices, PACCT was successful beyond its expectations in terms of drawing parent participants from a number of California counties beyond the San Francisco Bay Area, including Kern, Butte, Los Angeles, Fresno, and Sutter Counties. The fact

that parents traveled from many parts of the state to participate in the Parent Action demonstrates the potential for the formation of Parent Voices chapters in additional counties.

However, Parent Voices also experienced its share of organizational challenges in carrying out this project. PACCT planning started off slowly; it was difficult to build momentum with the open decision-making structure to which the project Planning Committee was committed. Although project planning began a full 18 months in advance of the scheduled event, the majority of decisions occurred in the three months prior to the Parent Action. The coordinators stated that the planning process took too long and contributed to a high rate of turnover in parent participation. Additionally, because PACCT was a year in the making, the urgency that the coordinators wanted to convey was not easily communicated early in the design phase and only began to surface as the event drew nearer.

The more recent and successful mobilization of parents around state budget issues has infused Parent Voices with energy around its state-level advocacy efforts. However, despite recent successes, it is still not clear whether the organization will be able to sustain broad parent participation in the local Parent Voices chapters over time. Parent Voices' organizational facilitators believe strongly that Parent Voices needs to remain a loose confederation of local grassroots chapters that reflect the concerns of parents in their individual communities. However, not all local chapters have established strong sources of community support and funding that can be used to sustain project staff and membership activities beyond the project period. In response to this challenge, Parent Voices plans to hold a training for the development of new chapters and to discuss methods that local chapters can use to sustain active parent participation.

CONCLUSION

In its second QCCI-funded project, Parent Voices has confirmed that it is possible to focus parent advocacy efforts around a critical issue and to influence key decision makers at the state level. During the project period, the Governor's proposed budget cuts in child care created a compelling call for action that has served as the primary catalyst for parent

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involvement. While these budget proposals have ensured parent turnout for immediate advocacy activities (Women's Legislative Caucus, vigils for child care in San Francisco and Oakland, and meeting with the Governor's staff), once the budget is finalized in June 2002, Parent Voices will also need to address the challenge of *sustaining* the momentum of parent involvement in advocacy.

Support from QCCI has enabled Parent Voices to develop as a grassroots, parent-led, parent-informed organization. The Parent Voices chapters continue to depend on the skills and abilities of the paid staff coordinators, who create the opportunities for parents to communicate their concerns to decision makers. As described by one coordinator, it is the job of the paid staff to disseminate the Governor's proposed budget and legislative information, facilitate meetings, organize, make phone calls, and mobilize parents. The parents' most important role in the organization is to express publicly how they are affected by existing child care policy, or by proposed changes in child care policy. The experiences with PACCT suggest that, at this point in Parent Voices' development, the work of paid staff is vital to sustaining parent-driven advocacy.

Paid staff have been critical for coordinating and sustaining parent involvement in Parent Voices.

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