

Minutes for the Service and Social Change Call for Organizers 3/16/2011

Participants:

William Blackerby, Shane Bernando, Kellie Magnuson, Hank Hughes, Hilary Bravo, Jamie Kirshner, Naomi Ross, Mana Tahaie, Yvette Ramirez Ammerman, Martiza Guzman, Isabel Arrollo, Shea Levin, Kimberlee Archie, Elizabeth Barahona, Sandra Trujillo, Erica Chase, Khyati Desai, Erin Garner-Ford, Denise K. Quintyne, Susie Cambria, Greg Bloom

(Sorry we missed some of you!)

Speakers/staff:

(Building Movement Project) Frances Kunreuther, Trish Tchume, Cheyenna Weber

(The Family Partnership, Minneapolis, MN) Maria Zavala, Amina Saleh

(Queens Community House) Anna Dioguardi

Minutes

- Trish Tchume gave introduction and framing about why this work is important and the need for a network.
 - BMP has been around for a long time helping to seed idea of integrating service and social change
 - We're building a network of service providers and their supporters who are doing social change work – for us that means any type of work within the organization that goes beyond direct services, is aimed at systemic change and incorporates the voice and leadership of clients we serve
 - The network will be providing a number of ways for groups to connect with each other; exchange knowledge, etc. but something that we hear time and again from groups that we work with is this need for connection with other groups that are doing this sort of work and particularly – other individuals who are holding the same roles within organizations
 - Hence these cohort calls – we're starting with this call for organizers, civic engagement directors, advocates (we learned from your RSVPs that you all identify yourselves by a wide variety of names); we'll be checking in with you after the call to find out ways to continue the connections; and we'll also be hosting future calls for folks who fall into other cohorts such as executive directors of service organizations doing social change work, development directors, board members, etc. So stay tuned for that.
- Round of introductions of Participants on the call
- **Speaker Introductions:**

Anna

ESL program allows people to become involved in civic engagement. Queens Community House, which was founded in settlement house tradition and runs a number of programs that serve a diverse cross-section of population. She works at Jackson Heights that focuses predominately in immigrant community of that neighborhood and primarily adult education program focusing on ESL, including 500 students a day in a program that is open from 9am until the evening. Anna does the organizing and advocacy piece of adult education and supports a community action group that is open to ESL students and folks in the neighborhood who are interested in issues effecting their community locally and issues effecting

immigrants around NYC and the country. The teachers are great about integrating the advocacy and issues that are important issues into their ESL work. Also run trainings and informational sessions every month about immigration or other issues that are relevant, do some work on civic engagement like explaining differences between municipalities/states and about how taxes work, etc. Smaller group has gone through different stages—self-identified leaders who are part of the action group and want to take more time and energy to get involved in issues. Leadership development and organizing training with them includes meeting once or twice a month to help build a core leadership within their group. 2 different kinds of action groups, one day and one evening, and the evening group actually elects reps who come to a meeting once or twice a month and take the information back to their classes which means more of a train the trainers model. If there are specific rallies or actions we'll help mobilize people to attend. There is another a little piece within Queens Community House, a building movement committee that I sit on and so do other staff members as well, and this group is constantly doing rethinking and figuring out who we are but we're the internal organizing arm for the House and a clearinghouse for organizing across programs. Our main focus right now is budget advocacy but we're trying to transform that work away from please don't cut our programs to become focused on how budget is balanced on backs of low income and immigrant communities and how vulnerable are most targeted. Tax issues are more prevalent now and doing a lot of internal education with staff around tax money goes, how it is gathered, and creating more tools for people who are creating advocacy programs. We're also working on our external messaging and mobilization.

Maria

Maria organizes the Latino community around housing issues, crime prevention issues, preventing youth involvement in gangs, Immigration issues and she is a leadership development trainer for the Family Partnership in Minneapolis.

Amina

Focus on train the trainers, we don't do direct service instead we walk with them, so we work with them on their problem and those others who are being affected by the issue...we walk with them to make a change in their life. Work with communities in building community leadership for racial and economic justice, working with low income people, immigrants, and people of color to train them and develop their skills. Specific programs include culture specific trainings, including one in Somali, a number of these folks are becoming citizens and were being taught about civic engagement so they can be empowered about the lives, especially focusing on immigration. Try to protect folks and empower them, used to work with Alliance for Family and Children, have a big annual conference where they do a Peace, Power, and Unity conference—similar to Freedom School—where they have a lot of workshops and trainings for people to learn how to be involved in civil society.

Questions from the RSVP responses:

- *How do you facilitate learning about social justice and current issues that are impacting communities – both with clients and with staff?*
 - **Anna** says they are always trying to do education and provide a lot of background but simultaneously doing external outreach that includes building alliances, taking issues to policymakers, or doing outreach in the community. They try to deepen people's understandings of the issue. Example: Legislation has been introduced that would allow non-legal folks to vote and we're now trying to have conversations with the group to decide where they stand where they want to go. We're also using a similar model internally

around taxes and the economy because we're focused on fighting budget cuts and people need more information to speak to issue in an in depth way.

- *Share an example of a direct action or ongoing social change work that has gotten clients and community members really engaged.*
 - **Maria** says we are introducing a bill about human trafficking to change the law in MN so that instead of those who are involved in prostitution being prosecuted they have to be considered victims instead of being put in jail they are cared for. Any person under the age of 18 doesn't have the full capacity to consent or take legal action and be responsible, so when they are involved in prostitution at that early age it is because someone else is getting them involved. Instead of prosecuting them the Safe Harbor bill will help change that so they are protected. The Family Partnership began conversations within several programs, especially PRIDE (which focuses on helping women out of prostitution), and we've seen an increase in human and sex trafficking, especially with immigrant youth. We work on the issues the community decides and this is one the community brought to us because it is connected to immigration, but we do lots of things especially around housing. It's about what the community wants to do and is ready to do. Mainly the people who bring in human trafficking issues is mostly by people who have legal documents and can be supporting immigrants without documentation or are afraid and we need their support. We are supporting them but they are supporting us to make the case. Jeff Bauer, our director, just gave a talk about how our laws are contradictory saying they make these people criminals and also victims, so we want to make this a safe space for kids to be protected. We tell people we work with them but not for them. We teach them how to do it but not necessarily do it for them.

Questions from the call participants:

- (Sandra Trujillo asked): *What challenges did you face (if you did) to get all the service delivery staff to change their orientation from serving "clients" to organizing? If staff didn't accept the change were they retrained or eventually replaced?*
 - **Anna** says: the process is ongoing and the integration started more than 10 years. I can speak to what I've heard and what my experiences have been. One of the things we still do is create time and space for the big picture—once a year we have a staff development day (we have between 250-300 staff across our programs) and that day all programs shut down and everyone comes to a communal gathering. Those days have been used to introduce more of the social justice issues and questions and the role of service providers and advocacy work. That's been done through workshops and conversations, and I understand that was harder at first than more recent years. It isn't that every front line provider has become an organizer, instead the front line workers who have a caseworker/client relationship what we ask is that they look at bigger questions of injustice and think about issues affecting others in the community. There were some people who felt uncomfortable with this vision for the agency and self-selected themselves out but there wasn't a mass exodus and the integration has been very gradual. We have a Building Movement committee that has helped us make it clearer and it has been integrated into our hiring process and it's hard to get everyone involved and some are more into it or not but it's a continuing process and at least everyone is cognizant of the bigger picture.
 - **Maria** says: We train other people to do the work so there are more of us. It is a lot of resistance sometimes and if you a community organizer you have a lot of meetings in your own house (is this what she said?) and we have to think about what we are trying to accomplish. It was sometimes hard for people to accept they had to move from community

building to community organizing, that it's the same thing. People are afraid of change sometimes but we've explained to people this stuff is the same. We do a lot of one on ones to get people comfortable and up to speed. If you don't know the community in depth you are just lost so it's all about educating staff and the VPs, and the staff are always in the community but you can bring the others into it and to events so they can see how people's lives are being changed. It takes years so be patient.

- (Kellie Magnuson asked): *Is there any structure through which people communicate the needs of the community to the organization and how does the org and participants decide what campaigns that the org works on?*
 - **Amina** says: We spend a lot of time looking at how other communities are doing it, we make sure we're increasing the number of people of color who work in the field, and we have our directors who talk to the upper management about what happens with our folks in the field.
 - **Maria** says: Within our committee we also do an internal committee because we found out a lot of people were giving services to the Latino community but not many knew much about it. So we have therapists who tell clients to do this but they didn't know people without documents didn't qualify for service. We do educational workshops about immigration to educate providers about the communities they serve. There was a disconnect, there was education but not information about the communities we were serving. They got they needed to stop using interpreters because it is so disrespectful, so they began organizing their own house in order to begin working externally.
 - **Anna** says: We have a leadership structure that is representative of the larger demographic that we do every three months or so, checking with them about what is happening in their communities and if there are issues we should address through workshops or campaign work. We really depend on them and we do open those questions to the larger group and have done surveys of the entire student body but as an agency wide piece the building movement committee is still in process but our goal is for it to become the clearinghouse for different issues we are working on and what campaigns we can specifically get behind.

Questions that didn't get answered on this call (Topics for future calls!):

From Maritza Guzman: Are they involved in organizing at the state or federal level? Which issues? Do these organizations also work in coalitions? Which ones? How do they choose which coalitions to join?

From Shane Bernando: Can the speakers talk about what partnerships in the community were essential to their success and why they chose to collaborate with these other organizations? I'd also like to know what outreach strategies were effective in their community engagement and advocacy work. Undoing Racism committee...Can you have her talk about that work more?

From Susie Cambria: Wondering about the long-term effects of client advocacy work. . . . Has anyone measured how involvement in education, systems advocacy and action, and the like impact involvement in advocacy and/or civic engagement later in life or even after the initial involvement? Do we know from the individual perspective about what works best, least, etc.?