Making Children a Priority of Our Local Communities

Years of Child Advocacy in San Francisco

by
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MAKING CHILDREN A PRIORITY OF OUR LOCAL COMMUNITIES

15 YEARS OF CHILD ADVOCACY IN SAN FRANCISCO

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October 1989

Published by

Coleman Advocates for Children and Youth

2601 Mission Street, Suite 708
San Francisco, CA 94131
415/641-4362

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PART ONE

THE RATIONALE FOR LOCAL CHILD ADVOCACY

I. WHY ADVOCACY?

What could be more compelling in stimulating policy makers to act than abandoned babies kept in caged cribs in a juvenile hall, 14-year-old youths held in isolation for days at a time without any access to counselors or health care, recreation leaders dealing drugs on playgrounds to the children they are supposed to be supervising, or homeless families with five children living in county-run, filthy one-room units without cooking facilities. Yet none of these very real problems in San Francisco was resolved through the traditional bureaucratic channels. In all of these situations, efforts to reform the system from within were tried. In every case, a solution required some type of advocacy - pressure on the system that came from **outside**, that was **organized**, that was **ongoing and consistent**, and that involved **public exposure** and **political pressure.**

Coleman Advocates for Children and Youth has been the major source of pressure on San Francisco to improve services for the city's most vulnerable residents - its children. In its 15 year history, Coleman has learned that there is nothing sacred about children's needs, that merely articulating problems and proposing solutions will not inspire action. We have learned that, despite the fact that universal lipservice is given to caring for children by policy makers and that there are numerous agencies with the mission to serve children, children's needs will go unmet without vigorous advocacy. The Mayor of San Francisco, who campaigned on a platform of support for social issues, expressed this reality clearly when he told a group of children's advocates that they were just like every other interest group to him, one more constituency whose demands must be balanced with others.

We have also learned that it is not reasonable to rely on the professional service provider community to be the primary advocates for children. Service providers, if they fight for change at all, will most often push for reforms that will make their work life easier - smaller caseloads, less paperwork, streamlined administrative procedures, new buildings, etc. The agenda between advocates for children and service providers is certainly shared when both are fighting for added services to the agency the service provider works for. It is not shared if the advocate recommends reallocations of funding, such as money from Probation to community based alternatives; the addition of services that do not fit into the mandates of existing agencies; or administrative and policy changes that might require more work, such as improved recordkeeping or procedures which expand due process.

II. WHY LOCAL ADVOCACY?

The local arena is where all policy is implemented, regardless of where it is made. Most child advocacy in recent years, however, has occurred on the federal and state levels, focusing on legislation and protecting the budgets of major children's programs, such as education, health and nutrition. While the necessity for state and federal advocacy cannot be minimized, what happens at the local level is of equal significance. There are several major arguments for child advocacy occurring on the local level:

1. Implementation of state and federal laws must occur on the local level. Ultimately, how policy is implemented determines its benefit for children. State and federal laws are, at best, only general guidelines and often have no built-in mechanisms for monitoring and enforcement. The impact of

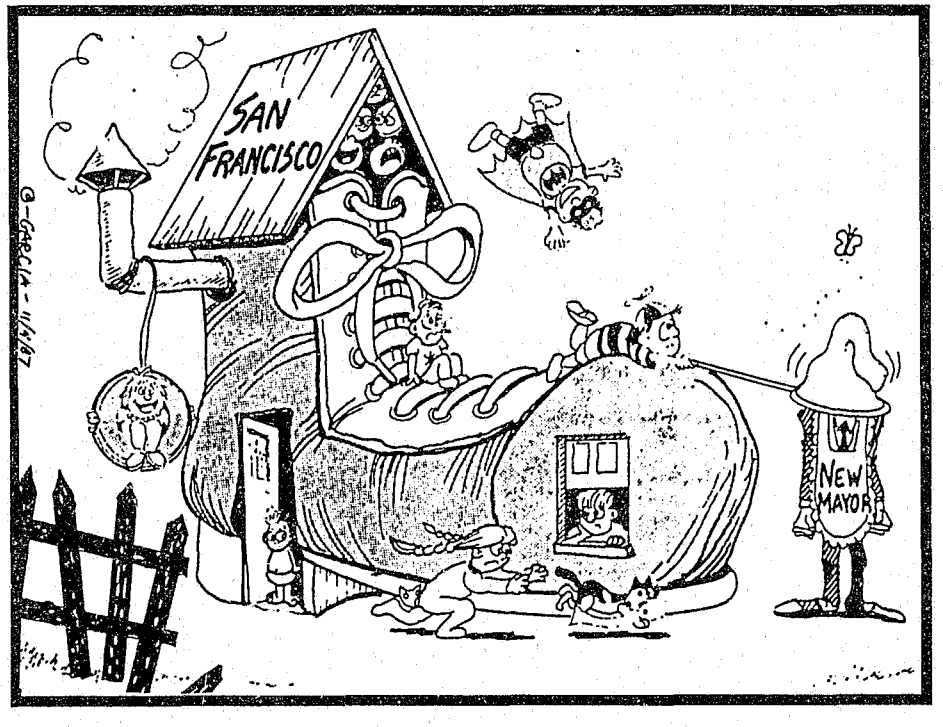
state and federal policy is most effectively evaluated in local communities; negotiations about implementation have the most immediate impact when they occur on the local level.

An example of why local advocacy must accompany state and federal advocacy can be seen in San Francisco's handling of status offenders. In 1976, after much state level advocacy, California passed a law saying that counties could no longer lock up status offenders. How creatively this policy got enacted depended entirely on local factors. In San Francisco, the law got implemented by taking the locks off the doors of the status offender units in the juvenile hall. The intent and research behind the state policy got ignored. Only when Coleman entered the picture did the city create neighborhood-based family counseling programs and small group homes throughout the city for status offender youth.

2. Programs for children are created at the local level. Much of what government does that impacts the welfare of children is affected not by broad policy, but by local programming decisions. For instance, placing recreation workers in housing projects in San Francisco did not require more money, nor was it the result of any state or federal policy. This, like many creative program ideas that benefit children, is a strictly local program issue.

3. A significant number of policies impacting children are made at the local level. This is becoming increasingly true with the trend to defer more policy-making to lower levels of government. Many local policy issues have been all but ignored so far by the child advocacy movement. These issues vary from state to state, but often include: afterschool latchkey programs, playgrounds and parks, teen recreation, housing policies, zoning, police, juvenile probation and juvenile court, libraries, homeless families and youth, interagency collaboration, and a range of social service and health programs not covered by state and federal funding.

4. Inner cities are the focal point for the crisis among children. Drug abuse, gang violence, school dropout, and homelessness are most extreme in the inner cities and solutions to these problems cannot come only from state capitals and Washington, D.C., but must be addressed at the city (local) government level.



Cartoon with editorial in local San Francisco paper urging the newly elected Mayor to make children a top priority.

PART TWO

THE EVOLUTION OF COLEMAN ADVOCATES FOR CHILDREN AND YOUTH

III. THE EARLY DAYS: FOCUS ON SYSTEM REFORM

From the mid 70s to the early 80s, Coleman Advocates for Children, like most child advocacy efforts, focused its attention on reforming the **public systems that were intended to promote the well being of children but often did not.** Particular emphasis was put on both child welfare and juvenile justice issues. The focus on system reform grew in part out of the activism and optimism of the 60s and 70s, which generated confidence that public systems could be made to serve children well. The major issues were not inadequacy of resources for children's services, but rather de-institutionalization, due process, equal access, mainstreaming, accountability of service providers, and humane service delivery systems. Federal legislation for juvenile justice and child welfare, services to handicapped children, and child abuse reporting reflected these concerns.

In San Francisco, Coleman was participating in this movement. We fought for the removal of various groups of youth from the juvenile hall, for a range of community-based shelter and residential programs, for in-home support services that would prevent families from breaking up, for an increase in adoption and a reduction of children in foster care, and for various types of accountability measures to be adopted by our child welfare agency.

We learned how to deal with the many barriers to reform: job and turf protection, lack of skill and information, destructive attitudes of workers and administrators, and longstanding procedures that were contradictory to needed change. We developed a methodology for picking strategies that meant analyzing the target agency, the barriers to change, the environmental forces supporting change and the openings in the system. We became expert in juvenile justice and child welfare issues; we researched program models and data supporting our positions; we published documents and newsletters monitoring the progress of reform, held conferences, and worked with agency staff and administrators. We formed and worked within coalitions of service providers in the children's field. The staff of Coleman were experienced service providers, and the Board of Directors viewed Coleman as very similar to a service agency.

Coleman gained a reputation for credibility, for basing our positions on solid information, and for being knowledgeable in the field. We also gained a reputation for being persistent and willing to step on the toes of bureaucrats when necessary. We used the political process sparingly - only on rare occasions when a legislative action was absolutely necessary. Going public was a last resort and we rarely used the media. Often the issues were too technical for press interest (or so we thought). We were operating in a rather sympathetic climate of reform and were able to focus our attention on data collection, administrative negotiation, and the education of the people we saw as our peers in the social service field.

Coleman organized demonstration against conditions in Juvenile Hall.

IV. THE CRISIS FOR CHILDREN WORSENS: THE STAKES RISE FOR CHILD ADVOCATES

The 80s, with its dramatic move to the right, changed our mindset about child advocacy. Given the growing severity of the needs of children and **the all-out attack on the very concept that government had a responsibility to help,** the focus on reforming a single system seemed like a luxury child advocates could not afford, making agency administrators the target of our advocacy seemed misdirected, and our skills and coalitions seemed too narrow. The lack of availability of resources for children's services became a major issue, public education about the need to invest in children was now a necessity, and the political arena was where the important action was occurring.

Although it did not happen instantly, over a period of about 6 years (1982-1988), Coleman went down a path many child advocates did: we greatly expanded our agenda, we shifted the arena in which we worked, and we adapted an organizational structure that allowed us to play a new role in the community.

Expanding the agenda: From Juvenile Justice/ Child Welfare Systems Reform to Making San Francisco a Better Place for Children

Limitations of a single system approach

In the early 80s, many child advocates began to experience the shortcomings of focusing on a single system. In San Francisco, we have seen many examples of the problems caused by focusing too narrowly. After years of juvenile justice advocacy, San Francisco developed a progressive plan for reforming the system. A "grand design" was created, calling for a dramatic reduction in the detention population and an increase in community alternatives. Meanwhile, however, the crack crisis appeared and the city began making criminal what had previously been seen as a social problem. Suddenly the law enforcement agencies flooded our juvenile justice system with cases and the new plan was put aside, called impractical and irrelevant. Years of work seemed almost wasted. We learned that reform of the juvenile court and juvenile probation system could only occur in conjunction with changes in police practices and policies, the availability of prevention and drug rehabilitation programs, and community attitudes about youth and violence.

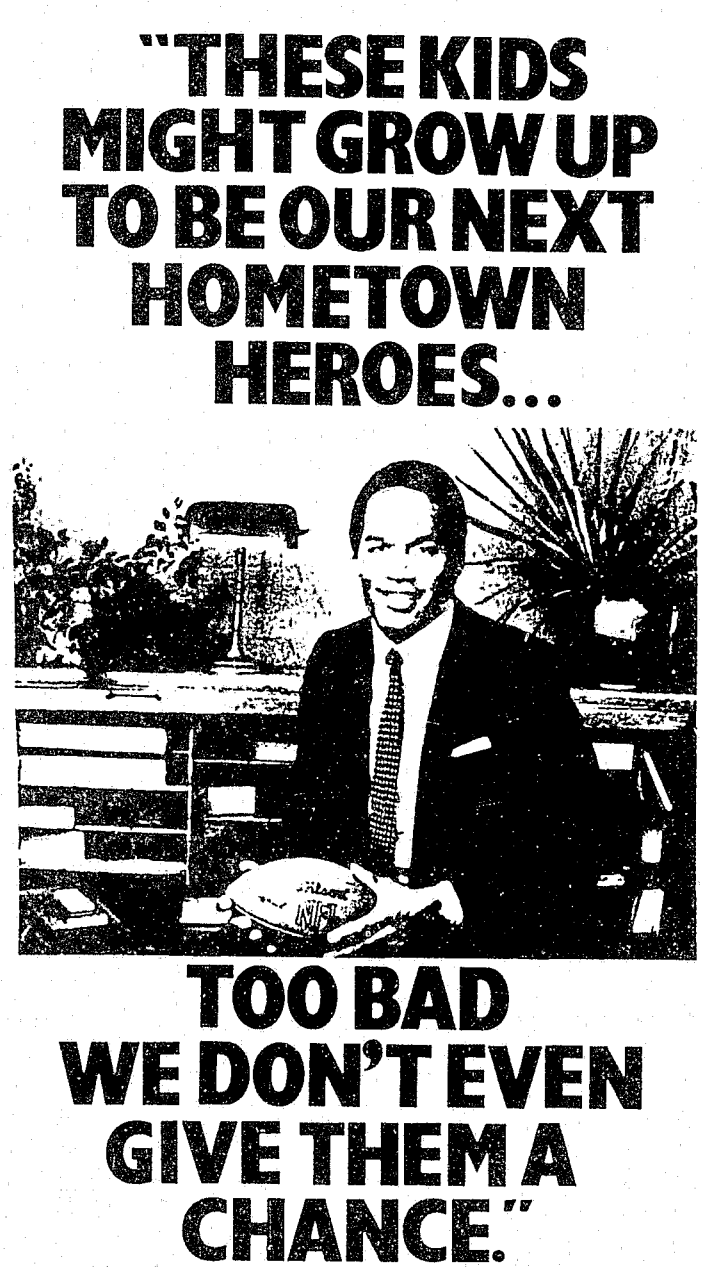
Examples of the same problems can be seen in the city's child welfare system. San Francisco, like many communities, had a child welfare agency in the throes of permanency planning when it experienced a virtual invasion of high risk children. Foster care, which was being reduced, suddenly skyrocketed. The increase was rooted in problems that had previously been the concern of systems other than child welfare: homeless families, street youth, reductions in health and mental health care, and drug-addicted and AIDS babies.

As child advocates, we have become discouraged by our efforts to "reform" solely the child welfare and juvenile justice systems. Too many people now have an excuse to question the premises of the reform. In many instances the situation is worse than when we started. And our arguments about cost benefits have not always proven correct. **While we have certainly not abandoned our advocacy within each system, we have begun to look for more comprehensive approaches to complement this work.**

The dramatic escalation in the needs of children, a result of shortsighted social and economic policies, has contributed to our sense of urgency about adopting a more comprehensive agenda. Child poverty has increased; the incomes of young families have plummeted; and almost every social problem plaguing our youth continues to threaten our future - teen pregnancy, abuse and neglect, homelessness, drug addiction, and school dropout. The public's willingness to support services for children has declined, and with that many of the safety net programs that have in the past protected our families and children. It is

difficult to work on narrow issues in the face of such overwhelming problems.

It is also becoming politically unwise to focus primarily on single issues. It is too easy for politicians, increasingly skittish about supporting human services, to get off the hook with just a single action. Without an overall vision and a broad set of demands, we realized that we were selling children short in the political arena.



From brochure with a message from O.J. Simpson published by Coleman to garner public support for expanding after school programs.

A Comprehensive Children's Agenda

For child advocates, the increase in the needs of children and the inter-related qualities of service systems have demanded major changes in our strategies and goals. It has become important to broaden our vision and our mission. **Coleman, founded to assist abused, neglected and dependent children, now has as its mission making San Francisco a better place for children.** Previously, we would articulate objectives such as increasing adoptions by 10% and implementing detention criteria at the Juvenile Hall. Now our objectives cover issues such as increasing overall city expenditures for children by 10%, and instituting children's services at every major housing project in the city.

Coleman has begun to address the overall needs of all of San Francisco's children by pushing the city to implement a comprehensive service plan for children. We began by drafting a children's agenda for San Francisco and had this adopted as official city policy. While the children's agenda is only a general policy statement outlining goals and philosophy, it does help people understand and accept the broad vision of where we need to go.

In developing the Children's Agenda, Coleman incorporated many issues. The ten point agenda calls for:

1. Affordable Housing for Families
2. Plentiful Child Care Resources
3. Safe, Enriching Recreation
4. High Quality Public Schools
5. Comprehensive Social Services
6. Accessible Health Care
7. State-of-the-Art Libraries
8. Effective Vocational Programs
9. A Rehabilitative Juvenile Justice System
10. Comprehensive Planning and Funding

Many of these items represented new issue areas for Coleman. One of our goals now is to see progress made in each of these ten areas every year. Many of the new issues we have taken on

are reflected in the content of the Children's Budget proposals outlined in Section V. Outside the budget process, we are also addressing a wide range of issues that reflect our expanded agenda. For example:

- A redefining of the role of the Recreation and Parks Department in order to make it the primary provider of latchkey services for children;
- Changes in the housing code that reduce landlord discrimination against tenants with children;
- An interagency case management system that would reduce duplication of efforts between city departments and minimize the number of workers in the life of a single family;
- Changes in the media's coverage of crack, gangs, and youth in order to portray youth in a more balanced and realistic light, to reduce public hostility toward youth, and to demonstrate that there are solutions to problems;
- The creation of a city-wide Office for Children which would coordinate, monitor, and plan for children's services, and foster similar mechanisms within each city department to increase accountability.

* * * * * *

So far, expanding the Agenda has proven a success. The more issues we take on, the more visible we become and the more we are able to effect change. Unexpectedly, an ambitious and broadly scoped agenda has increased our effectiveness rather than dilute it. Each accomplishment seems to make the next that much easier. Recently, we have entered territory - such as the Police Department - that is relatively unfamiliar and difficult to impact. Yet, our success with the Children's Budget and other issues has given us credibility and access that took years to develop in other arenas.

Changing the Advocacy Arena: From Service Agencies to the Political Process

How we as child advocates spend our time has shifted in recent years. Previously, the majority of our time was consumed in work with or related to service providers. **Now the majority of our time is spent on work related to City Hall.** While this was precipitated by the dramatic change in the political climate in the early 80s, making us all acutely aware of how our issues were subject to politics, the shift for Coleman reflects a growing sophistication that will be sustained even if the political climate becomes more liberal. We are learning where the power is and how to better impact it for broad-based change. While we feel like novices compared to our counterparts in the business sector, we are developing new skills and new strategies to get what children need.

The factors which have lead us to the political arena are the same ones that lead us to broaden our agenda:

- More and more issues that cut across the domain of single systems requiring action by the top administrator, the Mayor;
- Stalemates with agency administrators that could only be resolved by "those in charge", usually elected officials;
- Cuts in children's services making participation in the highly political budget process essential;
- Increasing urgency in the needs of children demanding more effective use of our time as child advocates.

While the shift in our focus was somewhat gradual, the potential of it hit us unexpectedly and with great force several years ago after sponsoring a **candidates' night for Mayors on children's issues.** A candidates' night devoted to children was a first-ever event in San Francisco. In planning it, we brought together 50 children's agencies to develop the questions and the format for a candidate's night and agreed to each do our share to assure an adequate turnout. We advertised the event in the paper and sent fliers to children's agencies throughout the city. Planning the event brought a level of excitement and cohesiveness to the children's constituency that had never occurred before. The result - the largest candidates' night of the Mayor's race and front page coverage from the papers!

Mayor Art Agnos speaking at a rally organized by Coleman urging the Mayor to make children's needs a higher priority.

Astounded by our power, the informal coalition stayed together, spearheaded by Coleman, and went on to sponsor a Speakout for the new Mayor that was attended by twice as many as the candidates' night and was an immensely impressive display of energy and commitment to a cause. **At the Speakout, youth, parents, and service providers testified to the new Mayor about the plight of the city's children. Covered by the press and complete with signs, visual effects, and testimonials from youth, it didn't leave a dry eye.**

After experiencing such a high level of success, we realized an obligation to utilize our potential political clout and adopted a more rigorous strategy to accomplish very specific goals. We decided on the Children's Budget (described in Section V) as the most effective initial strategy.

* * * * * *

In its first phase of development, Coleman's major strategies had been:

- rigorously documenting and researching our case,
- disseminating the information in detail to administrators and policy-makers, and
- negotiating with service providers for change.

These strategies shifted as we learned more about how they work and the impact they have. The changes we adopted are described below.

Greater emphasis on presentation

While we always research our issues, we tend now to put fewer resources into time consuming studies. We realized that data collection can remain quite simple because it is only a few of the most dramatic facts that are ever reported, read, or understood by policy-makers. **Ronald Reagan certainly illustrated that the entire country can be swayed by an anecdote and several "facts" (that may even be disputed in a news story the following day) if the presentation is emotionally powerful.** We put more energy now into emotional **power than detailed documentation.** This is partly because politicians, as opposed to agency administrators, care much more about the potential of an issue to galvanize voters than they do about the technical details. We are more likely to get a positive response from a compelling, well presented, one-page fact sheet than from a 30 page position paper.

In recent years, we have also placed more emphasis and put more resources into developing the concrete tools to capture the attention of the public. Like everyone else, we are using more sophisticated graphic techniques; we are putting out much more professional looking material - a new logo, better designed brochures and newsletters, laser printed reports, etc. As social reformers, we have reluctantly increased our focus on form while trying to maintain as high a level of substance as possible.

Form has not become a substitute for researching our case and being able to document our recommendations. It is a matter of how much time goes into this aspect of the work and how much effort goes into presenting the background material. As we develop our track record as an advocacy organization, we can rely more on an already established body of knowledge that does not have to be replicated every time we take on a new issue. **Furthermore, as we have success in creating the mechanisms within government to focus on children, City staff themselves will do more of the research and technical planning, allowing us to focus more on direct advocacy.**

Less time with personal negotiations

In the past we spent a great deal of time at meetings with people we considered the key

decision-makers, usually the top person in a given department - such as the chief probation officer or the general manager of the welfare department. We were flattered by the access, convinced about the power of persuasion, and sometimes confused "good vibes" with influence over the decision-maker. We have learned that negotiations with administrators resistant to change is very often fruitless and aimed at confusing or diffusing the advocacy effort. Negotiation is often best without face to face contact - through the press or other public forums. **For instance, Coleman was successful in getting a Children's Budget adopted primarily because of the public pressure exercised. The Mayor refused to meet with us personally to discuss or negotiate the issue, but we realized that it was irrelevant and that "negotiations" could occur without any meetings.**

Using the media

We have learned that, in the eyes of elected officials, things haven't really happened unless they are reported in the media; if they are reported in the media, they are by definition significant. **Therefore, as important as taking an action is getting coverage for that action.** When newspapers began to quote Coleman about the conditions in the juvenile justice system, we were taken much more seriously by Superior Court judges, even though we decreased the amount of time we spent negotiating with the judges themselves.

While the importance of the media varies depending on specific objectives, the necessity of having media coverage does significantly affect our strategies. Compelling stories, dramatic but simple statistics, unusual press conferences, and colorful commentary often replace our more scholarly and professional approaches in order to capture the interest of the media. We have found that we are able to use the media in several ways:

- to get news coverage of three to four major advocacy strategies each year;
- to get editorial support for two to three issues each year; and
- as a resource on stories related to children's issues.

In some ways, using the media has replaced organizing supporters and negotiating with administrators on a specific issue. When children's dental services were at the top of the list of cuts for the Health Department, we alerted one television reporter. Merely the threat of having this made public forced the Health Department to back down within several hours in order to avoid it being on the evening news! It would have taken weeks to accomplish the same goal without the media.

Building new constituencies: retaining our legitimacy

Being effective in the political arena requires having a strong constituency. The power of the candidate's night coalition weakened when the Children's Budget was discussed because it became evident that the coalition was dominated by service providers. This was partly because of the appearance that service providers asking for more money for children's programs were self-serving and partly because of the reluctance of service providers to talk about reallocation of resources within children's services or changes in policy in children's agencies.

While service providers are still the core of the children's constituency in San Francisco, we have begun work at reaching out to other groups - particularly neighborhood associations, parent groups, service and civic organizations, political clubs, youth, tenants associations, and citizen action groups. These groups, while not as technically well informed about line items in the city budget, often have the most creative ideas about change that is needed, a more client-oriented perspective on the problem, and more latitude to use pressure strategies to influence government. Their arguments are more compelling to policymakers and generally more interesting to the public at large. And, most importantly, in some cases they are the most legitimate spokespeople for children.

One of the ongoing concerns of the child advo-

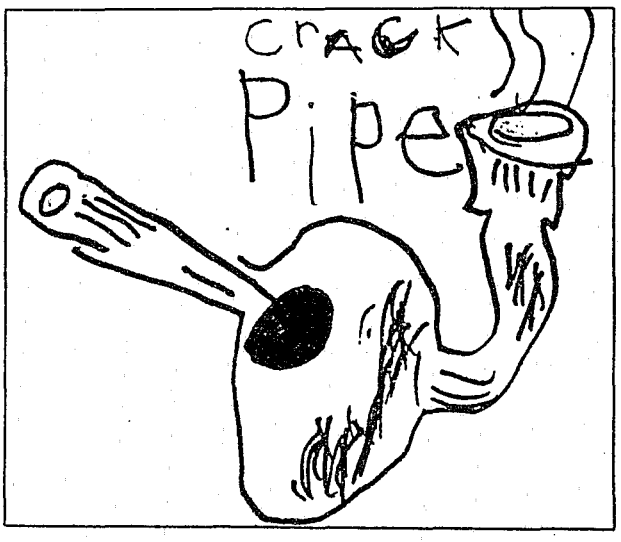
cacy movement is legitimacy. We are always speaking for somebody else - the children. We are usually self appointed, and, in the end, only have true legitimacy to the extent that we help create a voice for parents and children themselves. One of the dangers of the expediency of a media approach is that it allows an advocacy organization to be successful with its self-defined goals without having to bring in the legitimate spokespeople of the movement. Coleman is trying to be sensitive to this problem and to continue finding ways to retain the voices of the parents and youth themselves.

For instance, we have recently developed a publication called "Listen!" - San Francisco's first newspaper written entirely in the words of children. "Listen!" has had a powerful impact on the city - more than any other Coleman publication. The interviews argued more forcefully than our rhetoric ever could for prevention, community-based alternatives to incarceration, and expansion of treatment programs. While "organizing" youth to negotiate with the city may not be feasible, we are learning that there are creative ways for us to play a role in having their voices heard.

New Criteria for Framing Issues

While our basic themes and goals have remained the same, the way we present our issues is changing. Because we are operating in the political arena, we must use hot political issues to get the attention of the policy-makers. **When we are framing our issues, we thinking in terms of what a politician would like to be able to tell his constituency about what he has accomplished.** After considerable internal debate, we made crack the theme of our Children's Budget and couched every proposal, from youth employment to peer counseling, as a crack prevention effort.

We used the crack crisis to move our agenda, even though we viewed crack as simply the latest symptom of the more basic and persistent underlying problems of youth, and even though solutions to crack are the same as solutions to many other crises! In a similar way, we have emphasized the child safety aspect of latchkey programs, the cost-benefits of community based alternatives, the bureaucracy reduction involved in case management and the potential for many children's programs to reduce crime. As long as this does not become a cynical process, where goals are misrepresented in order to pander to a hot political concern, framing issues to respond to these concerns can be very helpful.



Picture drawn by six-year-old published by Coleman and reprinted in local newspaper.

Restructuring the advocacy organization

Coleman has adapted its structure to meet its new strategies. We have moved from thinking of ourselves as another social services agency to thinking of ourselves as a public interest organization. Becoming a membership organization enhanced and developed our children's constituency. When looking for board members, we put less emphasis on their expertise in the field and more on their political influence and ability to reach out to specific communities we want to involve in our cause. Rather than have the board merely set policy, we ask them to become community activists on behalf of children. Our strength is magnified by a board members who provide testimony, speak at press conferences, contact and negotiate with politicians and policy-makers, and do outreach to other community groups.

PART THREE

NEW STRATEGIES IN ACTION

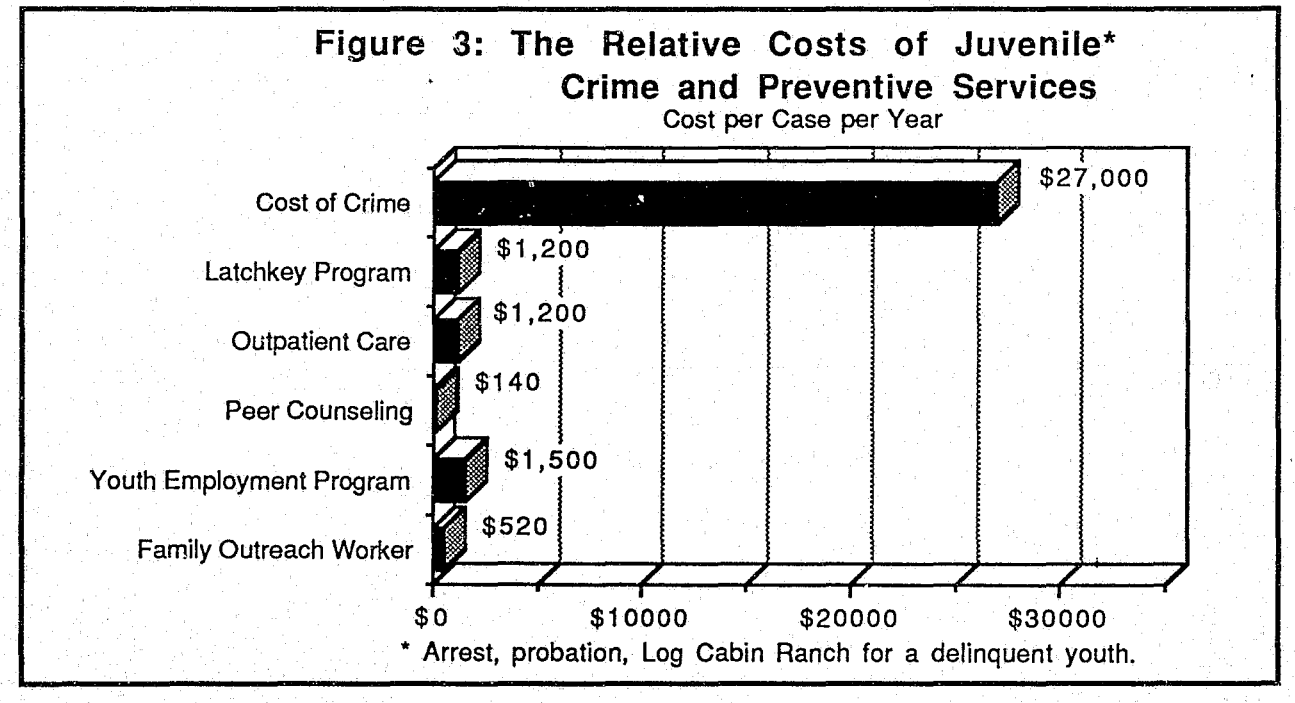
V. THE CHILDREN'S BUDGET

Coleman, recognizing that the availability of resources must be a focal issue, joined many in the child advocacy movement when we produced our first Children's Budget. Budget advocacy has become a major strategy of child advocates in the wake of the budget cuts in children's services. We felt that if we were merely criticizing the system rather than fighting for adequate resources for the system, that we were being unrealistic and unresponsive to the true needs of children.

Our goal with the Children's Budget is two-fold: to have the city adopt specific proposals which increase a wide range of necessary services for children and to have the city institutionalize the concept of a Children's Budget in the regular city budgeting process.

The Children's Budget has proven to be an invaluable tool to use with local government. Coleman's first Children's Budget proposal included the following:

- An analysis of city expenditures for children throughout 23 City departments;
- A Profile of San Francisco's children, providing data and documentation of unmet needs and specifying highest need neighborhoods;
- 32 specific program proposals, to be carried out by 7 City departments, which would improve services for children, particularly in the area of drug abuse prevention (the specific proposals submitted to the city in the first year's Children's Budget proposal reflected primarily priorities about which there had been a great deal of previous discussion and concensus in the service provider community);



From Coleman's Children's Budget. Chart reproduced by several television stations in coverage of story.

- Cost-benefit analyses of each program proposal; and
- Potential funding sources for the budget package - including suggestions about redeployment of personnel and reallocation of resources.

In trying to identify potential funding for children's programs, we ploughed new political ground and dared to challenge existing interest groups, such as unions, and thus to undertake a politically treacherous course. We suggested such things as cutting gardener positions and increasing recreation worker positions in our Recreation and Parks department and turning the county run juvenile facility over to a non-profit agency. In some instances, our strategy led to the criticism that we were addressing issues about which we had no particular expertise but it had great benefits in that it captured more public attention than anything else we had done.

Using the Children's Budget to Impact Children's Policy

Using the local budget process to impact children's policy turned out to be a very effective strategy for many reasons. It provided us with the best forum we have ever had for presenting our issues. **The budget process is the highest profile local policy-making endeavor; it receives the most press attention, the most public interest, and has the most staff resources attached to it. Simply by using the budget process as our podium, we automatically increased the public attention our issues received.**

The budget process also establishes concrete boundaries for debating issues. It has a beginning and an end, as well as built-in mechanisms for public accountability. There are mandated public hearings at most points of the process, some requirements for public exposure of documents, and legal time frames within which the budget must be produced. This makes it much harder for policy makers to use the tactics of delay and avoidance which so often frustrate child advocates on the local level, particularly since policy-making on the local level is often informal and, unlike the state and federal level, offers limited structures through which to make the case.

One of the ongoing challenges to the local child advocate is to find the forum through which change can be negotiated. The major forums for state and federal advocacy have been legislatures and courts. Because policy and program implementation do not lend themselves to legislative or legal solutions, using the budget process gave us an ideal forum for negotiations.

Furthermore, using the budget process allowed us to attack the issue of city priorities. We competed with other interest groups in a public manner and politicians were forced to make public choices about priorities. This is far more effective than the usual behind-the-scenes local politics. It is much harder to make children a low priority in the context of a high profile, very concrete budget process. This was particularly significant to us because our Children's Budget incorporated not only proposals for funding, but many proposals for reforms and new policy directions.

A unique feature of our Children's Budget Proposal was that we were not willing to ask only for more money to continue the status quo -- we incorporated many of our ideas for reform. Listed below are some of the recommendations that tied important policy and program reform to budget proposals. In each case, funding was recommended only after the reform measure would have taken place.

- The redeployment of police officers from the high profile but ineffective narcotics squad, which merely arrested large numbers of youth caught using drugs, to more community-oriented, proactive, preventive activities.
- The redeployment of recreation workers from underutilized centers to housing projects for after school program and the transformation of two facilities of the Recreation and Parks Department into multi-service youth centers.

- Placing health and mental health services on-site in public schools rather than in clinics and making peer counseling, which is both cost-effective and identified by teens themselves as the most effective form of intervention, a major children's service of the Health Department.

Every Children's Budget proposal called for changes in policy and program, as well as budget allocation. **In the first year, many of our proposals were adopted, thus setting important new policy directions as well as adding $5.6 million to the city budget for new children's services!**

A Plea for Jobs for S.F. Youth

Agnos Urged To Earmark Tax Surplus

By Jim Doyle
Chronicle Staff Writer

As a high school freshman, Joelle Felix was given her first taste of the working world through a city program that provided her with an after-school job at a legal services firm for the elderly.

As a sophomore, she worked two hours after school each day as an office worker for the Sheriff's Department, and she has worked part-time there ever since. Having just graduated from St. John's High School in the Mission District, Joelle now hopes to become a deputy sheriff.

"Without the program, it would have been much harder for me to start out," said the 18-year-old woman. "I learned to type, to answer the phone and to write a resume."

The future does not look quite as bright for many of San Francisco's 20,000 high school students, especially those from low-income families. The program that helped Joelle find after-

From newspaper story on press conference organized by Coleman to get city to incorporate a youth employment program into the budget.

The process of developing and mobilizing support for the Children's Budget

The first year of our Children's Budget Project in San Francisco was a success by the standards of most observers. The project was built upon many years of advocacy and, specifically, almost two years of work to develop a comprehensive children's agenda. A year before initiating the Children's Budget Project, Coleman sponsored a conference entitled "An Agenda for the New Mayor", at which several hundred people reviewed a draft agenda and began creating a concensus in the many issue areas that impacted children. **By the time Coleman officially kicked off the budget process, we had a strong constituency of children's advocates with a broad-based consensus.**

The actual Children's Budget process began with a major conference during the early fall (before the June approval of the final budget). Speakers from around the country were invited to share with our San Francisco constituency what was going on in other communities with regard to budget advocacy for children. Key officials of the city government were asked to speak, encouraging them to make a public commitment to take the children's budget seriously. Representatives from foundations, businesses, the media, and neighborhoods were also drawn into the program, thus increasing the "buy-in" of many groups. Conference participants were asked to generate ideas and priorities about the budget. Many smaller followup sessions were held to refine these ideas.

The Children's Budget Proposal document was submitted to the city in early February at a well covered press conference in City Hall. The document was put in big, black envelopes in order to get attention and mailed to 250 key people throughout the city - public officials, city department administrators, city commissioners, neighborhood leaders, children's agencies, political clubs and service organizations. It contained postcards for people to send to the Mayor and the Board of Supervisors urging support of the children's budget, and requests for formal endorsements of the budget when appropriate. We began a process of soliciting organizational endorsements and media editorials.

Meetings were set up with all members of the

city's legislative body, all members of the Mayor's budget staff, and every city department head affected by the budget; presentations were made to every relevant city commission. Our loose-knit coalition was kept together to meet to discuss strategy - letter writing campaigns, testimony at appropriate budget hearings, and press events. **Because of the consistent pressure put on the city, the Board of Supervisors (the city legislative body) passed a resolution urging the Mayor to incorporate our Children's Budget proposals into his initial budget.** This was the only direction the Board gave the Mayor on the city budget.

The processes through which each item was incorporated into the budget were different. In some cases, the city department heads refused to consider the proposals. In other cases, it was city department people who, behind the scenes, were giving us information about how to proceed. The addition of a youth employment program to the city budget illustrates one scenario in the Children's Budget. For a local program, the $750,000 request was substantial. No city department included the item in its budget, since it did not fit neatly into any existing department's mandate. The Mayor's Office did not include it in its initial budget yet it was an item around which there was a great deal of community support and about which the need was painfully obvious in light of the crack crisis. Between the month when the initial budget was released and a final budget was adopted, we organized a Committee for Youth Employment with about 50 organizational members, began releasing fact sheets, press releases, and letters to elected officials about the need, and staged a press conference at a local community center where dozens of youth publicly gave testimonials about how such a program had benefitted them in the past. **It was not long before several elected officials were competing to be the ones who would sponsor the program's addition to the budget.** We selected this item to mount a public campaign over because of its importance in the eyes of the youth community, the widespread support for it, and the obvious link to addressing the crack epidemic.

VII. ORGANIZING MODEL PROJECTS: STAYING CONNECTED TO THE COMMUNITY

As local child advocates, one of our key strategies has always been facilitating the development of new services which would not be implemented without our direct involvement. We carefully identify either types of programs or locations for services which represent a much needed departure from the status quo and which embody the policy directions we are pursuing. **This not only accomplishes the goal of adding new services for children and demonstrating that certain policy directions can work, it also broadens our constituency and credibility in the community.**

Specific programs we have played the key role in initiating include:

- a school-based child abuse prevention program in a high risk neighborhood with few child abuse prevention services;
- multi-service children's programs in two of the worst housing projects in the city;
- a gay and lesbian youth community center;
- an outreach center and shelter for homeless street youth; and
- a parent-run youth group for children a neighborhood without youth services.

We have played a variety of roles in organizing new services:

- convening all services providers in an underserved neighborhood to develop collectively a program to respond to a newly identified need;
- working with neighborhood parent groups to provide technical assistance in getting parent-run programs organized and funded;
- convening all major political and agency players involved in a certain issue, such as public housing, to develop a new project;
- drafting proposals for new programs and advocating for funding with private and public sources; and
- negotiating with public agencies, private business, volunteers and privateproviders to participate in offering a comprehensive service.

From article describing a recreation program in a public housing project, initiated as a result of Coleman's advocacy.

Multi-service approach in public housing projects

One of Coleman's most successful program development efforts has been in the city's worst housing project. This began when we observed dramatic increases in the percentage of black children in every high risk category we monitored in the city. This was at a time when the black population in San Francisco was declining. We knew that the majority of children in the projects were black and that these were often the ones at highest risk. We knew also that there were very few services offered to children in the projects. We decided that part of our strategy in addressing the problems of black children in San Francisco would be to facilitate the development of programs targeted to the projects.

Initially, we convened representatives from about ten groups which might have interest in the children in the city's housing projects. This included a tenants association, the Mayor's Office, the Housing Commission, childcare advocates, the Police Department, and a group concerned about neighborhood safety. After several meetings, the group decided to focus on a project identified by the Mayor's Office as the worst in the city. The first step agreed upon was to assist the tenants association in conducting a survey of tenants to determine what type of services they wanted. Childcare headed the list, followed by recreation and employment. We decided to focus on initiating a childcare center in the project because a childcare center can be the core service around which other services are developed.

The first barrier was getting the cooperation of the Housing Authority administration in identifying an appropriate space. Months of advocacy - pressure from the press, presentations to the Housing Commission, and efforts to involve the Mayor's Office - finally resulted in the Housing Authority giving up office space for a childcare center. The second barrier was funding for the center. All potential providers were surveyed and Head Start turned out the best option. **Within a year, with the heavy involvement of tenants and with vigorous advocacy every step of the way, a daycare center was built by volunteers, Head Start got its funding and initiated the program, the Recreation and Parks Department started an after school program and ten youth employment agencies agreed to provide on-site services.**

This was happening as the public's concern about crack was mounting. The Mayor, eager to respond in some positive way to the crack crisis, began to hear about the model project. He decided to use the model as the basis for his fight against crack and to replicate the project throughout the city! In this way, Coleman's initial efforts to facilitate the design of a model program paid off many times over.

PART FOUR

FUTURE DIRECTIONS FOR CHILD ADVOCATES

VII. UNRESOLVED ISSUES AND POSSIBLE NEW DIRECTIONS

Coleman is trying to move from being a respected group of experts and reformers whose demands politicians occasionally address to being a serious political force in the city. We hope some day the children's constituency will have the same stature as labor unions and the Chamber of Commerce. We are working toward an agenda that has the potential to alter dramatically the status of the city's children. While we have certainly made some progress, we have a long way to go. Issues we are currently struggling with, which could lead us into some important new directions, are listed below:

· Developing a meaningful partnership with the business community

So far, Coleman has not been able to get any major corporation to become politically active on children's issues. Businesses, while interested in children, limit their involvement to providing funding or resources for direct services. Discussions with members of the business community about changing the nature of that involvement have been extremely frustrating. In most cases, the representatives of the business community cannot understand that we are talking about political support, rather than financial support; and if they do, they consider their political involvement in issues, other than ones related to the business community, completely unrealistic. Yet, it is now accepted wisdom in the child advocacy field that the business community is a potential strong partner.

Some individuals in the business community have suggested that we tie children's issues more directly to the interests of the business community. In the coming year, a business tax increase enacted two years ago in the face of a budget crisis will sunset. The business community strongly opposed the tax in the first place. According to city budget analysts, allowing the tax to sunset will cause financial problems for the city. **Coleman has suggested that the business tax increase be used exclusively for programs that will prepare youth for employment.** In the coming months, we will be approaching members of the business community to solicit support for this proposal.

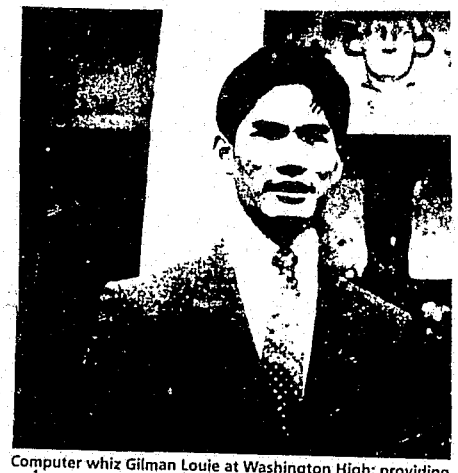
Crusading for Kids

Coleman Advocates got the city behind children; now it aims for business.

By Robin C. Evans

Margaret Brodkin, who as director of Coleman Advocates for Youth and Children has relentlessly commanded the agency's campaign for the creation of a separate city department of children's services, has a new strategy up her sleeve.

Children's Advocates has been fighting for reforms and expansion of children's services since 1974. A year



Computer whiz Gilman Louie at Washington High: providing a vital link between San Francisco youth and business.

From Chamber of Commerce magazine article describing Coleman's efforts to involve the business community in child advocacy.

· Issue vs. partisan politics: where to draw the line

As we continue to become a serious political force, elected officials want to know about more and more what we will do for them. As they come to realize that, as a charitable organization, we cannot support their candidacies,and that we may even criticize them in the future for actions they take, they become less eager to respond to our requests for their support. They tend to turn to the groups that can promise donations and workers for their campaigns and endorsements of their candidacies.

While we will use the political tools that are available to us - like candidate nights and report cards on key votes - we must rely on the general public support we can promise politicians if they become identified with our issues rather than direct support for their election. We can assist in bringing their involvement in children's issues to public attention by featuring them in newsletters, having them keynote conferences, and encouraging the press to cover their activities. This has gone a long way as local politicians have discovered that some of our issues can be very popular.

Other problems accompany this new political activity. We have to be careful not to be identified with the one or two politicians who most frequently spearhead our issues. We are also learning how not to become entangled in the petty jealousies and competition between politicians that seem to run rampant on the local level.

· Building a constituency and maintaining legitimacy: organizing vs advocacy

Community organizers define advocacy as one group speaking for another group. Organizing, which they consider far preferable, is defined as helping people speak for themselves. Since children cannot speak - at least politically - for themselves, efforts to help them are by necessity advocacy oriented. However, parents can speak for themselves and some of the most significant political change for children has come about as a result of parent movements. It is not surprising that parents often make the most compelling case for children and are the most independent, impassioned and forceful proponents of the cause.

Most child advocates would agree that a widespread parent movement would probably be the most powerful and effective way to fight for change for children, but organizing a grassroots parent movement has not been possible so far. The reasons for this are frequently cited. It is difficult to organize isolated, vulnerable people who preoccupied with survival. Child advocacy organizations have only a very small staff and organizing work is very staff intensive. Having had a great deal of success with advocacy, the children's movement has not put much effort into organizing parents.

At Coleman, we are beginning to rethink our position about organizing, particularly in light of the need to become a more effective political force. **We are trying to find some balance between the efficiency and technical skill of advocacy and the legitimacy and clout which results from organizing parents.**

This year, for instance, we are embarking on a completely new strategy in preparing our Children's Budget. We have identified about 80 organizations in the city, many of which are either parent groups or neighborhood associations (a number of them are the groups we are assisting in developing new program models), to be targeted by members of the Coleman Board of Directors. The goal is solicit the ideas and priorities of each group and have that be the basis for the Children's Budget. **The hope is that as the Children's Budget more and more reflects the results of an organizing and outreach process, the constituency of support and the number of those willing to advocate for it will expand.**

· Coalition Strategies vs. Independent Action

A constant struggle for Coleman is deciding when to act as an independent advocacy organization

case. For instance, we fought for an expansion of latchkey programs and successfully spearheaded an amendment to the city charter which mandated funding for about 35 programs. We did not stop our advocacy with the passage of the charter amendment. Instead, we successfully advocated for a community advisory committee on site selection, got appointed to the committee, and made sure that three-fourths of the sites selected were in the most needy neighborhoods.

· Finding innovative program proposals to help children and youth

Coleman struggles with whether we can propose the same array of children's programs year after year - programs that have demonstrated effectiveness, such as in home support services and community-based detention alternatives, but which have never been fully implemented. Must we continually modify the proposals we recommend in order to stay relevant to changing needs? The child advocacy movement has put forth a rather traditional agenda - nutrition, basic health care, income support, etc. - that we know works. **At the local level, however, we have the** opportunity to **experiment with new approaches and to hear constant feedback about the effectiveness of current approaches.** Coleman's program development activities also give us a forum in which to experiment and, as stated earlier, the local arena is where creativity can best be exercised.

So far, we have only veered slightly from traditional approaches with such proposals as a volunteer program to rehabilitate housing projects, a gay and lesbian youth community center, changing the mission of the city recreation department, and making peer counseling a core service of our mental health program.

However, the crack crisis and our expanded community outreach is changing our thinking. **We are witnessing a new grassroots service system evolve in high need areas in response to crack: neighborhood initiated volunteer multi-service youth programs.** In two instances, one a youth club run by two volunteer teachers and the other a tutoring, cultural, enrichment, recreation, and feeding program initiated by concerned parents, the programs have far surpassed traditional agencies in their ability to reach high risk children and youth. We are now considering to what extent we, as the city's child advocates, must put the institutionalization of these type of programs at the front of our agenda. **For instance, we are considering making a city-funded neighborhood service corps for children and youth the center-piece of the next Children's Budget. This would be a radical departure from our traditional menu of proposals.**

Group Tells Agnos How to Cut Budget And Give Kids More

Headline for newspaper article upon release of Coleman's Children's Budget.

· Recommending Reallocations of City Resources: Making Friends vs. Making Sense

As described in Section V, Coleman broke a traditional taboo of local politics when we came out with a budget proposal which talked about reallocations from other city functions to children's services. We were following the lead of the Children's Defense Fund, which annually compares military costs to children's services costs, implicitly recommending transfers of funds. This works fairly well on the federal level, which is less personal than the local level, and with the military, which is an easier target than local fire, police and park departments. However, the same principle applies.

Nothing we did with our children's budget captured more attention than the reallocation recommendations. And the recommendations certainly illustrated for everyone the meaning of making children a priority. Yet, the strategy opened a Pandora's Box and caused alarm, not

just among the unions that were directly threatened by the recommendations, but among other potential allies. **Suddenly, people saw us as not willing to play the traditional political games of getting support for agreeing to give support.** The teacher's union, for instance, normally a close ally, refused to endorse the children's budget because it had the potential to threaten jobs in the juvenile hall. Some neighborhood activists were wary of recommendations regarding reduced park maintenance, and withdrew active support.

We knew the liabilities of our strategy at the outset, and we are committed to continuing it for another year. However, we will continue to monitor closely the prices we pay. And we will very likely change our recommendations for reallocation to things less directly related to personnel. This year, for instance, we will look at the capital budget.

· Working out relationships with similarly oriented progressive groups

If our goal is to build our political clout, then we might do well to ally ourselves with similarly oriented public interest groups working on issues like AIDS, homelessness, protecting the city's neighborhoods, and the arts. On the other hand, as an organization we have been extremely reluctant to do this. While our Board of Directors supports the agendas of many of the groups listed above, and some of our agendas overlap, working in coalition with these groups (something we consider from time to time as a way to avoid competition and expand our power) is a time consuming effort and could dilute our ability to represent the needs of children. The Board of Directors carefully protects Coleman's having an agenda limited to children's issues.

Unfortunately, friendly co-existence with our colleagues in similar groups does not always happen. In fact, conflict is sometimes subtly encouraged by those in power. For instance, the Mayor has already told many of these groups that they should adopt Coleman's budget strategy in the coming year. This means that we could all be fighting over the small amount of discretionary money in the budget. Figuring out our relationship to our colleagues involved in related causes remains an unresolved issue.

In addition, we have occasional conflict with unions over some aspects of our reform agenda. San Francisco is a union town. Restructuring services and reallocating resources sometimes effects labor in what they perceive as a negative way. Being at odds with labor tends to put a progressive group in a politically untenable situation. As we expand our agenda, there is increasing tension with the Police Officers Association, service employees, and even librarians. While this has not yet become a major problem, it does keep us from joining forces with a potentially powerful group that might assist us with our agenda.

VIII. WHERE WE GO FROM HERE: A SUMMARY

· Strengthen and expand the child advocacy movement

The emerging children's movement is becoming one of the major social movements of our country. As the urgency of children's needs increases, child advocates must develop their skills, their organizations and their future leaders.

· Increase focus on local child advocacy

Coleman has demonstrated the potential of city-based child advocacy. Local advocacy offers the opportunity to impact a broad range of issues, to easily monitor implementation of policy, to foster creativity in serving children and to broaden the constituency base. It ensures that the child advocacy agenda will be creative and relevant and that the potential of local government will be realized. The need to focus on our local communities will increase as the problems of inner city children escalate.

· Expand the agenda of the child advocacy movement

Our agenda and the scope of our efforts must be increasingly comprehensive. A broad vision will allow us to make big gains on behalf of children. Single system efforts tend to be fragmented and ineffective in promoting lasting change.

· Utilize the budget process

The budget process offers a unique and powerful forum out of which concrete gains can be made. It can be used not only to expand services, but to effect policy and program reform. It offers child advocates a structured way to compete with other interests and demand accountability from policymakers.

· Focus on policies and programs that increase accessibility, early intervention, and neighborhood involvement

We cannot simply fight to preserve and expand the existing service delivery system. We must assure that the system is continually modified to meet the changing needs of neighborhoods and to keep us from being locked into the ever-escalating and expensive demand for acute care.

· Develop political skills

Child advocates must move forcefully and skillfully into the political arena, utilizing the tools that allow us to be taken seriously. This includes broadening our political constituency, raising children's issues in the context of elections, and using the political process as the forum for negotiating for change. If we are to have a major impact on the wellbeing of children, we must be a serious, competitive political force.

· Blend advocacy and organizing techniques

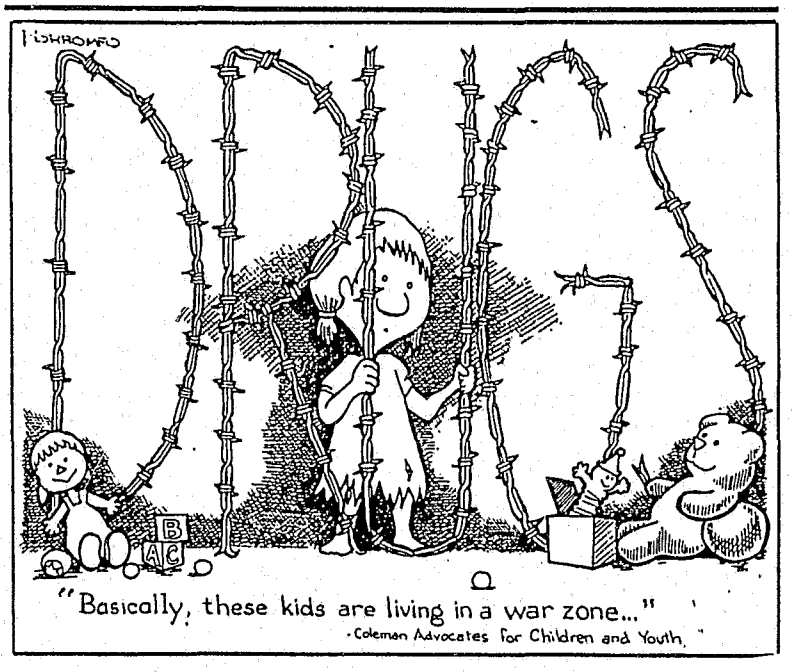
While not compromising the effective tools of advocacy, we can build on them by organizing parents and their supporters. This will not only allow us to broaden our constituency and expand our political clout, giving the children's movement more effective spokespeople and assuring that the child advocate's agenda is responsive to the felt needs of our constituents.

Utilize the media

The media is one of our most powerful tools and we must increase our skills in using it effectively. We must recognize that using the media often forces us to modify our strategy and at times puts us in a confrontational mode. This would not have occurred were it not for our need to get media coverage. We must adapt our strategies to deal with these realities because we cannot afford to ignore the power the media can have in changing public policy.

· Adapt the structure of child advocacy organizations to expand political clout

A core of paid staff, no matter how skillful, can only have a limited impact on the political process, particularly on the local level. Expanding the role of the Board of Directors, changing the criteria for selection of Board members, and developing a strong membership base are ways of making child advocacy organizations stronger public interest groups.



Cartoon in local paper with article on Coleman publication on impact of crack on children.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the following people for reveiwing this paper in draft form and offering helpful suggestions and comments: Peter Bull, Mike Wald, Trude Lash, Jim Lardie, Michael Reisch, and Eva Maas.

Claudia Lunstroth was invaluable in doing the layout and editing.

A number of my ideas in this paper are similar to ones presented by Stephen Bing and David Richart in their excellent book Fairness is a Kid's Game, which greatly stimulated my thinking about local child advocacy.

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Mission of Coleman Advocates for Children and Youth

We believe that every child has the right to a safe, stable home in which to grow; adequate shelter, food and medical care; and adequate opportunities for social, emotional, and intellectual growth. It should be our society's highest priority to ensure that these basic needs of children are met.

Many times, however, when the public agenda is planned, children's needs fall to the bottom of the list. Our experience has taught us that while the plight of an individual child may draw tremendous public sympathy, the needs of children as a group are seldom met.

Children do not vote; they cannot protest when their needs are overlooked. In a society where he who is able to speak loudest gets a share of the pie, who will speak up for children?

It is the mission of Coleman Advocates for Children and Youth to serve as the voice for children in San Francisco.

Using the tools of advocacy, Coleman will work on a broad range of children's issues, including child welfare, health, juvenile justice, and recreation. We will choose issues where:

- a significant number of the city's children will be affected (particularly those most in need).
- local solutions to problems are possible and can be accomplished within a reasonable time frame, and
- our efforts are needed most and will not duplicate the work of others.

Coleman's primary focus on every issue will be to change city policies and programs to more effectively respond to the needs of children. Our tasks will include:

- collecting and disseminating information on the state of children in San Francisco,
- focusing public attention on areas of needed change, through use of the media, public forums, and the publication of newsletters,
- developing creative, cost-effective proposals for improving services to children and their families,
- fostering interagency collaboration and coordination of services, and
- working to increase availability of local resources to children.

Coleman will remain independent from the systems it is working to change, financially and in terms of Board membership and ties to other organizations. The composition of the Coleman Board will reflect community representation.

The goal of Coleman Advocates for Children and Youth is to make San Francisco a city where ample resources are available to children and their families, where children's needs come first, and where families thrive.