

THE SAN FRANCISCO CHILDREN'S BUDGET STORY

The Prelude to the Children's Fund Campaign

from the appendix of

"From Sandboxes to Ballot Boxes"

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Appendix

I. Creating a Children's Budget

A "Children's Budget" has come to mean a document that child advocates submit to policy makers to promote either the reallocation and/or expansion of public resources for children. For some, such as the Los Angeles Roundtable for Children, it has meant an analysis of how money is currently spent on children. For others, such as the Association for the Children of New Jersey, the budget itemized recommended allocations for children's programs, and served as an alternative to the official budgets.

The Children's Budgets developed by Coleman Advocates went beyond documenting what was spent on children in San Francisco, and beyond identifying programs that should be retained or expanded. The agency proposed specific, new policy directions; a comprehensive rationale for these policies; and a coherent set of (often new) programs to implement these policies. Coleman also proposed funding sources for the entire budget package. (It should be noted that Coleman's Children's Budget efforts never included education because in California, education is primarily funded by the State, and is not controlled at the City level.) In this way, an innovative Children's Budget model with the potential to be an effective tool for advocacy and planning was born.

Community Outreach

As the development of the Children's Budget evolved, Coleman was able to expand ways to solicit community input. Efforts to expand thinking, get new ideas, ensure support, and, simultaneously, to 'spread the word' included questionnaires; focus groups; presentations in high school classrooms to gather youth input; attendance at political clubs and neighborhood meetings to solicit ideas; interviews with key personnel in City departments; and holding open, well advertised strategy meetings. Hundreds of diverse organizations and community leaders participated, including the Junior League, gay and lesbian political clubs, business organizations, neighborhood clubs, and church groups.

In preparing the initial San Francisco Children's Budget in 1988, Coleman relied on a dozen officially and unofficially produced reports on the problems of San Francisco's children. It also used longstanding recommendations of many neighborhood coalitions to supplement the input from conference attendees and follow-up caucus groups. Drafts of the budget were circulated to community leaders and opinion-makers throughout San Francisco's network of neighborhoods. Contrary to what might have been anticipated, results showed very little controversy about the programs to be proposed in the budget. Even later, when budget requests had to be pared down, as long as there were proposals in each of the major service areas, there was surprising consensus among diverse groups.

Refining the Children's Budget Process

Community outreach had an increasing effect on the Children's Budget. As Coleman searched for community groups to involve in the effort, the agency discovered a growing number of parent-initiated grassroots efforts organized out of people's homes, primarily addressing the drug crisis and community violence among youth. After identifying almost a dozen such groups, Coleman convened several meetings among the groups themselves, and developed a proposal

for grants to "neighborhood-based peer and parent support programs." These groups all felt they needed small amounts of money to sustain their efforts so that supplies and other expenses wouldn't continue to come from their members' own pockets. This proposal became a centerpiece of Coleman's subsequent Children's Budget. While not immediately funded by the City, it became the basis of San Francisco's federally funded drug prevention program, and within six months of the idea's inception, a \$500,000 grants program for these groups had been established! That program is still in place, and has spawned many neighborhood empowerment groups.

Five hundred copies of the first Children's Budget were mailed to City leaders, leaders in the children's field, and key children's service providers. Hundreds more were disseminated upon request. It became a significant planning tool for many non-profit organizations (one of the secondary benefits of a Children's Budget).

Building ad-hoc coalitions with key allies. San Francisco's child population is probably the most diverse and multi-cultural in the country. African-American children (approximately 15% of the child population in San Francisco) are, by most standard measurements, at a high risk for infant mortality, needing foster care or special education, ending up in the juvenile justice system, etc. Coleman worked in conjunction with the African-American Community Agenda Coalition, an organization of grassroots activists concerned about youth violence in their neighborhoods, to incorporate into

their work a specific budget for African American children. The agency pointed out how elements of the overall Children's Budget could benefit African-American children, and identified several programs, such as residential drug treatment, that could specifically focus on African-American youth. As a result, two African-American Supervisors on the Board at that time became more interested in the Children's Budget, and pushed hard for the programs affecting their communities.

Coleman organized a broad-based health coalition to urge the Mayor to spend a significant amount of the City's share of tobacco tax dollars – The Coalition for the Proper Expenditure of Tobacco Tax Funds – on new programs for children. The agency knew it would be more effective in pushing for this funding source if it did so as part of a more comprehensive health agenda that included AIDS programs, services for refugees, the homeless, and other low-income groups. Health proposals were worked out in collaboration with the broad committee that was formed in order to make sure that all concerned could back each other's proposals. The Children's Budget proposals, health outreach teams, and drug treatment for mothers with children, were, of course, key parts of the package. As a result of the coalition, Coleman received more publicity and political support for its proposals.

Working with City departments. As time passed, Coleman added an important element to its process: negotiations with City departments. This served a double purpose: 1) it was an opportunity to test the Children's Budget proposals and, if

need be, to modify them to be more compatible with other plans of the department; and 2) it provided an additional forum to try to get some new children's services inserted into the City's own budget.

An exciting moment came when we received a call telling us that the City's Social Services Budget was to be heard at the Social Services Commission the following day. (It had not been advertised, so even though we tried to follow every budget hearing, we had been in the dark about this one.) We began making calls, and within several hours we had mobilized a very articulate and persistent group of about eight grandmothers caring for young children to come to the meeting. The grandmothers' testimony about their need for respite care took everyone by surprise. Immediately the Commission insisted that respite care be added to the department's budget. Department staff were ordered to come up with a detailed proposal, and insert it into the budget. That year it was one of the few new services for children that was funded. This just illustrates how flukey budget advocacy can be.

Formalizing the Children's Budget Coalition. By 1990, when Coleman began a third Children's Budget, the agency felt it was important to formalize a coalition of children's organizations that would submit specific proposals. Fifty diverse and representative children's service organizations joined the coalition that ultimately sponsored the Budget, including the PTA, Grandmothers Who Care, child care centers, community coalitions, youth-serving agencies, and the local welfare rights organization.

A Difficult Balancing Act for the Lead Agency

While the San Francisco Children's Budget was Coleman-driven, the need for strong leadership and flexibility was balanced with the need for collective ownership of the concept and genuine widespread support for the project. The efforts to gather input, convene groups to develop specific proposals, and have organizations review the drafts led to numerous endorsements. People seemed quite satisfied with having a say, but letting the project be Coleman-initiated.

Seeing the work through. Within Coleman, the Children's Budget was definitely seen as a Coleman project. Understandably, other children's service providers in the coalition were preoccupied with the work of their own agencies and their particular budget needs. That they were invested at all in the examination of a Children's Budget was a positive reflection on them and on the importance of coalition-building.

It's a delicate balance – Assuming a leadership role and being able to control the advocacy process, and also having it be truly based on a genuine consensus of the major players and stakeholders. I think it always depends a great deal on the personalities involved. But in our case, for a number of years we were able to keep a very high level of trust among a critical mass of people who supported this, and then, of course, if we'd have a success, that made it easier. But for the budget process, we went to extraordinary lengths to have a community consensus-building process and we gathered enormous amounts of input from everybody who would have a stake in it. After the big citywide conference that introduced the idea of a Children's Budget,

we broke up into many small groups and asked, "What do you think should be in it?" We held follow-up meetings, and then sent out questionnaires, and had focus groups, and then sent out drafts and asked for input, often sitting down with the draft itself...so that even though we did the writing, it was based on a careful response to what we heard others say the priorities were. We didn't think we could get the support and win the kinds of things we were going after unless it really did reflect consensus. But if we had waited for a formal consensus process – well, I have seen lots of advocacy efforts die because the process is just interminable...paralyzing, really. If we had waited for the group to write it collectively, or to vote on every single sentence, it simply would never have happened. I think people bought into it because we were really careful to make sure that each round reflected what they wanted it to say.

Once we submitted it to the City, we felt that we were the advocacy experts, and could really develop a strong advocacy strategy and not have to take a vote on whether to go to the media or to provide testimony or to discuss what the focus of the press conference should be – I mean we had meetings and got input, but ultimately we made those kinds of decisions. And if we hadn't done a good job, I think we would have lost our credibility immediately.

But we were able to be much more aggressive than I think many children's advocates have been – at least in San Francisco – because we weren't being funded by the City or through the policies we were asking to see changed. So we had a lot of latitude. We were also able to use the advocacy skills we'd developed over the years.

Advocates fight for a cause – in this case, kids, and in this case, we were fighting against the Mayor and the Board of Supervisors to

get them to change the budget process. The advocates' only tools and skills are issuing reports, researching data, making policy proposals, using the media, negotiating with public officials, holding public hearings, testifying before public bodies, drafting legislation, and mobilizing the community. Coleman was equipped to be independent and to fight aggressively because we didn't have any conflicts of interest issues to contend with.

Without the flexibility to call the shots, it would have been impossible to be as effective as we were. In many instances, the effectiveness of Coleman's advocacy depended on one person (often myself because I'm the Director of the organization) knowing everything about what was happening. Allowing that person to make quick judgement calls was absolutely necessary.

The balance seemed to work well for us. We were free to advocate as we saw fit, yet there was sufficient buy-in so that many groups felt the budget reflected their priorities. Thus, supporters could often be quickly mobilized when needed. It is important for child advocates to realize that while there are many enthusiastic endorsers of the cause initially (powerful individuals, labor, business, other public interest groups), allies will not necessarily put their clout on the line to have children's services funded when those services need to be pitted against other items. Allies often fade from the scene when you move to budgetary allocations.

Advocacy tactics. Tracking the budget process, negotiating with decisionmakers, presenting testimony, organizing letter-writing campaigns – these are all skills child advocates can master well. Some of the advocacy tactics Coleman engaged in were fairly typical:

- **Sending notices** to the agency's mailing list requesting supporters to call and write to the Mayor, department heads, and supervisors – the Children's Budget package included pre-written postcards to the Mayor and the Board;
- **Orchestrating hearings** at key points in the budget process, making sure that a large enough group of people appeared when important decisions were to be made, and even more people when Coleman's items were the only ones on the agenda;
- **Meeting regularly** with legislators, their staffs, and high-level administrators in the Mayor's Office, and making sure carefully organized representatives of the constituency of that particular politician were present;
- **Submitting editorials** to major newspapers, neighborhood papers, and even one to the business paper (recommending a "pro-business tax" to support youth employment programs), as well as opinion messages that were aired on TV and radio;
- **Seeking official endorsements** of a children's budget from one of the two major local newspapers, two of the four local TV stations, and the predominant local news radio station;
- **Keeping information** and meetings going at a steady pace during the several critical months while budget policy was being made.

It may not be necessary to undergo everything Coleman went through to gain inspiration to mount a Children's Amendment-type campaign – I certainly hope not!

One reason for preparing this document is to allow others to learn from Coleman's experiences without necessarily going through the same steps. There are, however, some elements of budget advocacy which must be undertaken before an organization attempts a charter amendment-type strategy.

- Document the problems of your community's children, the general level of expenditures for children, and the types of new services that are needed.
- Develop a moderate level of consensus among those involved in children's issues about services needed.
- Document the failure of local government to respond adequately to needs of children (which doesn't mean that they must have failed to respond to a Children's Budget or to as aggressive an effort as Coleman conducted).
- Develop credibility on children's issues with policy makers, the press, and the service provider community.

The Budget Process and Accountability

Creating a budget is a complex, difficult process, often requiring a high level of expertise. Public comment is often perceived by policy-makers as a necessary annoyance. And in some instances, public scrutiny minimizes political courage in making difficult choices. But the lack of public scrutiny means that a child advocate's greatest weapon – the threat of public exposure – is difficult to wield. The press, and even the most persistent advocates, often miss those few public moments when the priorities are really set. The true budget priorities of any politician (what they really bargained away and what they really fought to preserve) rarely come to light.

Because the budget process is usually part of the reason that the budget status quo is maintained, it can become a legitimate, and even important, focus for children's advocates. Demands for greater public access can be an integral part of a Children's Budget campaign. As a result of Coleman editorials and protest letters to City departments about access, four City departments modified their budget-making process and increased community input. The Mayor conducted several community meetings prior to developing a budget, and established a special community advisory committee on the budget (with child advocates as members).

Lessons Learned

Coleman learned many lessons – the painful way – throughout the budget process. As stated in “Confronting City Hall,” some of these seem obvious enough, but they were made relevant to the agency in significant ways over the course of the three years spent fighting for a Children’s Budget. Perhaps some brief discussion here will save other children’s advocates time, energy, money, and even heartache.

• Children’s advocates can play hardball, too.

Budget politics is hardball. For children’s advocates that means no longer being ‘nice guys,’ but rather being comfortable playing tough, even with friends. I suppose no one’s angry at you until you challenge the status quo. In many ways it was painful to lose my innocence about this, but it also helped me become a better-equipped, more ‘grown-up’ advocate.

This proved to be a painful lesson for us at Coleman. Because our cause is perceived as just, we were used to having people admire our commitment. The ‘good’ people in City Hall liked to see themselves as our friends, and certain legislators liked to be seen as being in the forefront of children’s issues. But as our campaign for real reform and meaningful reallocation of resources wore on, our so-called ‘friends’ realized they couldn’t deliver without major disruptions of the status quo. There was a real personal toll – relationships suffered, and it was, for me, deeply painful.

When we attacked the Mayor for ignoring our second Children’s Budget, his Budget Director (a friend and social worker) became enraged. He was convinced that I was considering a run for Mayor and was, out to undermine the future candidacy of the current Mayor. When we insisted that the Board of Supervisors had not acted adequately on our proposals and instead went to the press, we were chastised and ridiculed publicly. When we sent out a newsletter criticizing the General Manager of the Department of Social Services and the

President of the Social Services Commission for holding their annual budget hearing with virtually no public outreach beyond the legal requirement, these two friends were angered and surprised that we – who were well informed about their budget – dared to criticize them on behalf of others. Each of these tactics in fact resulted in some level of success for our cause, but there’s no question there was personal pain involved.

• Kids are their own best sales pitch.

Children’s advocates have potential opportunities to make their case that those representing more entrenched and traditional causes do not. After all, children are very compelling. Almost everyone can understand the urgent needs of children when confronted directly by the children themselves. Coleman never missed an opportunity to make images of children visible. Pictures of children appeared on huge bus shelter signs; day care centers were frequent sites for press events; every event at City Hall was crawling with kids, no pun intended. In short, kids were featured prominently in the ‘campaign’ for a children’s budget, and as it progressed, more and more children were brought into the arena. Often these were children from community agencies, or the children of Coleman Board members. This included, as mentioned earlier, organizing a youth speak-out; youth attending meetings with

policy-makers; parents bringing their kids to hearings; even a children's version of the Budget, complete with the concepts in children's words accompanied by children's drawings.

The children and young people we included in our activities were extremely articulate, often moving in their efforts to convince policy-makers to fund services for them. In fact, one legislator begged us to stop bringing the youth to public hearings because it was so difficult to say "no" to them. Of course that plea only pushed us harder to make children visible. But Coleman also learned not to limit all strategies to traditional lobbying techniques. When the City's Budget Analyst prepared a report the agency didn't like, we prepared an alternative report, replicating exactly the format and style, and simply changing the content. When pictures of earthquake-shattered homes featured prominently in all papers, Coleman took pictures of pre-earthquake shattered homes of the poorest children, and maintained they looked just as bad. When we wanted to underline our message about the unmet needs of San Francisco's children, we brought Santa Claus and a group of children to put their wish-list at the foot of the Mayor's Christmas tree and sing carols to the Mayor in four different languages.

•**The media forced Coleman to up the ante.**

The media is accustomed to covering social problems, and is generally willing to cover children's issues long before politicians are willing to make them a priority. The media can also get the message to the public, which is the basis of any advocate's influence in the political process. Using the media is often the only way to push moral arguments, which have little impact when held behind closed doors at private meetings. One story in the paper about support for a particular program was sometimes equal to dozens of meetings, letters, phone calls, and public testimony.

The media can be an ally, but it is also fickle. It tires of issues previously covered or no longer 'hot.' This poses problems since budget battles are never short; they are long and tedious, and rarely consistently press worthy. Often, just when a cause most needs the punch that the press can offer, they are finished with the issue and on to another one.

When the first Children's Budget was released, Coleman got press coverage simply by tacking up all of the proposals on butcher paper in the Rotunda of City Hall and having young people hand-deliver copies to the Mayor and President of the Board of Supervisors in black envelopes. The means of delivery and the power of the document itself garnered lots of public attention. By the second year, the issue of a Children's Budget

wasn't new and catchy enough for the press, so Coleman did its own ad campaign (part paid and part pro-bono) in order to get public attention.

Coleman staff posted devastating quotes from kids in trouble asking people to support a Children's Budget on telephone polls. Coleman also staged events, sponsored a speak-out in which young people gave dramatic testimonials about their problems, and staged guerilla theater in City Hall about children being an endangered species in San Francisco.

Do you know the story of Martin Luther? He was taking on the whole Catholic Church, mostly for its rampant corruption, and he posted his theses right on the church doors. I have to admit, he crossed my mind when we were taping up our proposals in the Rotunda of City Hall!

By the end of the three years of presenting children's budgets we had run out of ideas for getting public attention. Advocates must constantly find new angles to sustain a certain level of attention. This is extremely difficult. It continually taxes our ingenuity, and sometimes affects the substantive policy proposals we make. To get press attention, often you have to position your issue in the most controversy-laden way. It's as simple as that. You almost learn to say things in an inflammatory way because that's what the press will cover. It's terrible, but true.

Issues are only sexy in the media for a certain amount of time, which is usually a far briefer a period than their actual relevance. I think it's really unfortunate in many ways that news has become entertainment, and you have to provide good entertainment if you're going to get news coverage. Now you can either reject that and say, "I won't do it – I will be pure." Or say, "That's what it is and we've got to become part of it." I chose the latter.

• **Advertising and advocacy have similarities.**

Budget battles are most successful when they are targeted toward just a few symbolic issues that are immediately and politically 'sellable' to the public. This runs contrary to good policy-planning concepts because policy analysts believe in developing a comprehensive, interrelated agenda, with programs based on the most urgent needs of the highest-risk populations. But when such analysts find themselves in the throes of a political budget battle, the struggle to identify the few issues and programs that have the most 'sex appeal' with the public becomes the priority.

Budget advocacy must also resonate with the other major events or problems that are occurring in the community and are foremost on people's minds. Using these problems as themes – whether it be a drug crisis, a natural disaster, or concern about violence – can be a powerful tool.

• **Drama and conflict get attention.**

One of the most memorable events of the entire budget advocacy process was the press conference jointly sponsored by Coleman and the African-American Agenda Coalition to protest the City's inaction in preventing drug violence. Several dozen individuals stood together, all holding coffins representing youth who had been killed in drug violence in San Francisco the prior year. The group called on the Mayor to declare a state of emergency and to immediately implement a number of the key recommendations in the Children's Budget.

The two things that people probably remember most about the Children's Budget campaigns were the proposals to replace gardeners (from the Recreation and Parks Department) with recreation workers who would supervise at-risk kids; and to use the funds normally spent on box seats for City officials at sports events in order to generate funds for a sports program for children and youth. These ideas got strong press coverage and embodied the major conflict of the Children's Budget: children vs. business-as-usual.

Editorials were written on this. It was one of the few things the person on the street knew about the Children's Budget. Conservative columnists and political analysts began to take the effort seriously because Coleman was willing to talk in realistic terms about the

City's overall funding picture and where funds for children's services might come from. The agency received a great deal of credit from the local political commentators and probably received a majority of the editorial endorsements because of this strategy.

• **Newspaper ads.**

One strategy recommended to Coleman was placing a full-page ad about the Children's Budget in the *San Francisco Chronicle*, the City's major newspaper. The ad contained arguments for the Budget, and coupons to be cut out and sent to the Mayor and Board of Supervisors to support the Budget. It cost approximately \$15,000, and did not turn out to be cost-effective. The timing of the budget process is complex, and it's nearly impossible to time a single ad so that it can have a strong enough impact. An ad is also an extremely high-risk undertaking because where the ad actually appears within the paper is unpredictable, as are other national and local events occurring on the day the ad is scheduled to run. The greatest value of an ad is to convince politicians that the issue and its advocates are serious and capable of being aggressive.

• **Some ideas carry a high price.**

It's important to note that presenting concrete ideas about where to get funding is a fairly unusual strategy on the local level. (To our knowledge, no other advocates in San Francisco had done this.) The general response of advocates to the politician's question, "Where can we get the money?" is "You're the policy makers; that's your problem." We decided that we lived in a time when that was no longer a responsible answer, and that we needed to suggest higher and lower priorities. We did it partly to be responsible advocates, and partly because we knew that this would grab public attention, and give us credibility.

Despite all the problems, Coleman doesn't regret the strategy of identifying funds that should be reallocated to children, and would probably adopt it again under certain circumstances. It was considered very daring to break the taboo you learn in Advocacy 101, which is that when the policy makers ask where they're supposed to get the funding, you're not supposed to answer the question.

In the end, almost none of the ideas that we recommended were adopted. And most of the policy-makers didn't want to deal with those issues, but it did force them to pay attention to us, and it did make a statement about the seriousness of our efforts. But no organization should adopt this strategy without knowing and weighing all the pros and cons.

While ideas about reallocating resources can be the basis for a great deal of public attention, they carry a high price. Every "resource" that is to be reallocated is a piece of turf being protected by some special interest group that potentially becomes an opponent.

Coleman learned this lesson the day it released the first Children's Budget and received an angry call from the head of the gardeners' union. Despite meetings and negotiations between Coleman and the union, when the amendment measure was on the ballot – four and-a-half years later – the leadership of the union blocked the endorsement of the San Francisco Labor Council. Coleman also entered into an angry letter exchange with the Chief of the Fire Department. Some commissioners will never forgive the agency for attacking their box seat perks; some probation officers saw Coleman as the enemy; and some in the business community saw the agency as just one more group trying to drive business out of the City. Many of these perceptions continue to this day.

This is a dilemma for an advocacy organization! Some of the most powerful entities in the municipal arena are the City employee unions, and all too often child advocates find themselves at odds with these unions. The advocates see the disparity between what goes into police and fire departments compared to services for children, and the detrimental impact on chil-

dren when institutional services are retained instead of funding innovative community-based alternatives. Advocates know that some department budgets are extravagant in light of budget constraints and overwhelming social needs. And yet, they don't want to oppose fair benefits for workers, or make enemies.

Coleman purposely refrained from taking on personnel issues at the police department in our reallocation proposals, and the benefit was that the Police Officers Association became strong supporters of our Charter Amendment. On the other hand, advocates don't want to buy into myths about the over-riding power of these unions, and really have no idea whether the passage of our charter amendment had any relation to the endorsement of the police.

Despite constantly recurring questions about where to get money for proposed programs, elected officials paid little heed to our suggestions. It may have been naive, but I really thought they would do some of it. They made some of the cuts, but they didn't reallocate those funds to children's services. In the end, politicians listen primarily to political power, and actually grew quite uncomfortable with our suggestions about how they could reallocate resources. Our ideas challenged them to make tough choices and to take on sacred cows. We realized that success had little to do with our ingenuity in finding funding, and almost everything to do with whether we were seen as a powerful constituency.

• **Meetings with politicians may not be helpful.**

One thing Coleman learned was that face-to-face negotiations with politicians are often unnecessary, and not particularly significant. That's because political decisions have little to do with reason or an exchange of ideas, and much more to do with perceived power. Real 'negotiations with politicians' occur in the press and in community forums. Despite the fact that the Mayor of San Francisco continually refused to meet directly with the children's budget advocates, "negotiations" went on for months, in some instances with favorable results.

While not having a real meeting distressed us a great deal personally, it actually gave us good ammunition for our campaign. On the other hand, meetings with our political allies often had negative results in that these meetings became opportunities for our "allies" to attempt to co-opt us (e.g., "explain" the budget dilemma). My observation is that advocates tend to put too much stock in a personal meeting with policy-makers, and too little into the 'public negotiating' process.

• **Reports don't create change – power does.**

Coleman spent a great deal of time producing detailed documents on the needs of the City's children, on public expenditures on children, and on program models. Initially the sheer impressiveness of all the work that had gone into the Children's Budget gave it credibility.

However, one should consider doing a cost-benefit analysis of time put into advocacy vs. time put into documentation. The documents are impressive and satisfying (they are concrete, and funders love them), but they don't necessarily lead to real change. In Coleman's case, some of the documentation work went unnoticed and seemed to play only a minimal role in the outcome.

- **Inside-the-system allies are important to find.**

Close allies inside government can make budget advocacy for children more effective. These allies provided critical specific information on the budget process. They let you know when budget cuts are planned even though they don't become public for months; they tell you who is on your side and who isn't; they inform you about whether your proposals are being considered. Sometimes these allies are not public about their support. Middle- or lower-level people within City bureaucracies often called Coleman with very useful suggestions based on their inside information. These were often people who were so frustrated inside the bureaucracy that they welcomed the opportunity to help a critic of the system. Coleman always worked closely with these people, and their confidentiality was always protected.

- **Legislators are more responsive than the executive branch of government.**

The legislative branch of government was generally more responsive to advocates on budget issues than the executive branch. This is partly because the legislative branch makes an effort to operate in public, as opposed to the executive branch which usually develops its budget proposals exclusively behind closed doors. The legislative branch has public hearings, and open votes on specific issues in the Budget, its discussions are covered by the press, and there is simply more accountability to the public. Legislators could 'adopt' various children and youth programs to fight for, and felt they could get political mileage out of being identified with a homeless program or recreation program or youth employment program.

- **Budget advocacy is a year-round process.**

Budget advocacy is a year-round process of building coalitions, developing proposals, and analyzing and negotiating budgets. Budget advocacy is extremely time-consuming, takes lots of preparation, and cannot be done effectively if it is limited to the 'budget season.'

• **The bull dog approach pays off!**

Coleman became known as “that group that will never go away.” Coleman was consistently informed, always there, and rarely missed a hearing or an opportunity to comment on the budget process. When there was no public testimony permitted, Coleman was in the back of the room with signs. When the press didn’t call for comments, Coleman called the press, or issued a newsletter. This persistence made children’s issues difficult to ignore.

I hope not every children’s advocacy group will have to go through what Coleman did for three years. Annual budget battles are a drain on resources in almost every way – financially, professionally, and emotionally. In many ways my thinking now is, “Go straight for the ballot.” Of course, this is an overstatement, as annual budget battles have to be part of every child advocate’s work. But an election is compelling. Let people in your community understand that they have the power to be advocates in the voting booth, and that children – who have no voice of their own in matters of policy – need adults to exercise that power on their behalf.