**Basics of building grassroots organizers for a grassroots movement.**

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**Intentions:**

**In this workshop, we will examine a model adopted in St. Louis, Missouri of building individual power, community power, and the power of an active coalition to raise up new leaders in the community of people with disabilities. Those leaders are then equipped to engage our community to take on issues important to us, challenge systems, and get tangible results from that challenge. We hope to finish up by asking how this might look for you and your organization.**

**BY:**

**Chris Worth: Chris Worth has 17 years of organizing experience. He is from West Virginia where he first began organizing in the enviromental movement until he began the Enable Project. He now resides in St. Louis and is the Organizing Team Manager at Paraquad.**

**Derek Wetherell: Derek Wetherell has 6 years of organizing experience. His back ground is in economic justice work focusing on St. Louis and Missouri. He continues to live in St. Louis and is the Systems Organizer at Paraquad in St. Louis.**

**Section 1: What is organizing?**

**Often times we will use organizing interchangeably with advocacy. However, these two methods of change are quite different. This is important because each on its own will produce different results, in very different ways. So let’s start by defining each.**

**Advocacy: This is the more traditional form of change for Centers for Independent Living and other large organizations. This method of change is largely focused on professionals speaking on behalf of a community of people, or on behalf of an individual organization or company.**

**Organizing: This method of change was used early on in the Independent Living Movement but has been replaced by Advocacy. This method of change is focused on building relationships, as a community of people with shared values and experiences, who then work together to make change that shapes our communities.**

**Each is necessary, but one is really great at making policy changes through grass-tops work and can be a more lengthy process. While the other is more on the ground and works towards building a mass movement with a strong emphasis on leadership development.**

**Section 2: What does it look like?**

**Paraquad in St. Louis has made a major commitment to community organizing and this commitment to community organizing and grass-roots work has turned into 9 neighborhood disability rights organizations doing work on the local level, 20 grass-roots organizers, 4 major wins, and major successes in Jefferson City with the help of the new leaders.**

**By investing in leadership development we have increased the presence of Independent Living in the community two fold. Additionally, the relationship between the CIL and the community of people with disabilities has grown with it.**

**Paraquad is now mixing its’ very successful advocacy program with a very successful organizing program, and it has clearly been working very well.**

**Section 3: Disability rights work necessitates Grass- Roots Work.**

**As said early on in the disability rights movement:**

“*Nothing about us, without us!”*

**In essence if we are not doing real Grass- Roots work and being intentional about building Grass- Roots Organizers then we are denying people the ability to be the best experts on their own needs and denying that they have crucial and valuable perspectives to contribute to their community. We have to do this hard work because if we aren’t we are not living up to the primary philosophies of our movement and we are certainly not building a powerful movement for disability rights.**

**Section 4: Identifying a leader**

**These are not a step by step process, but are guiding principles we find helpful in building new Grass- Roots Organizers. We really try to be very intentional about everything we do, and we are always evaluating.**

**- One on Ones are KEY! Having one on ones with people possibly coming in to organizing, to leadership, or to activism is not an option for organizing it is required because building relationships is core to organizing work and is the basis for everything that follows.**

**- Everyone has a unique role that they play because people are unique, and have dynamic experiences! Learn about individual gifts and talents! Some leaders have followers, and some have something else!**

**- Know your story and learn theirs! Sometimes their reluctance isn’t because they don’t have an interest it’s almost always coming from fear, isolation, or self-doubt.**

**- Let them know that it is going to be tedious and difficult work!!! If you tell them that it’s easy and not a lot to commit to A) you’re a liar, and B) when they find out they will duck out.**

**- There is always a “Task” coming out of meetings we don’t meet just to meet. Meetings are not why people get involved in anything.**

**Section 5: Leadership Development**

**Again this is more of a helpful list of core concepts for new Grass- Roots Organizers to really grasp. We believe that we are CONSTANTLY learning and part of that learning is doing, but the other part is evaluating.**

**- Relationship Building: The art of a One on One (active listening, and storytelling)**

**- Strategic Planning: Tactics are not strategy (strategy vs tactic, tactics, targets, problem vs issue)**

**- Evaluation: Evaluate everything because nothing is perfect … and if it was don’t you want to understand why?**

**- Experience… there are somethings you only learn through doing and at the end of the day you just have to do it…. And let’s face it people with disabilities don’t need any more simulated experiences..**

***Sample***

**Name of leader:**

**What kind of leadership style do they have?**

**What skills do they bring?**

**What skills are they interested in developing?**

**What is their personal story?**

**Why are they joining?**

**Task 1: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**

**Completed \_\_\_\_\_ incomplete \_\_\_\_\_\_**

**Names of Five Potential Grass- Roots Organizers**

**1) \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Meeting Date: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**

**2) \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Meeting Date: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**

**3) \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Meeting Date: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**

**4) \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Meeting Date: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**

**5) \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Meeting Date: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**