



LEADING CHANGE FROM WITHIN

20 Years of Building Grassroots Power in South Los Angeles



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PREFACE

Growing up in South Los Angeles, I lived in a stable, working-class, multi-racial neighborhood. Decades later, while a number of secure neighborhoods still remain, many South Los Angeles communities have been devastated. Scores of manufacturing plant closures resulted in massive layoffs. This was accompanied by an upsurge of sweatshops and underground enterprises, offering only dead-end, below-minimum-wage jobs. The resulting loss of income and social upheaval in great part triggered the explosion in the sale and use of crack cocaine in South L.A. and on our inner-city streets across the country.¹

This disintegration became evident during the Nixon administration in the mid-1970s. While President Nixon instituted policies long-sought by civil rights movement activists and supporters (e.g., affirmative action, equal opportunity employment), he made “law and order” and “war on drugs,” with a racial edge, central components of his administration.² This strategy was fully implemented by Reagan in the 1980s.

The Reagan Era economic restructuring combined with budgetary cuts to social services, the privatization of programs, and punitive enforcement policies led to massive incarceration of the victims of poverty, unemployment, and addiction. This assault targeted the family and community networks. The *ethic of caring* for our communities’ children was dealt a heavy blow as an alarming number of women were trapped in this web of addiction and incarceration.³ Families were torn apart.⁴

Community Coalition: Creating an Alternative Vision

In 1990, in the midst of this economic and social turmoil, Community Coalition for Substance Abuse Prevention & Treatment arose with a vision that a community can address the problems of violence and addiction in a more humane manner through constructive alternatives to fear and punishment.

“We were determined to rely less on law enforcement and instead move toward addressing root causes of crime and violence in our community.”

The mission of this new community-based organization was to act as a continuation of preceding movements that had fought for social change and economic justice. We sought to learn from these movements not only in terms of their vision, but also in terms of their organizing strategies and solutions to problems. We developed innovative approaches to counter what plagued our neighborhoods in order to build power and change public policy. The founding team was determined to rely less on law enforcement to address the violence and addiction in our communities and move instead toward addressing the root causes of these ills. They understood that if people have options and opportunities available to them, and services which address their needs, then there is less need to apply punitive measures such as imprisonment.

The position papers in this retrospective document the history and organizing efforts of the last twenty years — honoring our campaigns, actions, and accomplishments and mapping out the challenging, but valuable, work ahead. In the previous set of position papers prepared ten years ago, entitled *The State of South L.A.*, we outlined the specific work of each of Community Coalition’s organizing committees and campaigns, many of which were just being established. This 2011 report documents our unique perspective and

approach on four key issues affecting South L.A. — public safety, education, foster care, and the social safety net. The report captures our overall impact on these issues through effective community organizing strategies driven by everyday people.

Looking Ahead

As much as we have accomplished in the last twenty years, there are still challenges ahead. Looming over us at the state and national levels is the greatest economic crisis since the Depression of the 1930s, accompanied by a well-funded right-wing political assault. The politicians in power seem entrenched in the notion that the way out of this crisis is to continue the tax cuts for the corporate elite while cutting social services and programs for the rest of us. Record rates of home foreclosures and unemployment remain part of our socioeconomic landscape.⁵ The national unemployment rate has remained at about 10% during the last two years. However, for Los Angeles City, that rate is even higher, at 11.7%,⁶ and, in Los Angeles County, the rate shoots up to 19.1% for African Americans and to 14.5% for Latinos.⁷

On the brighter side, in the last ten years, we have witnessed community organizers of color joining the ranks of political leadership at the state and national levels. We trust they will be the voice of reason during this time of the “Tea Party.” Nonetheless, the presence of our allies in political positions will not alone change the structures of inequality. On the contrary, we need and must continue our activist agenda. Truthfully, the issues we have faced in South Los Angeles are not solely rooted in the lack of Black or Brown representation in positions of power, but rather in the systemic failings and limitations of our political and economic institutions.

May we keep our “eyes on the prize” with the wisdom and knowledge gained in the last twenty years. It is people power that will produce the change we need. As a movement-oriented orga-

nization, Community Coalition maintains the goals and principles on which the organization was founded and continues to pressure our leaders to do what is best for our communities, including advocating for those most abandoned by politicians, such as undocumented immigrants and formerly incarcerated people.

We remain committed to the core principles of Community Coalition’s founding members: Black/Brown unity and the political education and leadership development of every stakeholder — from the grassroots membership to the staff and board of directors. We are grateful for the courage and commitment of those who have passed the torch to us. We expect nothing less of ourselves.

Seguimos en la lucha,

M. López-Garza
Community Coalition Board of Directors

¹ This cocaine epidemic can also be traced to the U.S.-backed “contra war” against Nicaragua.

² Alexander, Michelle (2010). *The New Jim Crow* (44-47). The New Press.

³ Collins, Patricia Hill (2000). “Black Feminist Epistemology,” in *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness and the Politics of Empowerment* (2nd ed). Routledge.

⁴ These policy changes cannot be placed solely at the feet of the Republicans. Democrats also played the “get tough on crime” card to garner support and votes.

⁵ Lenders filed a record 3.8 million foreclosures in 2010, an increase of 23% from 2008. (*HousingWire: Financial News for the Mortgage Market*, February 27, 2011).

⁶ Bureau of Labor Statistics, December 2010.

⁷ Economic Roundtable, “Unemployment & Underemployment,” August 2010.



[1992] Community Coalition founder Congresswoman Karen Bass.

INTRODUCTION

In the late 1980s, Community Coalition founder, Congresswoman Karen Bass, began noticing a new and strange phenomenon in the African-American community in South Los Angeles.

At the time, Bass worked as a physician's assistant in the emergency room at a county hospital in East Los Angeles and during her spare time was heavily involved in South Africa anti-apartheid work. She noticed that people around her — friends, family members, community leaders, and fellow activists of various economic backgrounds — were disappearing. Some of them went missing for years. When they finally turned up, many were shells of their former selves — living on the streets or incarcerated.

Bass eventually discovered that, in all of these cases, the culprit was crack cocaine. "I had never seen a drug take a hold of people in quite the same way," Bass said — even as a PA in the emergency room, where she regularly dealt with patients addicted to PCP.

She was desperate to understand what was happening in the community and to the people she loved, when she ran across a flyer for a conference in San Francisco called "Crack: The Death of a Race." It was this event, organized by the Rev. Cecil Williams, that shed light on the mysterious phenomenon Bass had been seeing around her.

Upon returning to Los Angeles, Bass gathered fellow activists and friends, civil rights leaders, and social service providers to replicate the San Francisco conference. In October 1990, Bass and her group held a conference entitled, "Crack: Crisis in the African-American Community," and Community Coalition for Substance Abuse Prevention and Treatment was born.

Roots of the Crack Crisis

Although drug epidemics were not new to U.S. society, crack cocaine in the 1980s and 1990s would change American life and cities in ways that few

"I had never seen a drug take a hold of people in quite the same way."

-Congresswoman Karen Bass
Community Coalition Founder

could have predicted. However, the crack epidemic did have some similarities with its predecessors.

Much like the rise in mass alcohol and tobacco consumption during the Great Depression, the crack epidemic followed a major economic crisis. In the 1960s, U.S. manufacturing companies began shutting their doors in cities across the country and fleeing to cheaper labor centers in the Third World. They took with them millions of well-paying, middle-class, unionized and skilled jobs.

South Los Angeles alone lost more than 70,000 jobs between 1978 and 1982. By 1989, more than 320 manufacturing plants had shut down, and over 124,000 more workers had lost their jobs.¹ The level of unemployment made economic recovery nearly impossible, as small businesses that once thrived in South L.A. were unable to survive. Abandoned factories and massive unemployment were the only things that remained in the once robust industrial engine of the city.

With no alternatives, people turned to the government for aid. But rather than being met with job training programs or social services, they confronted Reagan administration policies aimed at dismantling the public safety net.

Conditions were ripe for people to self-medicate. U.S. wars in Central America during the 1980s helped fuel the American drug consumption and vice versa. Cocaine, once a rich man's drug, was reproduced as crack and distributed on a mass level by making it as cheap as a pack of cigarettes. Usage of the drug took off.

¹ Oliver, M. L., Johnson, J. H., & Farrell Jr., W. C. (1997). Racial and Class Tensions, 1960's - 1990's. *Major Problems in California History* (pp. 474-489). Boston: Houghton Mifflin.

Industrial Flight

Pre-1970s Map of Southeast Los Angeles' Industrial Corridor



Reproduction of map drawn by Southern California Library for Social Studies and Research
Source: Shannon, We Built this City.

- | | | |
|-------------------|-----------------|-------------------|
| 1. U.S. Motors | 7. Farmer John | 13. Chrysler |
| 2. Weber Showcase | 8. Goodrich | 14. Lincoln |
| 3. Goodyear | 9. Owens Glass | 15. Revere Copper |
| 4. General Motors | 10. Bethlehem | 16. Ford |
| 5. Firestone | 11. U.S. Rubber | 17. Rockwell |
| 6. Alcoa | 12. U.S. Steel | |



[1955] Children in front of yard on 39th Place [near Western and Normandie]. SHADES OF L.A. ARCHIVES / Los Angeles Public Library.

In a short period of time, a new economy revolving around the drug trade had filled the tremendous void left by manufacturing industries.

The Destruction of a Community

Introduced in the midst of tremendous poverty, crack spread through South L.A. like a plague, wreaking havoc like no other drug had. It not only destroyed individual lives and families, but also ripped apart the very foundations of the community.

For the first time, a drug claimed women as addicts in large numbers, as well as men. This created entirely new social dynamics. Families were torn apart as women and men fell prey to addiction, leaving both parents unable to care for their children. As the criminalization of crack accelerated, more and more men and women were carted off to jail rather than being treated for their addiction, and the foster care rolls exploded. Not since slavery had there been such a significant and massive breakup of Black families.

In this period, street gangs grew in number and power as they capitalized on the new economy. They made drug dealing a huge business, propelling the epidemic to greater proportions and

“Crack transformed South L.A. The ties that held communities together disintegrated. People feared one another.”

bringing organized violence to a new level. As the business and profits of selling drugs grew, the gangs employed younger and younger recruits who needed to provide for their families.

Deadly gang battles over turf and drug profits were commonplace, and innocent bystanders were caught in the crossfire on a near-daily basis. Drive-by shootings, civilian use of AK-47s, and street shoot-outs all had their origins in the crack crisis.

The ties that had held communities together in good and bad times disintegrated. The intensely addictive nature of crack drove people to steal and sell anything for their next hit. Neighbors who once had looked after one another and their children became suspicious and feared one another. They put bars on their windows and doors,

barbed-wire fences around businesses and alarms on their cars. Street barricades became commonplace. People barricaded themselves in their homes and sometimes even slept in their bathtubs for fear of stray bullets from shootouts.

Along with their fears of white supremacist groups like the Ku Klux Klan and racist law enforcement officers, the elders in the community became increasingly fearful of their own neighbors and the neighborhood children whom they had helped raise, but no longer recognized now that they had gotten into drugs.

While South Los Angeles had always had its share of problems, it had been a relatively harmonious working-class community. It was completely transformed by the crack epidemic. The neat rows of houses with manicured lawns and landscapes, and children playing in the streets, gave way to prison-like conditions as people lived in fear of what was outside their doors.

The National Response

At the time, there were two main responses to the drug epidemic, reflecting the opposing poles of the political spectrum. Neither addressed the root of the problem.

The attitude from the right wing was to view drug abuse as a problem that needed to be treated as a crime rather than as a disease or a health issue that required medical treatment and rehabilitation programs. This type of response became increasingly dominant as cocaine moved from the circles of the white elite to communities of color in the form of crack.

In policies, this view emphasized personal and individual responsibility, such as Nancy Reagan's "Just Say No" campaign. For those who couldn't say "no," punishment and incarceration were the only answers.

On the other side of the political spectrum, the issue was virtually ignored among left-wing and progressive-minded individuals and organizations. Progressives generally held liberal attitudes about drugs, and community activists often viewed drug

use as a matter of personal choice rather than a political issue.

When they did discuss the problem, left-wing activists focused their criticism primarily on the economic and social inequalities that fostered the drug crisis, and repressive law enforcement policies. They ignored the sensitive issues of drug use, crime and neighborhood violence, and offered few solutions.

With no progressive response to the crime and violence plaguing inner cities, the issue was all but surrendered to the conservatives. "Tough on Crime" became the mantra of the right. Public resources were funneled into beefing up repressive law enforcement measures and building a massive prison industry, which eventually held the largest prison population in the world.

Crackdown – L.A. Style

For residents of South L.A., conditions were so dire that they readily gave up many of their civil liberties to law enforcement in hopes of gaining some

"Public resources were funneled into beefing up repressive law enforcement measures and building a massive prison industry."



[1986] Photo by: Jack Gaunt/ Copyright © 1996. Los Angeles Times. Reprinted with Permission.



[1985] Former Los Angeles Police Chief Daryl Gates / Los Angeles Public Library.

relief from the daily bouts of crime and violence stemming from the crack epidemic.

Los Angeles in the 1980s was primed for a massive and forceful crackdown. With Chief Daryl Gates as the head of the Los Angeles Police Department, the LAPD implemented Reagan's "War on Drugs" like no other city — violently and purposefully targeting people of color and poor people.

LAPD officers rode through South Los Angeles with paramilitary tanks and battering rams. Police raids and sweeps were nightly occurrences. Police errors were not uncommon. They often destroyed homes that had nothing to do with drugs during raids, and arrested innocent individuals during their massive sweeps. Over the weekends, police arrested so many people that they had to use the Los Angeles Coliseum as a booking station. The vast majority of the arrestees would be released without any charges.

Children, who were previously seen as vulnerable populations who needed societal support and protection, were criminalized. Dubbed the "Lost Gener-

"Armed with paramilitary tanks and battering rams, police raids and sweeps were nightly occurrences."

ation," young African-American and Latino males, in particular, were viewed as permanently damaged, hopeless and not worthy of rehabilitation.

Gates instituted a gang database to track criminals involved in the drug trade. It included names of gang members, but mostly comprised innocent Black and Latino youth. This database, based on the massive police sweeps, grossly inflated gang numbers. It eventually identified almost half of all Black men between the ages of 21 and 24 in Los Angeles County as gang members.²

Rather than alleviate the suffering in the community, police sometimes added to the violence and chaos. Unable to look to the police for protection, young residents feared them as much as the gangs and the drug dealers.

² Canner, E. (Director). (1993). *State of Emergency: Inside the Los Angeles Police Department* [Documentary]. USA: The Coalition Against Police Abuse.



[1991-1992] Early members of Community Coalition.

“The original goal was to shift local drug policy away from law enforcement toward a comprehensive approach.”

Creating an Alternative

With South L.A. in crisis, Karen Bass searched for a new approach to its problems after being inspired by the San Francisco conference. She recruited fellow activist, Sylvia Castillo, who was working as a pediatric nurse. It was clear to Bass that forging a strong African-American and Latino alliance would be essential to rebuilding the community.

She gathered other community leaders, public health professionals and social service providers who had been the first to advocate for alternative approaches to the drug crisis. The original goal was to shift the local drug policy agenda away from law enforcement toward a comprehensive

approach that included addressing social and economic issues at the root of the problem.

Original members of Community Coalition made another key decision early in its formation. In order to successfully challenge local drug policies and the City of Los Angeles’ approach to the drug crisis, they knew that they needed to organize community residents and involve them in creating change. They viewed community organizing and policy advocacy as a complement to the existing social service agencies that were treating individuals fighting substance abuse.

They understood that it was vital to involve members of the community, who were most affected by its problems, in developing solutions. For example, it was residents who helped launch the organization’s first major campaign to reduce liquor stores in South L.A. In a massive community survey conducted by Community Coalition in 1991, residents identified liquor stores, rather than crack houses, as the main culprits in fostering crime and violence in their neighborhoods.



[1995] Early members of South Central Youth Empowered Through Action.

“To successfully challenge local city policies and the approach to the drug crisis, community residents needed to be involved in creating change.”

Finally, it was important for Community Coalition to resist the notion of a throw away generation of youth. Young people have always played critical roles in major social movements, such as the civil rights movement. The Coalition sought to organize youth campaigns to address the issues that drove young people into the drug economy, and to build the next generation of leaders in South Los Angeles.

Today, Community Coalition continues to be guided by the organization’s founding principles of developing alternative approaches to crime, drugs and violence by working with community

members. Whether organizing relative caregivers to fight for more public support and resources so that families who have been torn apart can stay together, or working with social service providers to build a stronger safety net for our most vulnerable populations, our main goal is to empower community members to lead the movement for change in South Los Angeles.

Over the last twenty years, Community Coalition has involved tens of thousands of South L.A. residents, including youth and families, in creating safer neighborhoods, better schools, stronger families and a firmer safety net. In the process, it has made progress in turning despair into hope, problems into solutions and apathy into activism.

We believe that only by building a large grassroots movement will we truly be able to rebuild South Los Angeles.



[2010] Residents of Martin Luther King Park Neighborhood in South Los Angeles.

CREATING SAFE & HEALTHY COMMUNITIES

In the era following World War II (mid-1940s to mid-1970s), when manufacturing companies provided stable middle-class jobs to the community, South Los Angeles looked and felt much different than it does today. Studies and historic photos reveal a vibrant, working middle-class community made up of African-American, Mexican-American, Japanese-American and white residents who looked after their homes, their children and their neighbors.¹

The collapse of the manufacturing industry and the dismantling of the economic safety net during the 1970s and '80s transformed the community and spurred the rising crack epidemic. The drug epidemic itself fundamentally changed the nature of violence in urban cities across the country. The phenomenon of "Black on Black" crime is a fairly a new development. Prior to the crack epidemic, residents most feared violence from organized white terror groups, such as the KKK and White Citizens' Councils. But following the crack crisis, their fears were of fellow residents and children from their own neighborhood who had gotten caught up in the drug economy.

This significant shift, with people of color as both aggressors and victims, partly explains why progressives generally stayed clear of the issue of crime. Torn and unsure about how to respond to the crack crisis and the associated crime and

violence, they stayed silent. With no progressive response, the right dominated the public debate and enacted costly, repressive policies that fell short in making communities safer.

It was in this political context that Community Coalition opened its doors and began its two decades of work to make South L.A. safer. Our goal has been to increase public safety by creating more comprehensive alternative solutions to crime and violence in the community, without increasing incarceration or policing. Through this approach, we attack the social and environmental conditions that foster crime in order to prevent incidents of crime and violence.

By working with residents who help identify the problems and solutions to public safety issues, Community Coalition has created successful models for increasing public safety in South L.A.

Nuisance Abatement: A Crime Prevention Strategy

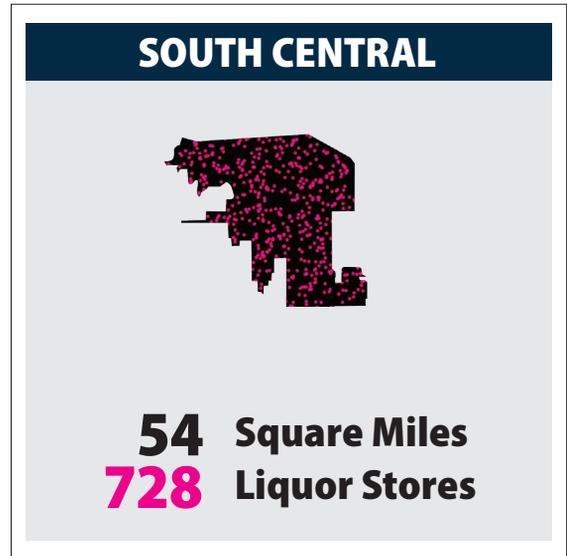
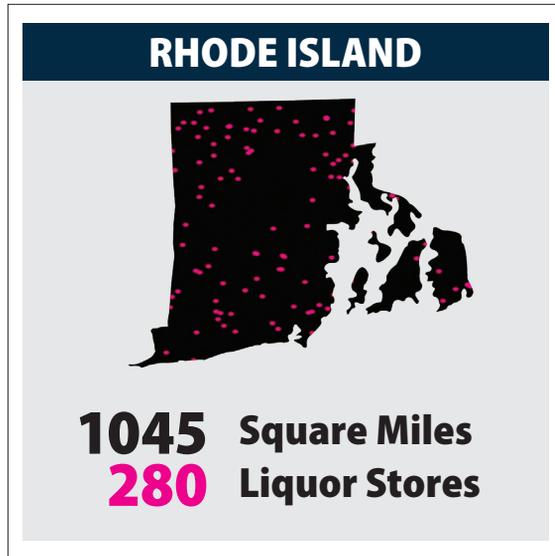
One of the first efforts Community Coalition launched as a young organization was an extensive needs assessment to identify the core concerns in the community. The needs assessment garnered more than 1,100 responses. To the surprise of the organization's leaders, residents identified liquor stores as the main issue in addressing the drug epidemic. This revelation served as the basis for the



Panoramic view of Vermont Avenue near Manchester showing shops and stores before the 1965 Watts Riots. *Vermont Avenue stores, Parts 1,2,&3. SHADES OF L.A. ARCHIVES / Los Angeles Public Library.*

¹ Lee, M. (1998). *Drowning in Alcohol: Retail Outlet Diversity, Economic Decline and Revitalization in South L.A.* The 1965 Watts Riots accelerated white flight and economic disinvestment.

South L.A. Drowning in Alcohol



Source: Johnson, C. (1992, July 1). A Fight to Keep Liquor Stores Shut. *San Francisco Chronicle*, pp. A-1, A-5.

Coalition's first major campaign and became a foundational aspect of its core public safety strategy.

Liquor stores were a long-standing problem in the area. By the early 1990s, South Los Angeles' overconcentration of alcohol outlets had swelled to more than 700. The neighborhood had more alcohol outlets than some thirteen other states.² In more affluent areas of the city, liquor stores were often well-maintained businesses that focused on liquor and complemented the offerings of nearby grocery stores, markets and restaurants. However, in South L.A., these stores served as low-quality replacements for the grocery stores that had abandoned the community after the manufacturing sector collapsed.

Furthermore, these businesses served as epicenters of crime in the community by fostering illegal activities such as drug trafficking, prostitution and loitering. Sometimes a liquor store worked in conjunction with a neighboring motel or recycling center to form a "crime cluster," creating larger problems for nearby residents.

The effect of liquor stores on community safety has been well documented. According to a Uni-

versity of Southern California study, "every new alcohol outlet produced 3.4 more violent crimes in a surrounding area than those without them."³ Armed with the knowledge of the negative effects of liquor stores on public safety, Community Coalition launched a campaign to reduce crime surrounding alcohol outlets in South L.A.

Organizers began to identify the city's nuisance abatement process as a tool for residents to hold the city and these problem businesses accountable. The community met with then Mayor Tom Bradley on April 28, 1992 when a day later the largest urban civil unrest in U.S. history erupted. Decades of frustration with being mistreated by police and with being locked out of social and economic opportunity reached a boiling point with the acquittal of four white LAPD officers who had been videotaped severely beating a Black man, Rodney King. The days of rioting that followed left fifty-three people dead, more than 2,000 injured and \$1 billion in property damaged.

One type of business was singled out by rioters in South Los Angeles — the liquor store. More than 200 liquor stores were destroyed during the unrest. Originally the city had planned to fast-track

² Johnson, C. (1992, July 1). A Fight to Keep Liquor Stores Shut. *San Francisco Chronicle*, pp. A-1, A-5.

³ Scribner, R. A., MacKinnon, D. P., & Dwyer, J. H. (1995). The Risk of Assaultive Violence and Alcohol Availability in Los Angeles County. *American Journal of Public Health*, 85(3), 335-340.



[1992] Community Coalition gathered more than 30,000 signatures supporting its campaign, "Rebuild South Central without Liquor Stores."

the rebuilding of all these liquor stores, against the wishes of the community. But Community Coalition launched "Rebuild South Central Without Liquor Stores," a multiyear campaign that mobilized tens of thousands of residents to testify at over 150 hearings, rallies and actions to prevent their re-opening. The campaign eventually resulted in the permanent closure of over 150 liquor stores and the conversion of forty into other businesses, such as laundromats, markets without alcohol, and nonprofit organizations.

The success of the campaign ultimately propelled the organization into the national spotlight for its willingness to take on the powerful alcohol industry and for its innovative use of the nuisance abatement strategy to advance public safety and address substance abuse. While the right criticized the campaign as anti-business and the left criticized the organization for being prohibitionist, organizational leaders and community residents knew that they were onto something important. In fact, studies documenting the impact of the liquor store closures revealed a 27% decrease in crime in the areas where those liquor stores once operated.⁴ In a short time, Community Coalition had found a direct and effective way to reduce

"Crime decreased by 27% in a community when a liquor store closed down."

crime in the community — without increasing incarceration or policing.

As resident leaders of Community Coalition mastered the intricacies of the city's nuisance abatement process over the years, they recognized the need for systemic policy change in order to make the process more efficient. For years, Los Angeles' business- and developer-friendly land use policies had made removing problematic businesses from a community extremely difficult.

Coalition members gained a significant victory in 2008, when the Los Angeles City Council passed the citywide Nuisance Abatement Ordinance. Coalition members had helped author the ordinance to shift some of the power to communities, and make it easier for them to shut down businesses that violated health and safety standards or broke the law.

⁴ Aboelata, M. J. (2004). *The Built Environment and Health: 11 Profiles of Neighborhood Transformation*. Oakland: Prevention Institute.



“Change takes people opening their mouths. Community Coalition creates situations for people to have a voice.”

-Bruce Patton
South L.A. resident

With the support of community residents, City Councilwoman Jan Perry pushed the ordinance, which placed stricter requirements on nuisance operators, through City Council. The new ordinance contains provisions that allow the city to take a number of enforcement measures, such as shutting off utilities or locking gates, against businesses that have violated the law, or health and safety standards.

Although nuisance abatement has served as a useful tactic for residents to hold local businesses accountable and to address incidents of crime and violence for nearly two decades, it is only an important step toward a longer-term solution. Community Coalition recognizes that real economic development that produces quality jobs with living wages, and contributes to the overall improvement of the quality of life, is needed to truly transform South L.A. into the safe and healthy community that its residents deserve.

A Model for Reducing Youth Violence

The emergence of the crack cocaine epidemic through the 1980s and 1990s spawned an explosion of street gangs, who became the de facto distributors of the new drug and the employers in its trafficking. The levels of gang violence pervaded not only in Los Angeles but cities across the country. News reports regularly featured stories about drive-by shootings in South Los Angeles.

A growing current of sentiment demonized youth, particularly Black and Brown males, as the primary purveyors of violence who needed severe punishment. Large cities like Los Angeles fully implemented criminalization models to deal with gang violence in much the same way as the crack cocaine epidemic. Ramped-up police forces and new gang databases targeted African-American and Latino youth in Los Angeles and other cities.

Draconian sentencing measures were passed at the federal, state and local levels that resulted in youth being tried as adults and sent away to prison. In prison, rather than learning skills to re-integrate into society as contributing citizens, many of these youth learned the skills to become better criminals, launching a cycle of

probation and re-incarceration that further disenfranchised them.

Starting in 2002, Community Coalition leaders began contemplating comprehensive ways to curb youth violence. Then-Executive Director Karen Bass said she became fixated on finding a plausible solution to youth homicides when she discovered that the times of day they most frequently occurred were almost entirely predictable. She searched for solutions with other leaders, who were also concerned with the issue, including civil rights attorney, Connie Rice, and radio journalist and activist, Dominique DiPrima.

“Summer of Success, a violence reduction program, led to zero homicides in one neighborhood in 2003.”

“Most youth homicides occurred between the hours of 9 p.m. and 3 a.m.,” Bass said. “We believed that if we knew what days and times they occurred, and we intervened during these times and provided kids with something else to do then we could prevent them from happening.”

In 2003, Community Coalition launched the Summer of Success (S.O.S.) program, a multi-pronged violence-reduction effort that brought late-night programs and recreational activities to the residents of Jim Gilliam Park in the insular Baldwin Village area of South Los Angeles. The neighborhood, better known as “The Jungles,” had recorded a string of youth homicides in the previous year. Jim Gilliam Park sat squarely in the middle of Baldwin Village and was the center of activity for a local gang. Although the park brimmed with recreational activity during the day, the gangs controlled the park at night, when the majority of violent incidents occurred. The Coalition chose to launch the program during the summer because that was when youth were most idle and the highest rates of violence occurred.

The Coalition recruited the newly-elected Councilman Martin Ludlow to leverage city resources for S.O.S. and a diverse array of partners, from local gang intervention organizations to the Conservation Corps, to roll out the program. S.O.S. featured a series of activities from midnight basketball and boxing to arts and crafts and dance classes throughout the summer.

The combination of community involvement, recreational programming and gang intervention proved to be a resounding success. By summer’s end, the Jim Gilliam Park neighborhood experienced a dramatic decline in violence — zero homicides and a 20% reduction in assaults.⁵

In 2007, civil-rights organization The Advancement Project released the Citywide Gang Activity Reduction Strategy Report, documenting the effectiveness of S.O.S., among other models, and called for a series of sweeping reforms in Los Angeles’ policy, law enforcement tactics and program activities to address gang violence.⁶ The report detailed more than one hundred recommended reforms (from the creation of a city department dedicated to gang prevention to job training) and highlighted Summer of Success as a model for cost-effective violence prevention.

Using the report as a framework for violence reduction, Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa formed the Gang Reduction and Youth Development Department to implement many of the reforms detailed in the report, including the establishment of the Summer Night Lights program, similar to the Summer of Success.

Maintaining the focus on late-night activities based at recreational parks, Summer Night Lights started in 2008 at eight parks throughout Los Angeles (including the original S.O.S. site, Jim Gilliam Park) and has led to remarkable declines in violence. Since the program’s inception, it has expanded to twenty-four parks city-wide, has resulted in a 40% reduction in violent crimes and an 86% reduction in homicides in surrounding neighborhoods, and has become a national model for gang violence reduction.⁷

⁵ Advancement Project. (2007). Citywide gang activity reduction strategy: Phase III report. Los Angeles. Online at www.advancproj.com.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ The Mayor of the City of Los Angeles. (n.d.). *The Mayor of the City of Los Angeles*. Retrieved January 15, 2011, from <http://mayor.lacity.org/Issues/GangReduction/SummerNightLights/index.htm>.



Community activism since 2009 has led to a dramatic transformation at Martin Luther King Park and the surrounding neighborhood in South L.A.

Building on Our Success

More recently, Community Coalition has sought to build upon our success in the area of public safety by using strategies that have been proven to reduce crime without increasing incarceration, by focusing our efforts on smaller neighborhoods.

The sheer size of South L.A. (sixty square miles) and its dense population of 880,000 residents limits the impact of any positive change or allocation of resources. Starting in 2007, the Coalition began exploring ways to implement our grassroots organizing model and our crime prevention strategies in targeted neighborhoods in order to bring transformative changes that residents could clearly see and feel. In 2008, Community Coalition launched Communities Rising, a new effort that combines our community organizing, nuisance abatement and youth violence prevention strategies into a comprehensive model aimed at reducing crime and violence in specific areas of South Los Angeles.

Less than two years later, we are already beginning to see qualitative improvements in safety in one neighborhood — the Martin Luther King Park area. Our work around King Park has generated key changes in the conditions there.

Prior to our initiatives in the area, Martin Luther King Jr. Park, located near the intersection of 39th Street and Western Avenue, just west of the University of Southern California, was the epicenter of violence in the community. The park had been virtually abandoned by local residents and sat under-utilized for nearly two decades.

In the past two years we have recruited a core of grassroots leaders who have engineered a dramatic transformation. King Park has now become a community space where families fill the park with activity day and night. New facilities have been constructed, including basketball and tennis courts. A recently renovated recreation center now features nearly twenty new programs and activities for youth and families.

King Park was also selected as a host site for Summer Night Lights in 2010, and the area subsequently saw a 100% decline in the homicide rate and a 50% reduction in aggravated assaults.⁸ In an era of severe budget cutbacks, King Park has benefited from an infusion of resources that has rendered King Park much safer, according to many residents.⁹

⁸ Council District 8 SNL 2010 Report (2010). Los Angeles: Office of Mayor Antonio R. Villaraigosa Neighborhood & Community Services Mark Ridley-Thomas Constituent Service Center.

⁹ Community Residents. October Community Action Meeting. Martin Luther King Park, 3916 S. Western Ave, Los Angeles, CA 90062, October 27, 2010.

Closing the Revolving Door

While Community Coalition has documented many successes in the area of public safety over the past two decades, we know that there is much still to be done to build a safe and healthy community. Public safety remains a defining issue for South L.A. residents.

Two significant ways to permanently alleviate the crime problem in South L.A. are to 1) change sentencing laws for nonviolent drug offenders and 2) close the prison “revolving door.”

The sentencing of drug offenders plays a significant role in high incarceration rates in the nation as well as in the state. With more than 250,000 people incarcerated, California has one of the largest prison populations in the country.¹⁰ More than 30% of those are incarcerated for a drug related violation.¹¹ These individuals are in need of comprehensive drug treatment and counseling, but instead are sent to prison due to sentencing laws that approach substance abuse as a criminal offense rather than a public health problem. These California prisons serve as warehouses for people with chronic substance abuse issues and factories that produce stronger criminals.

The problems continue after prison terms end. Every year, thousands of people are paroled or released from prison, and many return to their homes in South Los Angeles. They often lack the skills and resources (such as drug counseling and job training) needed to transition back into the community successfully and to lead productive lives. California parole and probation policies fuel high rates of recidivism — the state has the highest rate of recidivism in the country, with 70% of individuals returning to prison.¹²

A number of barriers prevent many ex-offenders from securing sustainable employment. Employers are hesitant to hire ex-offenders or individuals who lack the basic requirements to secure a job, such as a driver’s license. With few other options, the parolees often return to the underground economy in order to provide income for themselves and their families, and often wind up caught in the justice system once more. They are

caught in a “revolving door” between their communities and prison.¹³

This cycle has a devastating impact on individual families and on communities. Thousands of families are separated as children grow up without their fathers and mothers. The millions of dollars spent on public safety are wasted on repeatedly arresting, incarcerating and paroling these individuals rather than finding more effective and permanent solutions that would prevent or keep them out of the criminal justice system.

Comprehensive local and state re-entry policies should help individuals transition and keep them out of prison by 1) removing barriers to employment, housing and other necessities; 2) investing in comprehensive prevention and re-entry services in the community; and 3) implementing sensible probation and parole policy reforms for non-violent offenders.

These advances could significantly reduce recidivism and the cost of incarcerating and maintaining such a large prison population. At the same time, shutting the revolving door for thousands of individuals would have a permanent impact on crime, making communities safer.

We believe progressive organizations like Community Coalition must continue to push for alternative policies and strategies such as these to reduce the crime and violence that are increasing incarceration and policing. With twenty years of experience in using smart and effective strategies to confront violence in South Los Angeles, Community Coalition will continue to develop innovative, community-centered models that we know work and increase public safety.

¹⁰ Porter, N. D. (2010). *The State of Sentencing 2009: Developments in Policy and Practice*. Washington D.C.: The Sentencing Project.

¹¹ California’s Criminal Justice System: A Primer. (n.d.). *California Legislative Analyst’s Office*. Retrieved January 20, 2011, from http://www.lao.ca.gov/2007/cj_primer/cj_primer_013107.aspx.

¹² *Crime in California 2009*. (2009). Sacramento: California Department of Justice.

¹³ Lopez-Garza, M. and Lopez, B. (Producer & Director). (2010). *When Will the Punishment End?* [Film]. Los Angeles.



KEEPING FAMILIES TOGETHER

While all family members are harmed to one degree or another when a loved one suffers from addiction, three particular trends related to the crack epidemic of the 1980s destabilized and debilitated families in new ways, especially those in urban communities already devastated by deindustrialization, unemployment and poverty.

First, unlike other drug epidemics, crack equally claimed both men and women as addicts. The crack epidemic was the first time U.S. society witnessed mass-scale drug abuse by women equal to men. In fact, the drug treatment community was not even set up to handle female clients and patients. All-female drug treatment programs and facilities are a fairly new phenomenon of the last three decades. The large-scale addiction of women had an unprecedented impact on family and community life.

While addicted individuals from affluent communities were given drug treatment programs and services, poor individuals suffering from addiction were criminalized. Local and national officials, who failed to treat the drug crisis in communities like South L.A. as a public health epidemic, responded with violent racial profiling and massive incarceration. In the 1980s and 1990s, an enormous prison system developed. As Black and Brown men and women were caught up in addiction and incarceration, children were left behind and families were torn apart.

The final trend that contributed to the disintegration of families in this period was the rise of the modern child welfare system. While thousands of children ended up with relatives who stepped in as their adult family members struggled with a cycle of addiction and incarceration, many other children who had no relatives ended up in the foster care system.

“In the wake of the crack crisis and mass incarceration, foster care rolls exploded.”

In the wake of the escalating crack crisis and the expanding prison system, foster care rolls exploded in the late 1980s and 1990s. However, the system that was designed to provide a safety net for these thousands of vulnerable children ended up accelerating the break up of families and neighborhoods and often resulted in worse circumstances for children.

Foster Care: A Broken System

Locally, the Los Angeles County Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) was created in 1984 and began with a caseload of nearly 35,000.¹ The dominant policies of the time favored removing children from their homes rather than looking for opportunities to help families stay together.

By the late 1990s, the number of children removed from their homes and placed in other care peaked at 52,000.² This was not just a local phenomenon. The statewide rate of children in foster care grew to nearly 110,000 by the end of the decade and to over half a million children nationally.³

¹ Inter-Agency Council on Child Abuse and Neglect (1999). 1998 ICAN Data Sharing Report. Los Angeles.

² Leonard, J. (2007, October 20). California Foster Care News: I am suspicious of this “quick fix”—are the children really safe? *California Foster Care News*. Retrieved January 18, 2011, from <http://californiafostercarenews.blogspot.com/2007/11/i-am-suspicious-of-this-quick-fix-are.html>.

³ Needell, B., Webster, D., Armijo, M., Lee, S., Dawson, W., Magruder, J., Exel, M., Cucarro-Alamin, S., Putnam-Hornstein, E., Williams, D., Simon, V., Hamilton, D., Lou, C., Peng, C., Moore, M., Jacobs, L., & King, B. (2011). *Child Welfare Services Reports for California*. Retrieved January 18, 2011, from University of California at Berkeley Center for Social Services Research website. URL: http://cssr.berkeley.edu/ucb_childwelfare.

Families were suffering from the instability caused by the massive unemployment, addiction and incarceration in their communities. Rather than help stabilize these families with drug treatment services and job programs, the adults were incarcerated and their children taken away.

African-American and Latino children were disproportionately affected by this approach. While African-American children comprised 10% of the L.A. County population, they accounted for more than 40% of children removed from their homes.⁴ Over 80% of all children in foster care in Los Angeles were either African American or Latino.⁵

As the number of children removed from their homes swelled, the system was quickly over-

whelmed and could not sufficiently manage and monitor its caseloads. Sadly, a great number of these children placed in foster care were permanently scarred and damaged by their experience in the system which could not “guarantee the safety of the children” in their care, according to a blue ribbon task force at the time.⁶ By 2000, a grand jury charged with investigating a series of tragic deaths and abuse cases of children in foster care in Los Angeles declared the system “broken.”⁷

In some of the worst-case scenarios, children were re-traumatized by neglect and abuse or even killed in their foster care placements. Many others suffered from the lack of permanent stable homes and connections as they were shuttled from one foster care home to another.

All too often these foster care children, like their parents, would end up struggling with addiction, homelessness, poverty and the criminal justice system. In fact, nearly 70% of those in prison have been in foster care at some point.⁸

“The child welfare system, which was intended to help children and their families, often led to the further destabilization and break up families in South Los Angeles,” says Marqueece Harris-Dawson, President and CEO of Community Coalition. “Because the overwhelming majority of those in foster care were African American, Latino and poor and as their involvement in the foster care system led to negative outcomes such as high rates of incarceration, homelessness and long-term institutionalization, Community Coalition felt it was imperative to reform and find alternatives to the foster care system.”



“Unlike traditional foster parents — who plan, train and have access to many resources and support, relative caregivers don’t have that.”

- Amparo Remington
Relative caregiver

⁴ Ethnicity of LA County Foster Children (1999). Los Angeles Department of Children and Family Services.

⁵ Fact Sheet: Child Welfare Services—Fiscal Year 2001-2002. Data from *Child Welfare Services/Case Management System Datamart*. Prepared by: Information Technology Services Division—Statistics Section.

⁶ J. (2000, September 24). South LA Group Aims to Reform Foster Care. *Los Angeles Times*.

⁷ Liu, C. (2000, July 1). County Foster Care System ‘Broken,’ Grand Jury Reports, *Los Angeles Times*. Featured Articles From *The Los Angeles Times*. Retrieved February 18, 2011, from <http://articles.latimes.com/2000/jul/01/local/me-46664/2>.

⁸ No author. ‘Aged-out’ foster youth at terrible risk. (2009, September 2). *San Francisco Chronicle*, pp. A-18.



Community Coalition relative caregivers Johnny and Veronica Garay adopted five of Johnny's siblings following the death of his mother who was killed by a stray bullet.

“For the past decade, relatives have made up over 50% of those caring for children who have been removed from their homes by DCFS.”

Relative Caregivers: An Alternative

Over a decade ago, the Community Coalition identified relative caregivers as a unique and important alternative to the foster care system and as a strategy to stabilize families and communities in South Los Angeles. Relative caregivers are grandmothers, aunts, uncles and other adult family members who take primary responsibility for their young relatives when the children's parents are unable.

For the past decade, relatives have made up over 50% of those caring for children who have been removed from their homes by the Department of Children and Family Services. Thousands more children live with relatives in informal arrangements without any involvement or support from DCFS. Nationally, Generations United estimates that for every one child living with relatives as part of a formal arrangement through the child welfare

system, there are seven children living with relatives informally.⁹

These family members often take on their new responsibility unexpectedly and without planning. Often going unrecognized are the huge personal, emotional and financial sacrifices these individuals make to care for the children. For example, many of the relative caregivers are elderly grandparents who use their life savings or retirement funds to pay for the costs of providing basic necessities, education and health care for their young family members and are thus pushed into poverty.

The financial and emotional sacrifices by the relative caregivers are enormous, but the benefits to the children and the community are even greater. For example, according to one child welfare expert, children in kinship care are twice as likely to find permanent or long-term placement within three years as compared to children in foster care. These children are also less likely to end up homeless and unsupported in their early adult years or to enter the criminal justice system.¹⁰

Because of these outcomes, Community Coalition has viewed relative care as a preferable alternative to foster care and has worked to strengthen relative care in order to prevent children from entering the foster care system.

Organizing a New Voice

The advantages of relative care mentioned above are now widely agreed upon within the child welfare field. However just ten years ago, few knew of the advantages that relative care provided. The thousands of grandparents, aunts, uncles and other relatives who made up the biggest group of providers of parentless children in the state were a large and invisible population.

In 2000, the Coalition's Prevention Network, made up of service providers who focus on strengthening the safety net, conducted a major study and review of the needs and gaps in human services in South Los Angeles. One of the most important findings the study group revealed was the large unmet needs of individuals taking care of their relatives' children.

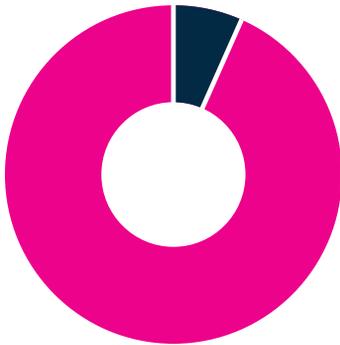
⁹ Census Bureau's 2009 American Community Survey. Grandfamilies Statistics . *Generations United* . Retrieved February 1, 2011, from <http://www2.gu.org/OURWORK/Grandfamilies/GrandfamiliesStatistics.aspx>

¹⁰ Children's Hospital of Philadelphia (2008, June 4). Kinship Care More Beneficial Than Foster Care, Study Finds. *ScienceDaily*. Retrieved January 15, 2011, from <http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2008/06/080602112351.htm>.

FAMILY CARE NOT FOSTER CARE CAMPAIGN

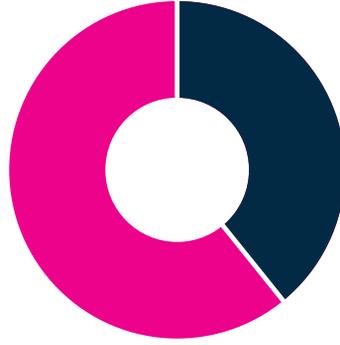
In 2000 Community Coalition launched the Family Care Not Foster Care Campaign to stop the fragmentation of South L.A. families and to challenge the inequity in the foster care system.

African Americans and Foster Care



African Americans were
10%
of L.A. County

- African Americans
- Rest of L.A. County Population



African Americans were
40%
of children in foster care.

- African-American Children in Foster Care
- Remainder of Foster Care Population

Source: Ethnicity of LA County Foster Children (1999). Los Angeles Department of Children and Family Services.

Service agencies reported being overwhelmed by individuals who came to their organizations looking for academic, mental wellness, medical and other services and support for their families. While the DCFS budget at the time topped over \$1 billion, the service agencies noted a lack of adequate resources and services for these relative caregivers.

The Prevention Network’s research uncovered that private, for-profit foster families agencies and group homes received the disproportionate majority of funding and resources for children in their care even though relative caregivers made up more than 50% of families caring for children removed from their homes.

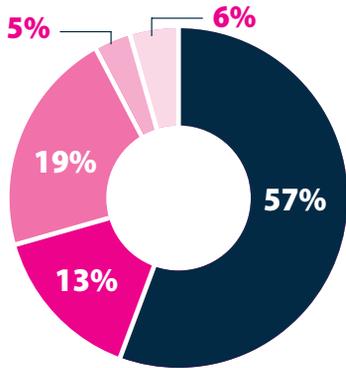
These findings painted a disturbing picture of a system that continuously fragmented and destabilized families in South L.A. by first removing children from their homes and placing them into a system unable to ensure their safety and then pushing families who stepped into care for these

vulnerable children into poverty by failing to provide an equitable and adequate share of resources.

In short, the providers in the Prevention Network had uncovered a major unaddressed need that affected a huge segment of South L.A. residents. “The Prevention Network exposed the institutional racism and inequity at the heart of the child welfare system’s policies and practices. The greatest portion of children entering the system were coming from areas such as South Los Angeles, but the overwhelming majority of resources were directed to private foster agencies,” says Community Coalition President, Marqueece Harris-Dawson.

For the service providers who participated in the study group, one of the most profound implications was the need for a vehicle for relative caregivers to advocate for the rights of kinship-care families and the needs of the children in their care. Unlike the private foster family agencies and group homes who had lobbyists and others representing

Children in Relative Care Shafted



Kids Removed From Their Homes Were Cared By:



Range of Payments for Foster Care:

Caregivers	Monthly Basic Rates
Relatives without Youakim*	\$0.00 per child
Relatives with Youakim	\$393 - \$573 per child
Licensed Foster Parents	\$393 - \$573 per child
Foster Family Agencies	\$1,362 - \$1,607 per child
Group Homes	\$1,314 - \$5,567 per child

*Foster care payments for relatives were called "Youakim" payments pursuant to a U.S. Supreme Court case that mandates states to pay relative caregivers at least what they pay licensed foster care parents.

Source: [1999] California Department of Social Foster Care Rate Setting Bureau

their interests with county and state governments and agencies, relative caregivers had no one advocating on their behalf, which was reflected in how public resources were distributed.

In 2000, Community Coalition launched the "Family Care, Not Foster Care" campaign to raise awareness of the issues facing kinship-care families, to begin shifting public resources to improve outcomes for the thousands of children and families in relative care and to organize South L.A. relative caregivers into a powerful, vocal constituency.

Through this campaign, service providers initiated an intense outreach drive to recruit their clients to participate in efforts to challenge DCFS policies and push for increased support of kinship services. They recruited hundreds of grandmothers, uncles, aunts and others who were trained on how to advocate for themselves and their children.

Over the past ten years since the original campaign, hundreds of relative caregivers have learned how to engage decision-makers, provide testimonies at hearings, speak to the media and recruit other relative caregivers into campaigns. They have become experts on the child welfare system and kinship issues locally and nationally. These individuals have become one of the first organized and politicized constituencies in the nation to advocate around kinship-care issues and policies.

In 2004, South L.A. relative caregivers helped Community Coalition along with Casey Family Programs, the nation's largest provider of private foster care, secure and establish a kinship-care support center in South Los Angeles, the first ever in the region to combine services with advocacy and community organizing.

In 2006, showing that relative caregivers can indeed impact public policy when organized, Community Coalition leaders worked with then Cali-



[2000] South L.A. relative caregivers launch Family Care Not Foster Care campaign.

for California Assemblymember, Karen Bass, to win \$82 million in the state budget to strengthen and improve foster care including \$36 million for kinship care. They organized kinship rallies in Sacramento and met with lawmakers to urge them to expand programs that support kinship-care families.

From Foster Care to Family Care

Over the course of various campaigns and a decade of organizing, Community Coalition's relative caregivers have had a profound and significant impact on how they are treated and perceived within the child welfare system.

Ten years ago, relative caregivers were viewed as reluctant second-best solution for where to place children the system decided needed to be removed from their homes. Even though kinship-care families made up more than 50% of those caring for children in out of home placement, and still do, they were often viewed by the general public and by child welfare agencies as an extension of the problem that the children faced in their homes.

DCFS often placed these children with relatives hesitantly and with very little services and support. Furthermore, rather than providing aid or assis-

tance to caregivers to create loving, stable homes for the children, DCFS often threatened punitive measures when the families experienced difficulty or hardship in meeting various DCFS regulations such as unrealistic home environment standards.

Despite the lack of adequate support, relative caregivers proved themselves to be much better providers than foster care agencies and group homes. Over time, child welfare representatives noted much more stability with children in kinship care, who experience far fewer placement changes than those in the care of strangers.

Child welfare experts also now recognize the long-term benefits for children in relative care. These children are much more likely to finish high school, go on to college, to stay off welfare and to avoid the criminal justice system. This change in perception is due in no small part to the education and organizing that relative caregivers and their supporters have done in Los Angeles and across the country.¹¹

The adjustment in perception has led to significant shifts in local DCFS policies. Now, relative caregivers are seen as the first priority option for placing

¹¹ Geen, R. (2004). The Evolution of Kinship Care: Policy and Practice. *Children, Families, and Foster Care*, 14(1), 131-144.



[2011] Community Coalition relative caregivers and their children.

children who are removed from their homes. For example, since L.A. County is a recipient of a state grant for Kinship Support Services Programs (KSSP), DCFS must give preferential consideration to relatives when placing youth in foster care.¹² The department recognizes the benefits to children, families and communities when kids can stay with their extended families and in their communities.

DCFS has also strengthened its support of relative caregivers in some small, but important, ways. Relative caregivers now complain much less about being treated punitively by DCFS. They are also more likely to receive an equal amount of financial support to care for children as foster care families.

For many years, an enormous imbalance existed between the per dollar payment that relatives and foster parents received. Relatives reported receiving \$0-\$300 per child while foster families received anywhere from \$500-\$1500 per child.¹³ Even though the federal court case, *Miller v. Youakim*, in 1979¹⁴ ruled that family members should be compensated the same amount as licensed foster parents for providing the same services, DCFS did not enforce the law for many years. But, through consistent public pressure by kinship-care families,

“Children in relative care experience fewer placements, and are more likely to graduate, attend college, and stay off welfare.”

relatives now receive much greater parity in the per-dollar support for their children as do foster care counterparts.

The work of relative caregivers has also helped strengthen the responsibility that DCFS must take for children they place with relatives. In 2000, California created KinGAP to allow families to become permanent guardians of their young relatives without having to adopt them, thus allowing continued access to needed services, such as a social worker. Prior to KinGAP, families were often

¹² Kinship Care. *CFS Home*. Retrieved February 24, 2011, from <http://www.childsworld.ca.gov/PG1351.htm>.

¹³ Terzian, R., & Shapell, N. (1992). *Mending Our Broken Children: Restructuring Foster Care in California*. Sacramento: Little Hoover Commission.

¹⁴ California Department of Social Services Foster Care Rate Setting Bureau.



[2010] Community Coalition relative caregiver Deann D'Antignac speaking in support of more mental health services for kinship families.

pressured or fast-tracked to adoption, which they often resisted because adoption ended access to services and made family reunification with birth parents impossible.

The advent of KinGAP allowed children to find stable permanent homes with their family members, preserved access to some of the same services as children in temporary foster care, and did not require the redrawing of their family trees.

However, many families still found KinGAP limiting, especially if they had children with special needs. Many families avoided KinGAP because it excluded clothing allowances and specialized rates for children with behavioral, developmental or other special needs. In 2006, relative caregivers success-

fully lobbied State Assembly Leader, Karen Bass, to include in her package of foster care reform a provision to allow KinGAP families to be eligible for support for specialized care for their children.

The Future of Foster Care

While these gains over the past ten years are important and have made a significant difference in the daily lives of thousands of kinship-care families, Community Coalition believes there needs to be a more systemic reform in the way that DCFS approaches kinship care.

Currently, DCFS operates under an antiquated system and needs to be restructured to reflect current realities and circumstances. Children placed with families constitute the greatest share of out-of-home placements. As already stated, kinship placements yield much better short- and long-term outcomes for children. However, the vast resources of the department are funneled to the vocal minority of private foster care providers. For example, Foster Family Agencies (FFA) and group homes still receive the bulk of resources — anywhere from \$158 to \$6,371 per child monthly.¹⁵

Because of how resources are unfairly allocated, private FFAs are able to build in a much greater system of support and services for children. Foster families can easily access services such as academic support, social workers, therapists and counseling at their FFA site or sometimes even bring them to their own homes.

In contrast, relatives often share how they struggle to access services for case management, tutoring, mental health or respite care for their children and themselves. They share countless stories of zig-zagging the city, going from one agency to another, to locate and access these services and the toll it takes on their physical and mental health.

If the department continues to rely, and even prioritize, placement with extended family members, then they must reallocate resources accordingly to those who make up the greatest portion of caregivers and who have proven to provide the best care and benefits to the children.

¹⁵ Reed, D. F., & Karpilow, K. (2009). *Understanding the Child Welfare: A Primer for Service Providers and Policy Makers System in California* (2 ed.). California Center for Research on Women and Families.

“If a high number of children entering the child welfare system are coming from South L.A., more resources should be dedicated on the front end to support the families before they fall into crisis.”

Furthermore, supportive services should be as easily and readily available to kinship-care families as they are to private foster families. Relative caregivers continue to cite a great need for neighborhood-based kinship services and programs, especially those that focus on mental wellness and prevention for children and the caregivers. Relative caregivers often identify the unaddressed mental health needs of their children as a significant source of concern and as a severe impediment to their children’s ability to reach their full potential. Many children, whether in relative care or foster care, suffer some level of stress or trauma due to the circumstances leading up to their removal from their homes. Some exhibit the emotional and other impacts immediately, others not until later.

Relatives have shared the struggles to get timely and adequate responses from their case managers or social workers when reporting behavioral and mental health concerns with their children. Many report receiving no responses or having to wait for months to receive an assessment for their kids. Sometimes, by the time the case worker has responded, the child’s behavior has worsened and has begun to affect and destabilize the entire family.

Relative caregivers have identified the creation of a robust network of neighborhood-based mental wellness services, specifically for kinship-care families, as an important priority. They say that these programs should be placed in areas with high density of kinship-care families and should provide concrete mental wellness referrals, services and programs, particularly geared toward prevention.

Finally, Community Coalition believes that DCFS must place greater emphasis and focus on creating and supporting prevention strategies and programs in high need areas. If high proportions of children who are entering the child welfare system are coming from areas such as South Los Angeles, more resources should be dedicated on the front end to support families in these communities before they fall into crisis and have to be brought into the system.

DCFS has a significant opportunity to invest more in prevention through its participation in the federal Title IV-E Waiver Demonstration Project, which it adopted in 2007. This project allowed DCFS to reduce its foster care rolls without losing its federal funding as long as the savings are reinvested in innovative strategies that prevent and reduce the number of children entering foster care.

However, the savings the department has reaped so far from this program have not translated into more support or programs for the very people responsible for the cost savings — relative caregivers — or into prevention programs to help keep children with their families and out of foster care in the first place.

Investing resources more heavily on the front end in prevention programs to support families will result in greater savings, fewer children in expensive private foster care, and in more stable families and communities.

Community Coalition believes it is time for DCFS to move from crisis intervention to prevention by changing the way it is structured, allocates resources, and supports families. The Coalition intends to continue to work to stabilize families and communities by working to reform the safety net for children, strengthening kinship care, and improving the capacity of relative caregivers to advocate for themselves and their children.



STRENGTHENING THE SOCIAL SAFETY NET

In the United States, a robust social safety net was for many years an essential part of the government's strategy for addressing the basic needs of its most vulnerable citizens.

Prior to the 1930s, needy Americans relied on private charitable or religious institutions for assistance. These organizations played important roles, but did not have the capacity to address the unprecedented scale of poverty and unemployment brought on by the Great Depression. To respond to this crisis and propelled by a strong labor movement, President Franklin D. Roosevelt spearheaded the passage of a slate of economic and social programs, including Social Security, collectively known as the "New Deal" between 1933 and 1936.

Continuing into the early 1970s, the U.S. government increasingly supported programs that aimed to shore up economic security and reduce social suffering. Pushed in large part by the demands of the civil rights movement, President Lyndon B. Johnson declared a "War on Poverty" and implemented more than sixty programs between 1965 and 1968 aimed at reducing the national poverty rate, which stood at 19%, and removing barriers to economic and social opportunity.¹

Medicaid, Medicare, Job Corps, the food stamp program and Head Start were just a few of the vital programs that were initiated in this era. By 1970, these programs had contributed to an almost 10% decrease in the number of people living below the poverty line. African-American unemployment fell by almost 42% and family income increased by 53% in the late 1960s.²

However, an escalating war in Vietnam and white backlash against civil rights gains forced reductions in Johnson's "Great Society" programs and ushered in a new era of conservative politics that

"Reagan's 'War on Drugs' turned a public health epidemic into an opportunity to move aggressively against communities of color."

sought to roll back the gains made by the poor, the working class, and people of color. By the 1980s, President Ronald Reagan had turned the war on poverty into a war on the poor.

An ideological shift, marked by deregulation and across-the-board tax cuts, permeated the federal government. The Reagan administration set out to dismantle the safety net, slashing social service programs and decreasing federal aid for job training and other vital resources, just as millions of families were feeling the effects of the collapse of the U.S. manufacturing sector spurred by Reagan's deregulation policies. As corporate capital fled overseas, government policies left people scrambling to make do on their own.

Impact on South Los Angeles

The economic and social policies of the Reagan era coupled with the one-two punch of deindustrialization and the crack cocaine epidemic devastated South Los Angeles. The scarcity of resources and opportunities combined with the powerful pull of crack resulted in a sharp increase in crime and violence. An underground economy centered around crack cocaine developed, filling the vacuum left by deindustrialization.

Rather than taking a public health approach and offering drug treatment, counseling and other services, the leadership in Los Angeles responded largely by criminalizing people of color. The Los

¹ DeNevas-Walt, C., Proctor, B., & Lee, C. H. (2006). *Income, Poverty, and Health Insurance Coverage in the United States: 2005*. Washington D.C.: U.S. Census Bureau.

² Luedtke, L. S. (1992). *Making America: The Society & Culture of the United States*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.



“We have to continue to build strong social safety nets in South L.A. because the capacity to serve and house the poor is being starved to death by budget cuts and elimination of crucial programs.”

-Lorraine Dillard
South L.A. social service provider

Angeles Police Department violently employed racist policies of discriminatory profiling and mass incarceration of Black and Brown residents. These policies reflected the national landscape, where Reagan’s “War on Drugs” turned a public health epidemic, crack cocaine addiction, into an opportunity to move aggressively against communities of color. Both local and national officials neglected the suffering of people beset by poverty and unemployment and whom they were meant to serve.

Organizing the Front Line

In South Los Angeles, local social service providers were the first to see the fallout of the crack cocaine epidemic as they struggled to meet the needs of clients who poured into their clinics and agencies seeking resources to deal with unemployment, poverty and addiction.

As a physician’s assistant, Community Coalition’s founding director, Congresswoman Karen Bass, recognized these providers as vital “first responders” to community crises. Bass viewed them as key partners in confronting the devastation ravaging the community and in building a larger social change movement.

“We believed that social service providers were critical agents in stabilizing vulnerable families and populations, who could get involved in broader community organizing efforts, including public policy and advocacy work, once stabilized,” Bass said.

From the beginning, Community Coalition purposefully organized service providers, who were the original members of the Coalition. A few years later, the Coalition formally launched the Prevention Network, an alliance of South L.A. social service agencies providing drug treatment, transitional housing, mental health, and youth and other services in the community. Working on the front lines of crises, providers could help identify emerging issues and trends and inform how public policies and resources should be distributed to address the needs of a community.

The Prevention Network

The Prevention Network has become an important

means to strategize and fight for public policies that not only promote prevention and increase resources for South Los Angeles, but also allocate them based on real need. Over the past twenty years the network has demonstrated tremendous value in organizing local social service providers to strengthen the safety net and to improve the quality of life for the community overall.

For example, social service providers in the Prevention Network identified key issues that drove decisive campaigns in Community Coalition's history, including "Rebuild South Central Without Liquor Stores," which resulted in the prevention of 150 liquor stores from being rebuilt in South L.A. after the 1992 civil unrest.

It also identified two other key emerging issues: foster care and re-entry. An extensive survey of service providers in 2000 showed that local agencies were overwhelmed by the needs of relative caregivers — grandmothers, aunts, uncles and others who care for their relatives' children — and ex-offenders making the transition from prison to civilian life.

In response, Community Coalition's Prevention Network members first launched the Family Care Not Foster Care Campaign in 2000 to address the needs of relative caregivers. A few years later came the Ex-Offender Taskforce (EOTF).

In the Family Care Not Foster Care campaign, the Prevention Network helped organize their clients—relative caregivers, who came into their agencies seeking physical and mental health services for the children under their care. These caregivers were unable to access the services because they were not recognized as foster care providers by the child welfare system. The campaign sought to shift public resources to extended families, who made up the largest constituents in the state caring for children no longer living with their biological parents, but who received far fewer resources than private foster care agencies and providers.

Over the past ten years, relative caregivers have won greater recognition by child welfare agencies as providing better, safer alternatives to placing

“Social service providers are the ‘first responders’ and are critical agents in stabilizing vulnerable families.”

children with strangers in foster care. Their work has also resulted in a more equitable distribution of resources so that relative caregivers now receive more financial support, on par with licensed foster care parents.

In 2004, the Coalition opened the Kinship in Action Center, the first of its kind in L.A. County, combining self-help, advocacy and community organizing. The center aims to help sustain the work originally launched by the Prevention Network by continuing to organize relative caregivers to advocate for public policies that help build strong and healthy families in South Los Angeles.

The EOTF comprised of dozens of organizations providing services to formerly incarcerated residents, has led critical strategies over the past decade to aid the large parolee population in South Los Angeles. The EOTF has convened several forums, town halls and resource fairs to educate ex-offenders about critical services and advocated for policies that focus funding on prevention and intervention rather than on punitive measures that perpetuate a vicious cycle of re-incarceration.

Today 25% of young black males ages 18 to 35 are either in prison, in jail, on probation or otherwise trapped in the criminal justice system in the United States. Nearly 8% of Latinos were incarcerated nationally in 2005 and 40% of all incarcerated individuals in the state of California are from Los Angeles County.³

Many are non-violent drug offenders. All are forever marked as ex-cons who face systematic discrimination in jobs, housing, and access to social services as a result. With so many barriers and so few resources to aid in their transition back into society, many find themselves re-incarcerated

³ The Sentencing Project Interactive Map. (n.d.). *The Sentencing Project Home*. Retrieved February 11, 2011, from <http://www.sentencingproject.org/map/>.



[2010] South L.A. service providers at Community Coalition's capacity building training.

for technical parole violations or re-offending as they struggle to make a life for themselves and their families.

In order to remove some of these barriers, Prevention Network members, who would later start the EOTF, teamed up with then-Assemblymember, Diane Watson in 1997, to author a bill removing the lifetime ban on public assistance for drug felons who underwent a drug treatment program. After being vetoed twice by Democratic Governor Gray Davis, it was finally signed in 2005 by Republican Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger.

The EOTF also has been applauded in the service sector by public officials and ex-offenders for publishing two editions of "A Place to Start: A Resource Guide for People Transitioning Out of Prison."⁴ The guide compiles vital resources including mental health, transitional housing and drug treatment programs, and emphasizes the importance of accessing services during the first forty-five days of parole.

However, even with these accomplishments, the EOTF recognizes that the issues and needs of ex-offenders remain largely unmet. The effort to better support the reintegration of recent parolees into communities such as South L.A. has been an uphill battle due to the political climate that for so long has focused on costly punitive sentencing for non-

criminal offenses rather than on investing in preventive strategies that would actually save money.

A comprehensive re-entry policy is needed to remove barriers and help individuals become productive members of their community. Short-sighted, knee-jerk approaches that continue to punish these individuals will keep recidivism rates high, fill more prisons to capacity, and overwhelm more service providers and communities such as South L.A. with the negative consequences of having large ex-offender populations who lack the essential services needed to successfully stay out of prison.

Investing in "Home-grown" Leadership

The unmet service needs of the formerly incarcerated and the experience of the EOTF illustrates why Community Coalition believes it is critical to build the capacity of local social service agencies.

However, for a long time there has been a gap between the needs of the people and the capacity of organizations to meet them. Investment in health and human services in South L.A. has lagged for decades, and the recent economic downturn pushed the system to the breaking point. The Prevention Network has taken action to prevent severe cuts in services, but vital service agencies in the area are feeling under stress, and the entire social safety net is in jeopardy.

⁴ Choi, J., Harris, J., & Wing, B. (Eds.) (2009). *A Place to Start: A Resource Guide for People Transitioning Out of Prison* (2 ed.). Los Angeles: Community Coalition.

“The Prevention Network has demonstrated tremendous value in organizing local service providers to strengthen the safety net and to improve the overall quality of life.”

Furthermore, several local organizations serving and or led by people of color have traditionally been and continue to be shut out of mainstream resources and funding streams. As a result, many organizations have disappeared or are in danger of closing their doors, including several important and long standing Black civil rights organizations that specifically address the needs of low-income residents.

In order to help strengthen the safety net for residents, Community Coalition has worked with small to medium nonprofits that focus on community organizing, advocacy or social services in South L.A. to strengthen their capacity. These organizations have strong leadership, primarily by people of color, and chiefly serve South Los Angeles residents, but have limited opportunity or capacity to invest in or develop their organization’s long-term sustainability. Over the years, Community Coalition has supported these organizations by facilitating capacity-building training and connecting them to foundations and public initiatives. Our efforts have resulted in the development of entirely new organizations, the stabilization of agencies on the brink of closure, and the qualitative growth and expansion of others.

In 2009, following discussions with Prevention Network members, Community Coalition decided to expand our capacity-building efforts to help stabilize and strengthen the local safety net and to invest in developing local, “home-grown” organizations, whose leadership, staffing and programs reflect the community they serve. The Coalition created a year-long capacity-building

program for small to medium nonprofit organizations based in South Los Angeles, with a specific, but not exclusive, focus on Black-led organizations that serve some of the community’s most vulnerable populations.

These organizations are particularly at risk in light of the current shift in public and private funding toward well-resourced “best practices” programs. The local organizations have struggled to pay the high cost required to qualify their programs as following “best practices” and as a result, South L.A. stands to lose its fair share of resources for people suffering from addiction and mental illness, as well as the formerly incarcerated, foster care youth, and kinship families.

Working with a cohort of local executive directors and board members, the capacity-building program aimed to improve the internal capacity of the organizations so they could sustain and even grow their vital programs. The workshops focused on areas of leadership, strategic planning, fundraising, financial management policies, and building a strong board of directors.

Overwhelmingly, participants reported feeling much better prepared to sustain and grow their organizations based on the information and support they received during the program. Several participants indicated that the capacity-building series was the first event of its kind where they received valuable information and honest feedback from people who they felt were truly invested in the growth and development of their organizations.

Community Coalition continues to view social service providers as essential partners in a creating a healthier, safer community. The Coalition looks to them to identify emerging service needs and to help direct policy initiatives and resource distribution according to the real human needs they see and address on a daily basis. In the next period, Community Coalition will remain steadfast in our commitment to investment in building the capacity of fellow organizations and local leaders in order to strengthen the social safety net, which we view as vital to building a stronger movement for social justice.



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[2009] SCYEA youth and staff.

BUILDING THE NEXT GENERATION OF LEADERS

The 1980s crack cocaine epidemic and the response by local law enforcement has had devastating lifelong impacts on South Los Angeles youth. The rise of the underground drug economy spurred the explosive growth of local gangs, which many youth viewed as a way to make money amidst rising unemployment and poverty. Others saw it as the only way to get protection in a community increasingly divided by a maze of gang territories and riddled with violence. Local politicians and law enforcement agencies responded to the growing drug trade and gang problem by enacting tougher law enforcement policies, including harsher punishment for juvenile offenders.

In addition to the response from local politicians and law enforcement agencies, media hype and frenzy contributed to an overall cultural shift that no longer viewed youth as vulnerable and in need of societal guidance and support, but as permanently damaged and dangerous. Giving up on an entire generation of young African-American and Latino youth, society demonized them and wrote them off as “The Lost Generation.”

Community Coalition leaders were unwilling to give up on the youth so easily and believed they needed alternatives to drugs and gangs. “We believed that we could harness the normal rebellion that happens in their youth and channel that energy into productive and creative opportunities to improve their lives and community,” said founder Congresswoman Karen Bass. “Youth had always been at the forefront of social movements for change, such as the civil rights movement, in our country. We as a community needed to create those opportunities for youth-led organizing and develop their leadership.”

In 1991, shortly after its founding, Community Coalition pioneered a youth project long before funding existed for such programs. Despite the pervasive doubt that youth could be organized and impact public policy, the Coalition launched its youth program, South Central Youth Empowered Through Action (SCYEA, pronounced “Say Yeah!”), now a nationally recognized model for youth organizing and leadership development.

The SCYEA Model

SCYEA’s mission is to build the next generation of community leaders. SCYEA develops youth to become leaders who can articulate the needs of South L.A. young people, shape and influence public policy, and build a strong youth movement.

SCYEA organizes students from the eight high schools in South L.A.: Crenshaw, Dorsey, Fremont, Jefferson, Jordan, Locke, Manual Arts, Washington Preparatory. The program trains them to recruit and involve their peers in identifying problems and solutions important to young people. SCYEA has established organizing committees that take



[2010] One hundred percent of SCYEA seniors graduate high school and over 75% go on to attend a four-year college.



“SCYEA has helped me see the leadership within me that I never knew I had.”

-Towayne Scott
SCYEA youth leader

the form of clubs on the campuses, with weekly lunchtime meetings; classroom presentations; and school activities designed to recruit, engage and train its members. Each week, leaders from each of the high school’s organizing committees come to Community Coalition for additional leadership and political development training.

While Community Coalition is not a direct service organization, the nature of organizing young people in South L.A. requires a strong social service component and system of referrals to local social service agencies. Community Coalition provides youth with the academic support and services needed to complete high school, perform well on key standardized tests (i.e., SAT), and attend college. It is part of our moral responsibility to ensure that youth are equally prepared to lead successful individual lives as they are to be student activists. Providing youth space for activism without offering services compromises the building of long-term, sustainable leadership in South Los Angeles.

Hands-on grassroots community organizing and leadership training, combined with both traditional and unconventional academic support has produced a formidable cohort of committed and talented youth year after year who often return to South L.A. and make notable contributions to their community and society in general. Every year, 100% of Coalition youth participants graduate and at least 75% go on to attend a four-year college or university.

Focus on Education

While there are many important youth issues ranging from reforming the juvenile justice system to reducing gang violence, over time SCYEA zeroed its energy on improving the poor quality of education in South Los Angeles. Viewing education as one of the central civil rights issues of the Twenty-first Century, the Coalition saw numerous opportunities for youth to organize their peers and improve their own lives by taking on educational justice issues.

Schools are instrumental institutions that shape youth lives. Where one is born, what schools one attends, and the quality of education one receives

are central factors to determining life opportunities and outcomes. Unfortunately, education, which was once viewed as a “great equalizer” that could help people overcome poverty and other barriers to opportunity, has significantly declined over the last several decades in inner cities like South Los Angeles.

Federal disinvestment from urban areas and the passage of California’s Proposition 13 in 1978, which severely undercut funding for public schools by limiting property tax increases, has massively contributed to the current crisis in education. The U.S. now ranks ninth in the world in the number of college graduates.¹ Out of the fifty states, California ranks forty-ninth in the percentage of adults who have a high school diploma.² In 2008, more than 30% of students did not graduate from high school in California.³

Schools in communities like South Los Angeles are more likely to experience heavy overcrowding, larger classroom sizes, fewer credentialed teachers and college counselors and less access to courses needed to be eligible for college — all resulting in higher rates of drop out and lower rates of college attendance.

For almost fifteen years, SCYEA youth have directly confronted the inequity in the public school system by organizing their peers in direct action campaigns to change public policy and to improve the quality of education in South Los Angeles. The Coalition believes that if we ensure that schools live up to the responsibility of preparing all our youth for successful futures, education can indeed be a “great equalizer” in our society.

Confronting Inequality

In 1997, after several years of fighting mostly defensive battles around controversial statewide ballot initiatives attacking youth and communities of color, SCYEA had built a strong organizing model and was ready to launch an offensive direct-action campaign.

Youth organizers and members surveyed over 1,500 South LA youth who revealed that their most pressing concern was the deteriorating conditions

“South L.A. schools were some of the oldest and most overcrowded schools in the district, but most were on the bottom of the list to receive Proposition BB repair funding.”



SCYEA youth exposed the deplorable conditions of their schools during the 1997 Proposition BB Campaign.

of their schools. Soon after, the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) won a major victory. After over twenty years of regular funding cuts since the passage of Proposition 13, voters passed the first bond measure that put desperately needed funding into its schools.

Voters approved Proposition Better Buildings (Prop. BB), which would allocate \$2.4 billion to repair, modernize and build new school facilities. However, SCYEA’s youth research team discovered that the majority of the new bond money was headed for schools in wealthier neighborhoods. While South L.A. schools were some of the oldest

¹ Lee Jr., John Michael, and Anita Rawls. (2010). *The College Completion Agenda 2010 Progress Report: Executive Summary*. Retrieved from <http://completionagenda.collegeboard.org>.

² Mortenson, Tom. (2009). *Report: California at the Edge of a Cliff*. Sacramento, CA: California Faculty Association. Retrieved from <http://www.calfac.org/research>.

³ Landsberg, Mitchell and Howard Blume. (2008, July 17). “1 in 4 quit high school in California,” *Los Angeles Times*. Retrieved from <http://articles.latimes.com/>.



[1997] SCYEA's Proposition BB Campaign won an additional \$153 million to fix school facilities in South L.A.

“SCYEA’s campaign exposed the lack of equality in distribution of public dollars.”

and most overcrowded schools in the district, all except for one were on the bottom of the list of schools to receive funding.

Outraged to discover that many suburban schools in LAUSD had plumbing, roofing, and even \$150,000 for pool filters on their Proposition BB repair contracts, while most South L.A. schools had little more than security grills on theirs, SCYEA teens armed themselves with disposable cameras to document and expose the hazardous and dilapidated conditions of their schools. Classes being held in cafeterias because of lack of adequate classroom space, broken bathrooms, and tiles falling from ceilings were just a few of the conditions that students reported.

Much to their surprise, youth met intense opposition, particularly from school administrators, who believed the students were trying to embarrass their schools rather than trying to improve them. Some administrators terminated SCYEA’s on-campus organizing committees and threatened

students with expulsion and denial of diplomas for participating in the campaign, forcing Community Coalition to temporarily halt some students’ activism and involve the American Civil Liberties Union of Southern California (ACLU-SC) to defend their rights.

Despite these challenges, youth leaders recruited hundreds of their peers, gave school tours to news reporters, organized huge protests, gave public testimonials and participated in meetings with key decision-makers. As a result of their public pressure campaign, the tax bond oversight committee reopened the repair contracts and allocated an additional \$153 million to address priority repairs in overcrowded schools in South L.A. and other parts of the city. An estimated 6,000 parents, students, teachers and community residents contributed in one way or another to the campaign.

The Proposition BB victory set several important precedents. The first was the power of youth organizing to impact public policy in real and significant ways. The second was putting the issue of equity front and center. Before SCYEA’s campaign, the dominant frame in the media and the public debate regarding the bond measure revolved around how to reduce waste when providing adequate air conditioning to schools in the suburban San Fernando Valley.

SCYEA's campaign exposed the lack of equity in the distribution of public dollars and how the district continued to perpetuate existing inequality in the education system by not prioritizing need when allocating funds. The Proposition BB victory helped set the frame for many more public bond battles to come.

A few years later, SCYEA leader Roxanna Godinez took that fight statewide when she helped sue the state of California for how it distributed a 1998 statewide voter-approved school bond measure⁴ aimed at building new schools to relieve overcrowding. For decades, suburban districts held a significant and unfair advantage over urban districts because public dollars were distributed not based on need, but on a first come, first served basis.

Godinez was a student at South L.A.'s Fremont High School, which housed over 4,000 students in a school designed for 1500. In 2001, Godinez with the help of the Advancement Project, successfully sued Governor Gray Davis and the State of California. As a result of the lawsuit, the state of California set aside nearly \$1 billion in new school construction funds for Los Angeles and other urban areas with significant levels of overcrowding. Ultimately, the lawsuit led to the construction of over sixty-six new schools in the Los Angeles Unified School District since 2001, becoming the largest public works project in the country.⁵

In the fall of 2011 and in 2012, two new schools will open to relieve overcrowding at Fremont. When they open, the high school will have come a long way from holding computer classes in the cafeteria — without computers!

Pipeline to Prison

After this campaign victory, Proposition BB provided benefits to students for years to come in South L.A., but what about the thousands of South L.A. youth who have dropped out and are no longer attending school?

Many have called public schools in the inner city "pipelines to prison." This stemmed from several decades of disinvestment in public schools that

began in the late 1970s and escalated during the 1980s under the Reagan Administration. By the late 1990s, schools in inner cities on the outside resembled jails more than places for learning. On the inside, the education given to students was so abysmal that it provided few opportunities beyond life in low-wage work or the underground economy. Instead of preparing youth for college or other meaningful employment, schools became warehouses for thousands of poor African-American and Latino youth.

Unable to see how their education contributed to their life prospects for college or career, many simply dropped out or "disappeared." SCYEA youth first began referring to "The Disappeared" in the late 1990s to describe students who stopped attending school and often could not be accounted for by the school district. These youth ended up unemployed, in low-wage work or the underground economy, and in prison.



[1999] Roxana Godinez, former SCYEA leader, at Fremont High School.

"We can make changes and we can organize and get millions of dollars for our communities and get students on the college track. It's not hopeless."

- Roxana Godinez
SCYEA alumna

⁴ Proposition 1A: Class Size Reduction Kindergarten-University Public Education Facilities Bond Act.

⁵ Advancement Project. (n.d). *Who We Are; What We Do*. Retrieved from <http://www.advancementprojectca.org>.



“SCYEA is helping youth with college and career readiness, something that our schools are failing to do.”

-Paola Lopez
SCYEA youth leader

In the late 1990s, SCYEA youth turned their focus to shedding a bright light on their thousands of peers who were among the disappeared and on how South L.A. schools acted as part of the pipeline to prison.

In some South L.A. schools, the disappearance rate was as high as 70%. At the time, however, LAUSD calculated their drop out rates by only counting students who officially contacted their schools to report that they were dropping out, thereby masking a serious problem.

In the Spring of 1999, Coalition youth leaders confronted this issue of “The Disappeared” head on after learning that more than 300 students out of approximately 500 seniors at Fremont High School were not on track to graduate, just two days before graduation. Their freshman class had originally started with 1500.

Digging deeper, SCYEA conducted a survey of over 1,000 students at Fremont and discovered important factors contributing to the low graduation and high disappearance rates. Large percentages of students were taking classes they had already taken and passed, including U.S.-born students fluent in English who were placed in English as a Second Language (ESL) classes. Almost a quarter of students revealed they did not have a teacher for some of their classes, and a whopping 81% reported never having talked to a college counselor.⁶

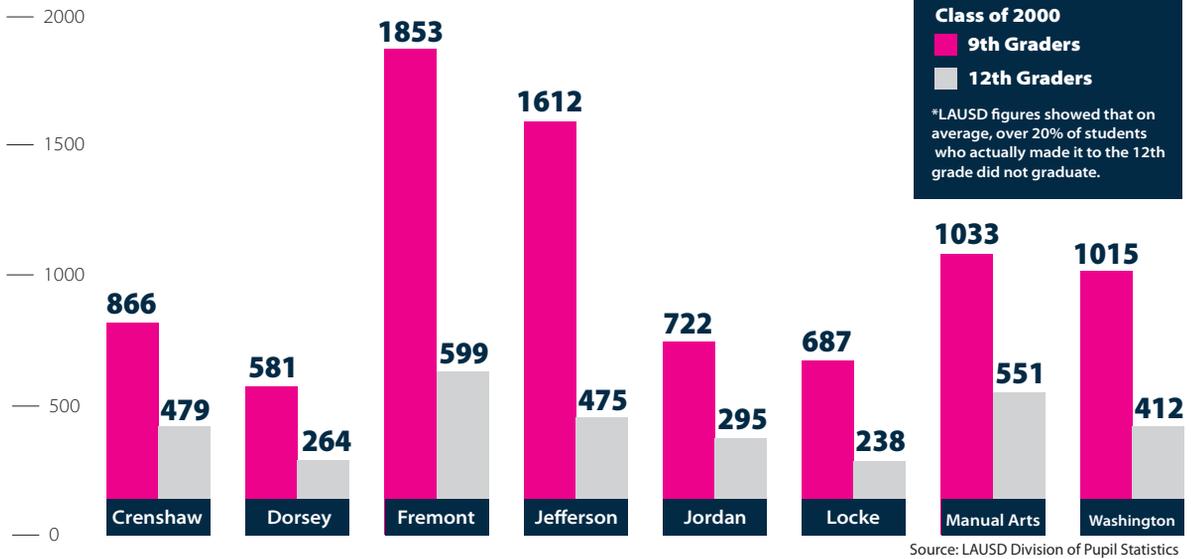
Soon after, SCYEA leaders would confirm that the conditions at Fremont were not unique to that campus. The problems at Fremont would become the stimulus for a citywide campaign to dramatically improve the quality of education in South L.A. by ensuring that ALL students received an equal education and access to college preparation.

Pipeline to College

After being alerted to the problems at Fremont, student organizers and SCYEA leaders in schools throughout South L.A. began asking their classmates the following question: “How many of you want to go to college?” Almost every last hand shot up. But when asked if they had heard of A-G, the classes required for college admission, the vast

⁶ Community Coalition. (1999, July 26-30). *Education Emergency at Fremont High School: Survey* administered by SCYEA during the 4th week of classes. Los Angeles, CA: Community Coalition.

South L.A. Disappearance Rate in 2000



“SCYEA youth were one of the first to publicly identify the shocking disappearance rate in South L.A. schools.”

majority of hands dropped. Research showed that only 8-16% of South L.A. students were graduating with their A-G requirements — which are the basic math, science, English and other classes needed to be eligible to attend University of California or California State University schools.⁷

This problem even existed among SCYEA members often at the top of their classes academically. When they sat down to complete their college applications, they discovered they were missing the basic classes required for college admission.

Despite following exactly what the adults at school had directed them to do, the vast majority of South L.A. students were not eligible for four-year colleges because no one had bothered to tell them that the graduation requirements were

NOT the same as the college admission standards. While more than 90% of courses offered at suburban schools such as San Marino High School qualified as A-G courses, fewer than 65% of such courses were offered in South L.A. schools such as Dorsey High.⁸ By not offering college prep courses to students in South L.A., the message was clear: standards and expectations for South L.A. youth were lower — they were not expected to attend college.

This was an important finding because it contradicted the popular belief that low-income African-American and Latino students had low college attendance rates because they were lazy, lacked interest or simply did not have the grades. SCYEA’s organizing and research revealed that it was low standards and lack of access to basic college prep classes that were the biggest barriers to attending college.

⁷ UCLA/IDEA. (2004). *Report on the Education Gap in Los Angeles County: Where Does Your District Fall? Assembly District 47, 48, and 52*. Los Angeles, CA: UCLA Institute for Democracy, Education, and Access. Retrieved from <http://idea.gseis.ucla.edu/publications/documents/report-on-the-education-gap-in-los-angeles-county>.

⁸ UCLA/IDEA. (2004). *Report on the Education Gap in Los Angeles County: Where Does Your District Fall? Assembly District 47 and 49*. Los Angeles, CA: UCLA Institute for Democracy, Education, and Access. Retrieved from <http://idea.gseis.ucla.edu/publications/documents/report-on-the-education-gap-in-los-angeles-county>.



[2005] Community Coalition parents and students helped win a major victory when the LAUSD School Board passed a resolution mandating A-G curriculum be taught in all LAUSD schools.

In 2000, Community Coalition's youth leaders launched the Equal Access to College Prep Campaign — a five-year effort to make A-G the default curriculum throughout the district so that ALL students had equal access to college.

SCYEA organized dozens of protests and demonstrations and engaged elected officials and decision-makers, such as school board members, city councilmembers and even billionaire philanthropists to win their support. In the early phases of the campaign, the youth won incremental victories toward their goal, such as more college counselors for South L.A. schools, and more information on colleges, rather than military recruitment, at their career centers.

But the youth's campaign was met with much skepticism. Many, including public officials, had already determined that some youth were not meant for college. As one state legislator put it, if all students went to college, "who would fix my car." Other well-meaning liberals patronized the students. They believed it was unfair to raise the standards because students would fail. Even many traditional progressive allies did not see access to these classes as a fundamental civil rights issue.

Community Coalition soon realized that a broader coalition was needed to win a district-wide policy

for A-G. In 2004, Community Coalition and the Alliance For Better Communities organized and launched Communities for Educational Equity (CEE), a citywide coalition of community groups, education advocates and other stakeholders, who could help win support for equal access to A-G classes for all.

Finally, in June of 2005, the campaign achieved a landmark victory. Over 1,000 students, parents and community members carrying signs that read, "Let me choose my future," and "College Access for ALL," marched outside the school district headquarters. As a result of years of hard organizing work by students, parents and supporters, the LAUSD Board of Education passed the historic A-G Resolution, mandating that A-G college preparatory curriculum be made available in all schools in LAUSD starting in 2008.

By pushing the district to adopt the A-G Resolution, and to match the high school curriculum to college admission standards, the students succeeded in overturning a decades-old model of education rooted in an industrial economy, made preparing students for college the minimum standard that all schools had to meet, and made college opportunity a basic civil right for all youth in Los Angeles.



[2009] Students, parents, and labor and community leaders celebrate the launch of the Architecture, Construction and Engineering Academy at Locke High School that prepares students for college and careers.

This unprecedented victory sparked similar student and parent demands in other cities. Since the 2005 decision, A-G resolutions have been passed in school districts throughout California.

Pipeline to Living-Wage Careers

Before the A-G campaign, South L.A. schools failed to provide many of the basic classes students needed to attend college, but they offered a plethora of mindless vocational courses. The vocational programs of the past that had provided excellent training, skills, and job opportunities in industrial manufacturing after graduation had long since been gutted. These classes now acted as free periods that merely warehoused youth until their next class.

In the midst of the A-G campaign, allies from the building trade unions made the Coalition aware of several important opportunities to improve vocational education, without reducing academic standards, and thus providing youth another pipeline out of poverty and the underground economy.

For many years, painters, ironworkers, electricians and others in the building trades unions held high-wage careers with health benefits and pensions. These jobs provided a stable middle class life to millions of U.S. workers. While workers of color were historically shut out of these jobs

due to racism by the trade unions, more recently African-American and Latino workers were unable to access these jobs because they did not have the basic math and science skills required to pass the entrance test for these jobs. This confirmed SC-YEA's belief that A-G was not just college prep but that "A-G is life prep," which became an important slogan in the campaign.

In 2007, the Coalition organized the Youth and Workforce Development Alliance, made up of community, labor and business groups to establish career-based academies in South L.A. high schools that would prepare youth for both college and high wage careers in Twenty-first century industries, such as construction, engineering, health care and technology. The Coalition viewed the effort to strengthen career education programs in South L.A. schools as an opportunity to improve education overall and to build on our model of creating alternative pipelines for students out of poverty and prison.

The YWDA consisted of leaders from labor unions, foundations, business organizations, youth and community groups and education advocates. Members envisioned that the career academies would be based on A-G curriculum, use innovative hands-on learning practices and technology to promote student achievement and engagement,



[2010] Community Coalition youth and parents present reform recommendations to Superintendent Ramon Cortines on how to turn around Fremont High School.

and would be directly linked to industry internships and apprenticeships upon graduation. In essence, students would be prepared to enter either a four-year college or to pursue high-wage post-secondary education career.

In 2008, after nearly a year of failing to get the program implemented at a traditional LAUSD school due to resistant school administrators, the alliance won a commitment from administrators at Locke High School, which is run by Green Dot Public Schools, a charter company. The alliance achieved its vision when Locke opened the Architecture, Construction and Engineering (ACE) Academy in the fall of 2009.

While only in its second year, the ACE Academy already has shown moderate improvements in student academic performance. In 2013, ACE will graduate its first class of seniors ready for college and a career.

The Current Stakes

There is a long history of students and parents across South L.A. fighting to improve the quality of education. It has not been an easy struggle and some families end up fighting for the limited available spots in magnet or charter pro-

grams, busing their children to other parts of the city, or just moving to another neighborhood or city altogether.

South Los Angeles has one of the highest percentages of charter school enrollment in the region. Some charters have heroically and successfully come to the rescue of students and their desperate parents, who for so long lacked quality public school options. Community Coalition understands, however, that charter schools cannot address the root causes of inequity in public education and is not an answer for all children in LAUSD, the body that still retains the responsibility of educating the largest number of children in the region. LAUSD for all intents and purposes cannot choose whom it educates. It has the noble calling and the moral obligation to educate all of our children, no matter the zip code in which they are born.

When LAUSD Superintendent, Ramon Cortines, made a surprising announcement that LAUSD would implement one of the four reform models authorized by federal legislation to turnaround low-performing schools at Fremont High School, Community Coalition immediately recognized this as an important opportunity.

“Fremont represents an enormous opportunity to create a quality, high-performing public school and to demonstrate a community-driven reform model within the Los Angeles Unified School District.”

Fremont, which has suffered from decades of high dropout rates and low graduation and college going rates, has long been identified in the community as a “drop out factory.” It has been classified as a “Program Improvement School” for over a decade.

There are multiple reform efforts underway to improve low performing schools like Fremont throughout the district. However, all have been turned over to outside administrators or private charter operators. With the first in-district reform effort underway, Fremont represents an enormous opportunity to create a quality, high-performing public school and to demonstrate a community-driven reform model within the Los Angeles Unified School District.

Community Coalition believes the most important element in any school improvement model is community engagement. Students and parents must not only help identify the problems and solutions to improving their schools, but they are also essential to sustaining any real and long-term reform efforts.

Since late 2009, the Coalition has been working with parents and students to press for reforms that take the whole child into consideration, in addition to building a school with a rigorous curriculum that supports college and career. Some of the recommendations by parents and students include such things as on-site health care, mental wellness programs, arts and recreational activities, and intensive wrap-around services for at-risk individuals. All these proposals focus on strengthening a child’s ability to learn, while at the same time

preventing and cutting the disappearance rate. Some type of reform is currently happening or will happen in the near future at all South L.A. schools. The implementation of these community-driven reforms at Fremont has the potential to serve as a successful turnaround model for a public school whose success is a result of genuine and consistent student and parent involvement.

In conclusion, the first twenty years of SCYEA’s work contributed to significantly changing the education landscape. SCYEA made the issue of equity part of the public debate on education; injected academic rigor, the college-going rate and high expectations a part of the discussion on student achievement; and forced education officials to recognize the true drop out rate in South L.A. by acknowledging what SCYEA leaders first coined as “The Disappeared.”

Throughout these campaigns, one of SCYEA’s biggest challenges has been LAUSD and its pervasive culture of low expectations and complacency. During the Proposition BB campaign, youth confronted administrators who did not want to “rock the boat” and who actively threatened student activists. During the A-G campaign, SCYEA youth encountered a district that accepted that the majority of kids were not expected to go to college and who refused to acknowledge “The Disappeared.” School administrators actively ignored or opposed the Coalition’s work.

While working with the second-largest school district in the nation can still present its challenges, the current LAUSD administration is now more likely to acknowledge the problems like “The Disappeared” and attempt to meet the expectation of tracking every student on an A-G curriculum. In the changing landscape over the past twenty years, there has never been a greater opportunity to implement what students and parents in Los Angeles have been demanding for years. The next phase of Community Coalition youth work must focus on making an operational model of a community-driven school: one that has high expectations, reclaims its disappeared, and actively engages students and parents.



[2010] Community Coalition member Karla Acosta and her children.

MOVING FORWARD

On April 29, 1992, decades of frustration reached a boiling point. Beat down by grinding poverty and joblessness, pervasive drugs and crime, rampant police abuse and the lack of access to basic goods and services, South L.A. erupted in rage following the acquittal of four officers videotaped beating of Rodney King.

Multiple days of protesting, looting and burning left fifty-three people dead and 2,000 injured. While it was a dark moment, the civil unrest also acted as a renewed call to action for many — ranging from the private to the public sector, from community activists to elected officials — to address the gross racial and economic inequities that led to the largest civil unrest in U.S. history.

While Community Coalition began in 1990 before the civil unrest, we also viewed the moment as an important opportunity to revitalize South Los Angeles. Our vision for South L.A. is a qualitative transformation of the social and economic conditions that foster addiction, crime, and violence.

We envision nothing short of creating a safe, healthy and vibrant community in which anyone would desire to live. In our vision of South Los Angeles, residents would have safe streets and peaceful neighborhoods filled with bustling parks, recreational centers, and other public spaces to reclaim the sense of community that once existed.

Rather than claiming the title of the lowest performing schools in Los Angeles, our schools would be the envy of the city and nation. No longer acting as pipelines to poverty and prison, our schools would produce the next generation of thinkers, innovators, and leaders. Our schools would prepare young people not only for college and career, but also for leadership in their communities and beyond.

“We envision nothing short of creating a safe, healthy and vibrant community in which anyone would desire to live.”

With improved public safety and quality schools, South L.A. would finally attract the business and development the community needs to economically thrive. Opportunities for gainful, meaningful employment that can support families would return. Retailers and small businesses that once dotted the entire Vermont corridor would once again provide goods and services for local residents, who would support the local economy by keeping their hard-earned money in South Los Angeles.

Rather than being a community in crisis struggling to address widespread poverty and crime, South L.A. would have a robust safety net geared toward preventing individuals from ever falling into crisis. An adequate and well-resourced network of community services and agencies would help youth stay out of trouble, build strong and healthy families and assist individuals returning from prison to reintegrate into the legal economy and their community.

We believe these changes ARE possible. But, we also understand that in order to achieve the large scale transformation we seek, we must alter the way our government, social, and economic institutions operate and prioritize the needs of ordinary people. Community Coalition firmly believes that the type of fundamental qualitative change that is required in South L.A. is only possible by building a long-term sustainable movement that involves thousands of people working together toward a common vision. One of our overall aims as an organization is to help build that movement.

Movement-building Strategies

Community Coalition utilizes the following key strategies that are growing a powerful, large-scale social movement for change.

Community Organizing

Community Coalition employs community organizing as our central strategy. For twenty years, we have been involving youth, residents and families who are most affected by the challenges facing South L.A. to identify solutions and take action to reverse the devastation caused by the crack epidemic, economic decline, and disinvestment from our communities

Historically, decision-makers in the private and public sector have made decisions about South L.A. with little or no community input and par-



[2006] Community Coalition members.

ticipation. In order to alter the way policies and decisions are made, the balance of power needs to be shifted in the direction of people residing in the area. Community organizing is the main strategy to shift that balance of power.

We carry out time-limited direct action campaigns to win implementation of specific policy goals and build power. In addition to winning concrete and tangible victories that improve people's lives, the purpose of our action campaigns is to recruit, involve and provide leadership training and experi-

ence for community residents to sustain and grow their activism beyond a specific campaign.

Forging Black and Brown Unity

As a primarily African-American and Latino community, the Coalition consciously works to forge Black and Brown unity in South Los Angeles. We purposefully recruit both African Americans and Latinos in every issue area and develop and frame campaigns in ways that involve individuals across racial lines. Community Coalition has found working with residents to identify issues, develop solutions, and win campaigns together to be one of the most powerful ways of fostering unity.

Another key to forging unity and addressing existing tensions between the African-American and Latino community is to understand the role and relationship of racism and the power structure in forming division and inequality in our society. As a progressive organization, we view the economic system based on profit primarily responsible for racial and economic injustice.

We believe that adequate resources currently exist to meet everyone's basic human needs, but the problem is how resources are distributed. Currently, priority is given to supporting the interests of wealthy individuals and corporations rather than to meeting people's basic rights to health care, education, employment, safety and housing. This understanding of our economic system drives our analysis of the problem, identification of issues, the implementation of political education, and development of community-based solutions.

Building Homegrown Leadership

Community Coalition's brand of community organizing involves intensive leadership development to build authentic grassroots leadership. One of the primary ways in which we develop leaders is through our time-limited, direct-action campaigns for material improvements that community members can see, hear, and touch. We involve members in developing and conducting surveys and other types of social action research to assess community issues and interests. We study the political landscape, analyze the power equation, discuss campaign strategies, and de-

“Qualitative change in South L.A. is only possible by building a long-term sustainable movement that involves thousands of people working together toward a common vision.”

velop community speakers and organizers out of ordinary citizens.

Political education is an integral part of the work from beginning to end. It is done in a way to develop consensus around the deeper root causes of some of the problems we face. The objective is to get individuals to look at the broader issues and understand the problems as structural, rather than a problem of bad or weak individuals. If we are successful, members will sustain their involvement beyond one campaign and become lifelong activists.

Civic Engagement

Community Coalition believes that building large-scale electoral power is essential to sustaining long-term transformation. We view achieving electoral power as a significant way to get elected officials to listen to communities’ voices and win material improvements. Voting is one of the primary ways for residents to exercise democracy in the United States and one of the few formal, and one of the most powerful, mechanisms accessible to the average citizen to have input in how government conducts business.

Community Coalition uses election cycles to build a permanent apparatus to facilitate and strengthen civic engagement. During elections, Community Coalition implements “Get out the Vote” campaigns targeting constituencies we organize. We convene meetings to hold community discussions on key ballot initiatives. Our electoral strategy allows us to engage the largest number of individuals in exercising their civil rights and civic duties.

In between elections, we combine voter engagement campaigns, political education, and leadership development trainings to increase residents’ knowledge and electoral turnout and activism beyond election seasons. The Coalition has organized leadership school to increase grassroots community participation in a variety of civic leadership positions. Our civic leadership school trains “homegrown” leaders who can assume roles in public decision-making bodies to break the long history of communities like South Los Angeles being represented by disconnected individuals primarily motivated by personal gain.

Contributing to a Mass Social Movement

We believe that in addition to our local campaigns, we must contribute to building a mass social movement in order to bring about the type of pressure needed to reverse national policy and address the systems that create and foster inequalities. Coalition members and staff look to the ten-year period before the civil rights movement for lessons, examples, and models of the type of organizing needed to build such a movement.

The Coalition is building a progressive institution capable of contributing trained leaders to help build the next large movement for social and economic justice. Building an institution capable of recruiting, involving, training, and sustaining a large number of people is a method of preparing South L.A. to participate in a future mass movement for social change.

Furthermore, we believe one organization alone cannot build a mass social movement — which is why we work in alliance with progressive forces including community-based organizations representing communities of all races and origins, civil rights organizations, social justice advocates, and labor unions.

Conclusion

Nineteen years ago, when Community Coalition launched its “Rebuild South Central Without Liquor Stores” campaign, it had to stage protests just to be heard. The establishment labeled the campaign as anti-business, prohibitionist, and anti-Asian. Today, the strategy of reducing the con-



[2008] Community Coalition members.

“We have grown our ability to engage thousands of ordinary people, to shift the public debate and to influence decision-makers.”

centration of liquor stores to decrease substance abuse and related crime and violence is a national public health model.

More importantly, the idea that one’s physical environment has a significant impact on social and economic conditions and the outcome of one’s life is increasingly growing in acceptance. More comprehensive and preventative approaches that address environmental conditions are now more likely to be embraced and funded.

Fifteen years ago, when the organization’s youth launched the Proposition BB campaign, they staged protests, demonstrations and a media campaign for nearly a year just to get a meeting with the oversight committee and to get the

repair contracts re-opened to redirect some of the funds to fix South L.A. schools. There was little to no public debate around the issue of equity, nor public questioning as to why some of the oldest, most overcrowded schools in the poorest neighborhoods were getting the least amount of bond money. Our voices often fell on deaf ears and even more often faced active opposition from LAUSD administrators, including school principals.

Today, some form of needs-based data is included in the formulas for distributing school funds, and former student activists and allies sympathetic to community concerns hold seats on the school board. Now, decision-makers often contact the Coalition when seeking community input.

In 2000, when South L.A. social services providers gathered to discuss the most pressing needs they saw in human services delivery, they identified services for relative caregivers who were caring for their children as a huge unmet need. Focused on back-end solutions, the foster care system was throwing most public resources at mega for-profit foster family agencies and group homes, while

relative caregivers who cared for the majority of children in out-of-home placement received next to nothing. Invisible and unorganized, caregivers received little resources and even less respect among child welfare officials and experts.

As a result of the Coalition campaigns, relative caregivers have won millions of dollars in resources to support kinship-care families and achieved greater parity with individual foster care families when it comes to per dollar support. Equally as important, relative caregivers have earned greater respect and recognition by many within the child welfare field. While just ten years ago, the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) reluctantly placed children removed from their homes with their extended relatives, today the department recognizes the tremendous short- and long-term benefits to children when they stay with family and in their communities.

Our strategies for social change centered on community organizing, multiracial unity, leadership development, civic engagement, and coalition building have allowed Community Coalition to win campaigns and to shift the landscape over the past twenty years. We celebrate these successes and recognize that none of this is possible without the active involvement and leadership of everyday youth, parents and residents taking action to improve our community.

The Coalition also looks forward to the next twenty years. We believe there is much work to be done and change yet to be accomplished. Now more than ever, we see tremendous new opportunities to shift power to ordinary people and to impact the ever-changing political landscape.

We have grown our ability to engage thousands of ordinary people, to shift the public debate and to influence decision-makers. We must build on our experience and seize new opportunities on the local, state and federal levels to work with progressive elected officials who share our values and to bring community voices to the table to shape governing agendas and the development of community-driven solutions.

At the same time, the Coalition recognizes the continued need to build and maintain strong organized grassroots power. We draw inspiration and lessons from the civil rights movement, where masses of average citizens responded to the call to become freedom fighters. These individuals kicked open the doors, which had been shut since the founding of the country, to allow masses of people and generations to come to take advantage of new opportunities to advance our society.

Community Coalition was built on the legacy of the civil rights movement. We will continue to draw on that wisdom and those lessons to move South Los Angeles forward in the next twenty years.

Our Mission

To help transform the social and economic conditions in South L.A. that foster addiction, crime, violence and poverty by building a community institution that involves thousands in creating, influencing and changing public policy.



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