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New Turf for Organizing: Family Child Care Providers

Abstract

Child care providers are among the lowest wage workers in the USA. Nationwide less than 5% of child care providers are represented by labor unions. This article addresses the question: How can family child care providers be effectively organized? I describe and analyze Local 880's effort in Illinois organizing family child care providers. Adapting the grassroots organizing model 880 developed organizing homecare workers, Local 880 has over 2200 signed authorization cards and over 1500 members in the family child care union. Even without formal recognition the union won a pay increase for providers in 1999 and has filed numerous successful grievances around disputed back pay. Keys to 880's success organizing family child care providers were: 1) prior experience in homecare organizing, especially non-NLRB organizing, 2) experience with grassroots organizing, and maintaining unions without recognition, 3) ability to influence state-wide elections and legislative issues by direct political involvement and joining coalitions.

Introduction

This is how Susan[1], a licensed family child care provider in Illinois, described her typical work day:

> My first one comes at five [a.m.]. What I do is I get up at four and take my shower before my kids come. I take my shower, clean up the house, do whatever I'm going to do, then at five I get the baby. After I feed the baby I get the other kids ready, and then I send one off to school. And then the other one we color, we paint, we do sign language…one comes home from school at 4:00 and the other one I get at 3:30 [p.m.] and she leaves at 2:00 [in the morning]…her mom works second shift. Actually my day care is 24 hours a day, six days a week.

Work schedules like Susan's are common among family child care providers. For providing child care 21 hours a day Susan receives $18-$21 a day per child from the State of Illinois as a licensed family child care provider caring for children with low-income working parents. Before Local 880 Service Employees International Union (henceforth 880) persuaded the legislature to increase reimbursement rates in 1999, providers earned $13 - $18 a day per child. The low pay, long hours, hassles with the reimbursement bureaucracies, plus the lack of benefits and respect are reasons why over the past five years 1500 family child care providers in Illinois have signed authorization cards and joined Local 880. Susan is a part of a growing effort to organize child care providers in the USA (see Brooks, 2003; Helburn & Bergman, 2002; Grundy, Bell, & Firestein, 1999; Montilla, Twombly, & Vita, 2001).

This article addresses the question: How can family child care providers be effectively organized? The first part of this article provides context by defining family

child care, describing the child care crisis in the USA, and presenting a brief history of organized labor and child care providers. Next, I describe 880's membership recruitment, recognition campaign, and the major issues voiced by family child care providers. The discussion section outlines how Local 880 adapted their homecare organizing model to child care organizing then compares and contrasts Local 880s family child care organizing to SEIU's campaign in California organizing 75,000 homecare providers. The conclusion draws lessons from the current campaign and argues for unionization as an important step toward solving the child care crisis in the USA.

Background/Context[2]

Family Child Care

Family child care is the care of unrelated children in the home of the provider (Kontos, 1995). In the USA there are an estimated 306,000 licensed family child care providers (Children's Foundation, 2002) caring for 1,080,000 children (Smith, 2002). Illinois has 10,000 licensed family child care providers. Prior to welfare reform passing in 1996, the use of family child care compared to other forms of child care had been declining since the 1970's (Helburn, 2002). Although studies have yet to capture the full impact of welfare reform on the numbers of children in family child care, the unprecedented numbers of single low-income mothers going to work (Jencks, 2002) combined with shortages of center based care (Whitaker, 2002) suggest that the numbers of children in family day care may be going up again.

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[1] All names are pseudonyms.

[2] Parts of this section appeared earlier in Fred Brooks "What Differences Unionizing Providers Might Make on Child Care in the USA: Results From an Exploratory Study." Child & Youth Care Forum. Volume 32, Number 1. Pp. 3-22.

The family child care providers who have joined Local 880 are overwhelmingly female and people of color. Ninety-six percent of Local 880's family child care providers are female, and 88% are African-American. Eighty-nine percent have at least a high school degree, while 58% have education or vocational training beyond high school (Lyons, 2001).

Crisis in Child Care

Child care in the U.S.A. is in a state of crisis. Problems include affordability, availability, staffing, and the quality of child care (Blau, 2001; Helburn & Bergmann, 2002; Mencimer, 2002; Reeves, 1992). The staffing issue affects quality of care. Child care centers have difficulty maintaining high quality, educated, well-trained staff. This is considered a primary cause of the mediocre to poor quality of average child care in the U.S.A. (Cost, Quality & Child Outcomes Study Team, 1995; Whitebook, Howes, & Phillips, 1990). Although most studies have focused on center-based care, several studies suggest family child care is no better than center based care in terms of quality of care and stability of staff. Kontos, Howes, Shinn, & Galinsky (1995) found only 12% of regulated family child care providers and 3% of non regulated providers offered good quality care. Seventy-five percent of the regulated providers offered adequate/custodial rated care; while 50% of the non-regulated providers offered care rated as inadequate. Kontos et al. (1995) found turnover rates in family child care were similar to or higher than the 41% annual turnover rate Whitebook et al., (1990) found in child care centers. Since many core issues in the child care crisis are also labor issues, it is not surprising that labor unions have increased their organizing activities in the field of child care.

Child Care and Organized Labor

Less than five percent of child care providers in the USA are unionized (Whitebook, Howes, & Phillips, 1990). Wages for child care providers have always been among the lowest in the economy, and they remain so today (Helburn & Bergmann, 2002). The median hourly wage for child care providers in 2000 was $7.43 (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2000). Low wages and high turnover of child care providers are primary causes for the mediocre to poor quality of average child care in the U.S. (Cost, Quality & Child Outcomes Study Team, 1995; Whitebook, Howes, & Phillips, 1990). Although a possible solution to this historically well-known problem would be to unionize, formal labor organizing has not been the dominant approach to addressing low wages, difficult working conditions, and sparse benefits in child care.

There are at least three explanations for the low levels of union membership among child care providers. First, high turnover and small, decentralized units of employees make organizing child care providers quite difficult (Montilla, Twombly & De Vita, 2001; Child Care Employee Project, 1991). Second, membership in unions in the USA declined steadily from 1954 to 1998 (Clawson & Clawson, 1999) while the child care industry grew exponentially. It is unusual for an institution on the decline to implement a major expansion in difficult, uncharted territory. Third, "Child care providers often do not perceive themselves as the 'type' who joins unions (Child Care Employee Project, 1991, p. 15).

Although historically organized labor never considered child care providers a top organizing priority, there are signs around the USA that this may be changing. In New York City the American Federation of State County and Municipal Employees

(AFSCME) has 9,000 child care providers covered by collective bargaining contracts. In Massachusetts District 65 of the United Auto Workers (UAW) has represented 1000 child care providers since 1978 (Child Care Employee Project, 1991). In the late 90s Local 925 SEIU utilized the innovative tactics of card check recognition and interest based bargaining to organize a dozen child care centers in Seattle (Brooks, 2003). The United Child Care Union in Pennsylvania is organizing both center-based and family child care providers serving mostly low income families (Helburn & Bergmann, 2002). The Los Angeles chapter of The Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now (ACORN) has organized over 500 family child care providers into a de facto union called Child Care Providers for Action.

An extensive literature search was unable to find one scholarly, peer-reviewed, outcome study about the effects of unionizing child care providers in the USA. Two studies of center-based care included unionization as one of many variables influencing child care outcomes. In their study of 227 child care centers, Whitebook, Howes & Phillips (1990) found 4% of the child care workforce were members of labor unions. Unionized providers had higher wages, more early childhood education credits, more current hours of in-service training, and lower turnover compared to non-unionized providers. Unionized providers earned $1.50 more per hour compared to non-unionized child care providers. Unionized providers were also more likely to have working conditions that were correlated with higher quality child care compared to non-unionized child care providers. In a regression analysis of 400 child care centers, Mocan & Viola (1997) found that unionization increased providers wages by 19% and overall compensation by 26%.

Method

Data for this analysis were collected from 880 organizing files, interviews, and participant observation. The organizing files provided background research and statistics. Interviews with three senior organizers included questions about the history, strategy and tactics of the campaign. Ten union members, selected by convenience sampling, were interviewed in a focus group. Members were asked questions like "Why did you join Local 880? and "What issues are you fighting for?" Although a small convenience sample is not necessarily representative of the entire membership, several findings from the focus group were supported by a telephone survey of 211 Local 880 members conducted just 3 Months before the focus group by Metro Chicago Information Center. The similar findings suggest focus group results are probably representative of the larger population of union members.

A rich source of data was participant observation. In April 2001 the author attended 880's Legislative Lobbying day in Springfield. The highlight was a meeting between 100 family child care providers and four State of Illinois officials responsible for the administration of child care. Every child care provider testified (often quite emotionally) about the issue she was most concerned about. The entire event was tape recorded, transcribed, and content analyzed. The combination of participant observation, interviews and secondary analysis of 880 files permitted triangulation of data.

Recruitment, Issues, & Victories

Recruitment

In the mid nineties several 880 members quit their homecare jobs and opened family child care operations. Several other homecare union members had friends and

relatives running family child care businesses. The family child care providers who had been in 880's home care union felt like they needed union representation to deal with many of the same issues they had experienced in homecare: low pay, long hours, no health insurance, and no benefits. In 1996 after several months of research to assess the feasibility of organizing, 880's membership board voted to begin organizing licensed family child care providers. Organizers obtained a list of the 10,000 licensed family child care providers from the state of Illinois and began making house calls to talk about issues and sign-up members.

Organizers stated that it was very easy to recruit child care providers to join the union. One organizer described it this way:

> A good organizer can build a vision and get three out of four people that they visit to join and pay dues. And almost everyone signs an authorization card…so it's very ripe. There are lots of issues.

Organizers say recruiting child care providers in some ways is easier than homecare workers because many child care providers are members of informal networks and are well connected to other providers through these associations (Myra Glassman, 2001). According to 880s lead child care organizer Brynn Seibert (2003), the associations are geographically based and serve a variety of training, education, referral, and emergency substitute functions. Sometimes a union member involved in an association will invite an 880 organizer to make a union presentation at an association meeting. These presentations can result in 5-10 new union members. Although these provider networks are not based on ethnicity or country of origin like the Latino immigrant networks

described by Milkman & Wong (2001), the networks provide a similar function--they make it much easier to sign up members.

As of Fall 2003 Local 880 had over 2200 signed authorization cards and 1500 members in the child care union. Approximately 600 members pay monthly dues through bank drafts, which while not as efficient as dues-check off is the next most reliable method of dues collection. To get dues check-off Local 880 will need to win official recognition from the state of Illinois. 880s ultimate goal is to sign-up over 50% of the 5000 licensed family child care providers who care for state subsidized children.

Recognition Campaign

The employer of record of family child care providers is a highly contested domain. Family day care providers have two types of clients. Private clients pay 100% of the fee charged by the provider. The second type of client is a low-income family that qualifies for a state child care subsidy. Most union members have both types of clients. The mixture of private and public clients makes it difficult to argue the state is the employer of record. Therefore, after 880 recruits a critical mass of child care providers they will pursue both a legal and an organizing strategy to win recognition. One reason the state denies being the employer of record is because it alleviates the state from bargaining with the union and paying expensive fringe benefits to child care providers.

Although maintaining membership and winning issues is difficult without recognition it is still possible. 880 has a long history of maintaining and servicing union members without elections or contracts. Since 1985, 880 has maintained a chapter of home care workers who contract solely with the state called Department of Human Services Office of Rehabilitation Services (DHS/ORS). Without a contract or formal recognition 880 has

won 13 pay increases for DHS/ORS workers. Over 15 years of organizing all DHS/ORS workers have won pay increases from $3.35/hr to $7.00 per hour, and a significant number of workers went from $1 to $7 an hour. Additional union victories at this unit include a grievance procedure, getting paid bi-weekly and getting the state to deduct taxes from paychecks (Kelleher, 2003).

According to 880 organizers the key to maintaining membership without recognition or a contract is building a militant direct action organization that can deliver significant, concrete victories through membership mobilization. The organization has to have structure, activity and identity even without "legal" union status. As far as members are concerned if 880 looks like and union, acts like a union, and delivers victories like a union, it doesn't matter if the organization has legal union status. Members believe they are in a union if they do the following: pay membership dues, meet to discuss issues, elect leadership, file and win grievances, lobby their public officials, have social events, earn union benefits such as discounted eyeglasses and prescription drugs, attend local and national leadership training conferences, and have a direct voice in deciding union priorities and protocol. All of these activities are part of 880's organizing model.

This model of grassroots organizing is what 880 learned from its roots in ACORN (see Kelleher, 1985). In community organizing there are no elections or NLRA to establish ground rules for legitimacy, credibility, and bargaining. Community organizations gain power and win issues based on their ability to mobilize large numbers of people in such a way that the power structure is forced to respond. When 880 organizes without recognition or an election they are taking a page right out of ACORN's organizing manual. 880's goal is to win a "meet and confer agreement" which will

formalize bargaining between the union and the state outside NLRA regulations. Meet and Confer agreements are won primarily based on the power of the constituency organized rather than from an election.

Local 880's role in the fall 2002 Illinois gubernatorial campaign may hasten recognition of the union by the state. Local 880's political action committee, with major support from the International Union and the SEIU state council, worked hard to elect Rod Blagojevich as the first Democratic governor in Illinois in over 20 years. In return Blagojevich agreed to support recognition and collective bargaining rights for both homecare and family child care providers if he was elected Governor. In February 2003 he signed Executive Order 2003-8 granting collective bargaining rights to over 20,000 personal assistants (homecare workers) from Local 880's DHS/ORS unit. In May, after over 500 Local 880 members marched on the state capitol and packed the House and Senate galleries, the Illinois General Assembly passed HB 2221 codifying the executive order. In July Governor Blagojevich signed HB 2221, and the state began negotiations. Negotiations concluded in September 2003 and the first collective bargaining agreement was signed on October 23, 2003. This agreement guarantees a 34% wage increase over four years (from $7 to $9.35 per hour), a new grievance procedure, three months back pay, unemployment insurance coverage, and the establishment of labor-management committees that will deal with issues like health insurance. This was a huge victory for Local 880 after 15 years of organizing without recognition from the state. Although Blagojevich has committed to recognizing the child care workers union he has not yet signed an executive order to that effect (Kelleher, 2003).

According to Local 880 organizers there are two reasons Governor Blagojevich recognized the homecare unit, but has not yet recognized 880's child care unit: 1) The employer of record issue for the DHS/ORS unit is clearer and more compelling than it is for child care providers. One-hundred percent of DHS/ORS workers salaries come directly from the state; most child care workers have some private clients in addition to state subsidized clients. In child care even the state subsidized families make co-payments directly to the child care providers. Having multiple income streams muddies the employer of record issue for child care providers. 2) Local 880's 18 year history of organizing the DHS/ORS homecare unit makes it bigger, stronger, more powerful and credible compared to the much younger, smaller child care unit. Eighteen years of consistent organizing and victories created a sense of credibility and legitimacy that Governor Blagojevich could not deny. Local 880's child care unit does not yet have the same size, history, or power enjoyed by their homecare units (Kelleher & Glassman, 2003).

Health care.

Lack of recognition has not stopped 880 from launching major campaigns on key issues and winning some of them. A 2001 survey of 880's membership, conducted by Metro Chicago Information Center (MCIC), found 46% of 880's family day care providers did not have health insurance, and those that did have health coverage were most often underinsured and relying on public health clinics and other public programs for their healthcare (Lyons, 2001). This is more than three times the 14% uninsured rate across the USA. For these members, winning health insurance is the number one priority for the union. One member described her need for health insurance this way:

> Health insurance is most important…. Right now I have a [medical] bill for $18,000. I need an operation, but I still can't go in because I owe all that. Until I pay I have to stay out of the Doctor's Group. So [health] insurance is my top priority.

The need for a health insurance plan was a common theme from membership in both the focus group and the participant observation meeting between members and state officials. MCIC's survey of 880 family child care providers found that 18% of the membership had family medical needs that had not been taken care of due to lack of health insurance (Lyons, 2001).

Local 880 is organizing a long-term, collaborative, statewide campaign with allies to try and win health insurance for its members. With grant assistance from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, 880 members are conducting membership surveys on current health care needs and are convening a task force of academic, political, activist, and industry stakeholders to recommend state funding streams to cover health insurance for low wage workers. The task force will be holding hearings across Illinois in 2004 to publicize the health care crisis for low wage workers.

Pay & Grievances.

Even though 880 helped win a major increase in reimbursement rates in 1999—from $13-$18 to $18-$21[3]--members still have various issues concerning pay. One issue is that the reimbursement rate is calculated based on the assumption a child is in care just five hours a day. In reality most parents with a child in care work eight hour shifts and often have up to an hour of transportation time to and from work; this entails many children being in care 10 hours or more a day. Some providers spoke of parents leaving

children in care over 12 hours sometimes. Most providers care for children whose parents have very different work schedules such as the provider quoted at the beginning of this paper. In the MCIC survey 38% of the providers stated they would prefer to work less hours than they currently work (Lyons, 2003).

Other issues associated with pay included late reimbursements (or lost paperwork resulting in no reimbursement), receiving timely co-payments from parents, and a desire to have federal taxes deducted from their state reimbursements. When an 880 member has problems getting reimbursed, the union will typically intervene in the form of an unofficial grievance procedure. An 880 steward (or organizer) will call the resource and referral agency, explain the situation and intervene on behalf of the member to resolve the grievance. According to organizers, since 1996 880 has successfully won back pay and reimbursements in dozens of cases for providers.

Respect

One issue that prompted many providers to join 880 is the lack of respect. Several members stated that before they joined the union anytime they would call the resource and referral agency about with a question they were not treated with respect, and their problem was not taken seriously. One member described this change in response since she joined the union:

> Since I have been speaking with the Y [the resource and referral agency] and I told them I have been a union member since January, they have been treating me with respect. Their attitude has totally changed.

A common theme providers gave for joining the union was the feeling that they "need someone to back-me-up." Without the union, providers felt a sense of isolation and that it

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[3] Rates vary based on age of children and geographic location.

was difficult to get respect and swift response to grievances around pay and paperwork issues with the resource and referral agencies. Organizing around dignity and respect issues is one of Bronfenbrenner's (1997) rank-and-file intensive tactics.

Comparative Analysis of 880's Organizing Model

This section describes the origin of 880's homecare organizing model and how the union adapted the model to organize family child care providers. The second half of this section compares Local 880's family child care organizing to Delp & Quan's analysis of SEIU 434 B's recent success organizing 75,000 homecare workers in California.

Local 880 was founded in Chicago in 1983 and over 20 years has expanded to seven additional Illinois towns. Local 880 has over 25,000 homecare providers under union contracts. Through 880 homecare workers in Illinois have won wage increases, vacation pay, sick leave, and hundreds of successfully filed grievances (see http://www.seiu880.org/). Because home care and family child care share similar structures, organizing family day care providers did not require 880 to create a new organizing model. The organizing model for family child care providers is very similar to the model 880 created in the early 80s to organize home care workers. Two organizers who founded Local 880 (and still work there) in 1983 previously worked as community organizers with the Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now (ACORN). Local 880's organizing model borrowed more from ACORN than it did on prevailing models of union organizing in the late 70s and early 80s. The steps of the model include (from Kelleher, 1985):

a) Targeting. 880 carefully researches the industry assessing its potential for organizing. This includes gathering statistical information about the numbers of workers, state regulations, and talking to the workers about issues and concerns.

b) List Building. This involves obtaining a list of employees who can be contacted. In the case of family child care, 880 asked the state for the list of the10,000 licensed providers.

c) House Visits. After obtaining the list of addresses 880 organizers visit potential members in their homes to discuss issues, explain union membership, and ask the provider to sign an authorization card and join the union. Membership includes paying dues either by cash or bank drafts. Initially organizers do house visits. Once membership begins to build, house visits are done with or by members, often visiting several potential members gathered in the home of one provider.

d) Leadership Development. While making house visits organizers are looking for leaders who will be willing to chair meetings, sign-up members, pass cards, and take ownership of the union.

e) Organizing Committee Meetings. As soon as 880 has signed up 10-15 members they begin having regular organizing committee meetings that are chaired by leaders who emerged through house visits. The two major themes of the meetings are “Why we need the union” and “How to win the union.” Members do most of the talking and organizing staff is there to provide technical assistance and help strategize next steps. Members elect leaders and the organizing committee meets either weekly or biweekly for 6-8 weeks building toward a recognition action.

f) Recognition Action. When the membership, leadership, and organizing staff feel the union has gained a "critical mass" of membership and solidarity it has a recognition action where the mass membership meets with the employer and demands recognition of the union. Recognition actions are typically loud, boisterous, and fun affairs for the members. They include a lot of singing and chanting. 880 does not expect a recognition agreement on-the-spot (but this does happen rarely), but rather the action is seen as a key element in continuing to build membership and momentum, and to put "management on notice that the workers are well organized…" (p. 40)

g) Election Campaign & Afterwards. Typically shortly after a recognition action the union files for an election with the National Labor Relations Board. In home care 880 has won 29 elections; they report a success rate or winning 70 – 75% of their NLRB elections.

880's organizing model shares many of the following components of Bronfrenbrenner's (1997) "rank and file intensive" campaigns: emphasis on person-to-person contact, rank-and-file participation, inside and outside pressure tactics, emphasis on respect and dignity, and developing a culture of organizing. According to Bronfenbrenner, only 3% of unions typically used five or more rank-and-file intensive tactics. Local 880 organizers say most of the rank-and file intensive tactics have been part of their organizing model from the very beginning.

Local 880 organizers state they were the first union in the country to successfully organize Medicaid reimbursed homecare workers using the model described above. This model has been successfully replicated and expanded by other SEIU affiliates. Most

notably SEIU 434B in California successfully replicated 880's homecare model resulting in the largest union victory in 60 years winning an election of 75,000 homecare workers in California. Prior to launching the California campaign in 1987 SEIU sent lead organizing staff to Illinois to learn 880's homecare model. A collaborative relationship developed between Local 880 and the lead staff of Local 434B. This relationship continued on a regular basis up until the final vote count in California in 1999 (Kelleher, 2003).

In the campaign organizing family child care providers, Local 880's basic strategy has been to extend their grassroots organizing model from homecare to family child care. In addition, the union has leveraged the power and credibility it has earned through 20 years of homecare organizing to similar legislative campaigns in child care resulting in victories such as the 1999 increase in reimbursement rates for child care providers. According to Delp & Quan (2002), the keys to SEIU's success in California were: 1) grassroots organizing, 2) building effective coalitions with consumer groups and 3) changing state and county policies to establish public authorities as the employer of home care workers. Local 880's strategy in child care organizing shares the grassroots organizing strategy with the California campaign. Structural differences between homecare and child care have made it difficult for 880 to organize and partner with the consumers of child care. Although 880 has not changed state policy to get the union recognized, their role in getting Governor Balgojevich elected in fall 2002 may have the same result in getting the state to recognize the union.

Grassroots Organizing

Grassroots intensive rank-and-file organizing was the foundation of success in the California homecare campaign (Delp & Quan, 2002). Organizers in California were delightfully shocked at how responsive the constituency was toward being organized. Local 880 organizers describe a similar enthusiasm for unionization from family child care providers. Both Local 880 and the California homecare campaign involved members in successful statewide, direct-action campaigns aimed at policy makers. In California SEIU joined a statewide labor/community coalition to increase the state minimum wage. Local 880 joined a similar coalition in Chicago to win a Living Wage ordinance and in 2003 was a key player in a statewide coalition that forced the state legislature to increase the minimum wage from $5.15 to $6.50 an hour over the next year. Both campaigns organized union members by legislative districts and applied direct pressure on specific legislators on key union legislation. Both campaigns began under republican Governors opposed to their demands, Wilson in California and Ryan in Illinois. Both campaigns played roles in electing Democratic Governors less hostile to their demands (Davis in California, Blagojevich in Illinois). One contextual difference between the two campaigns was the national economy and state budgets during the campaigns. The California campaign coincided with the longest economic expansion in US history and for much of the 90s California enjoyed budget surpluses. Local 880's organizing began during the last few years of the economic expansion, but for the past 2 years 880 has been organizing during a stagnant economy and a severe state budget crisis. Their 2002-2003 demands for increased wages and benefits were made during a time of $5 billion budget deficits in Illinois. Although both campaigns demonstrated strong grassroots organizing,

the state fiscal crisis in Illinois may make it more difficult for Local 880 to win pay increases and health insurance for family child care providers. Yet 880's recent victory in winning a 34% pay increase for state-employed homecare workers (over four years) is proof that this can be done even in a stagnant economy and a $2 billion state budget deficit.

Coalition Building and Framing the Issue in the Public Interest

Successful public sector organizing requires unions to make clear connections between the union's interest and the public interest (Johnston, 1994). One of the most powerful ways to make this connection is to get the consumers of the service to make the claim that unionization will benefit them as consumers. Building strong alliances between homecare consumer organizations and the union was crucial to victory in the California homecare workers campaign. Local 880 also has a history of partnering with consumer organizations in homecare organizing. Although creating coalitions with homecare consumer groups was not easy in the California campaign (it took enormous time and entailed working through suspicion and many differences), the payoff was enormous. The union alone did not have the power to pass state and county legislation necessary to create the public authorities to recognize the union (Delp & Quan, 2002).

Structural differences between homecare and family daycare may make coalition building more difficult in child care. Unlike the elderly and disabled consumers of homecare, family daycare consumers are not already organized. To be an effective voice, parents of children would have to be organized. Since the consumer of state subsidies is typically a single, working mother with one or two children, it will not be easy to organize this constituency. Child care providers describe close relationships with the

mothers of children in their care. These relationships could become avenues for organizing. Unionized child care workers in Seattle organized parents to lobby Governor Locke who eventually passed a pilot program to increase wages for center-based child care providers in Washington. Similarly, mothers of children in family child care could probably be organized to write letters or make phone calls to their legislature, and could possibly even be involved in direct action.

Changing Policy

Changing state policy was critical to unionizing homecare workers in California. SEIU initially pursued a legal strategy to establish the state as the employer of record, but they lost in court. This forced them to adopt an organizing/political strategy to pass state and county laws to establish public authorities as employers of record (Delp & Quan, 2002).

Local 880 did not pursue a legal strategy to establish the state as the employer of record. They believed the investment of resources and time was not worth the slim chance of victory. Local 880 tends to use lawsuits as a last resort rather than an initial strategy. Grassroots organizing is typically their initial strategy, even when the problem seems to be a legal one. Local 880 has a long history of influencing state policy. They have their own lobby day every year in Springfield, as well as many other ‘mini-lobby days’ where members from across the state come to Springfield in smaller numbers to lobby their legislators. Influencing state policy has been a key criteria in their expansion across Illinois. For 20 years 880 has been trying to implement union friendly policies with republican governors in power the entire time. As described earlier, the victory of

Democratic Governor Blagojevich may be fortuitous for winning a Meet and Confer agreement with the state.

Unionization, Quality of Care, Directions for Research

By definition unions are most concerned with issues affecting the well-being of workers. Although improving the quality of family child care is not the primary reason unions are organizing family child care workers, improved care could be a latent function of union organizing. The reason unionization may improve quality of care is because the workplace issues that unions are organizing around—long hours, low wages, high turnover and no benefits—are related to poor quality care. Prior research on center based care shows a correlation between unionization and factors associated with quality care—higher wages, providers with more education, and lower turnover (Whitebook, Howes & Phillips, 1990). If unionization succeeds in improving pay, reducing hours, and improving benefits, this could result in improving the quality of care children receive in family child care.

The providers who met with the state day care officials in Springfield were very clear on the link between their union issues and the quality of care they were providing their children. There is a growing body of literature that is making this same link. The subtitle of Bellm and Haack's (2001) Working For Quality Child Care is "Good Child Care Jobs Equals Good Care for Children." The book makes the same argument that Local 880 members made with state officials, i.e., what is good for a child care provider is also good for the child being cared for by that worker.

Future research should include direct measures of quality of care such as the Family Day Care Rating Scale (Harms & Clifford, 1989), and needs to assess whether

quality of family child care is associated with unionization. If correlational studies find that unionization is associated with higher quality care, future studies could begin examining cause and effect relationships between the two. Since unionization of family child care providers is growing it might be possible to measure quality of care pre and post unionization. One feasible design would be to conduct multiple single subject designs rating quality of care at the moment a provider joins the union to establish a baseline and then follow-up every six months for a couple of years.

Since a number of ACORN affiliates have recently launched organizing drives of family child care providers, future research should compare the strengths and weaknesses of community organizations leading this organizing as opposed to labor unions.

Conclusion

Based on the evidence from this case study, and from comparing Local 880's efforts to SEIU's homecare organizing in California, five lessons can be drawn about organizing family child care workers:

*__Family child care providers can be recruited and organized.__ The combination of long hours, low pay, challenging work, and no benefits or health insurance make the constituency very ripe for initial union recruitment.

***Recognition will be tough.** Because of the contested employer of record issue, state child care bureaucracies are not going to easily recognize and bargain with unions. Unions with experience maintaining membership and winning victories without recognition or NLRB sanction will be in the strongest position to organize family child care providers.

***Grassroots organizing is required**. The ability to win pay increases, grievances, and benefits will depend exclusively on the quality of grassroots organizing. Without recognition or a contract everything depends on organizing.

***Importance of Politics and Coalitions.** Since child care reimbursements are controlled by state agencies, the ability to wield statewide political clout is important. Direct involvement in legislative and gubernatorial campaigns can pay big dividends if it results in the election of union friendly politicians. Since not many service employee unions have significant statewide power, political involvement is enhanced by joining coalitions with other community and progressive organizations.

***Cut the issue as "what is best for children."** Since the overall political climate is not that sympathetic to unions, and empirical research suggests that child care quality and union issues are linked, unions should emphasize quality of care issues simultaneously with union issues. This position is strengthened if the union can get the consumers of the service to make these arguments (Delp & Quan, 2002).

Most experts do not see the crisis in child care being solved without significant government involvement. Helburn and Bergmann (2002) argue for tripling federal funding for child care to create universal high quality care. With the federal budget facing record deficits Congress is unlikely to dramatically increase funding for child care anytime soon. In the fall of 2003 the Senate Finance Committee voted against a modest proposal to increase child care funding by $11.25 billion over the next five years (Women's Policy Inc., 2003). If the federal government is going to play a role in solving the child care crisis they are going to have to feel pressure from voters to do so. If child care providers are going to wield any political clout they have to be organized. There is

no guarantee that union organizing will ever be up to scale to make a significant impact on federal child care policy, but as a director of a Seattle child care center—with over 25 years of experience in the field—stated: "It's not certain to me that unionization will make enough of a difference but it's quite clear to me that nothing else will. It's our last best hope for saving the field (Brooks, 2003, p. 20)."

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