

**LOBBYING FOR WELFARE:
A BUDGET AUGMENTATION FOR ADULT PROTECTIVE SERVICES**

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When I think of a lobbyist, I envision a perfectly dressed individual wining and dining lawmakers, talking on his cell phone and negotiating laws that will benefit his clients. And when I think of a welfare agency, I imagine crowds of needy people pressing to receive assistance from a harried social worker who really has little to offer and even less desire to help the poor. I set out on my BASSC internship to see what happens when these two very different worlds intersect at the County Welfare Directors Association of California (CWDA).

CWDA advocates on behalf of and provides services to the 58 California county welfare agencies and, in doing so, faces the same problem as the counties themselves: they have little money. which in the lobbying business usually translates to little clout. However, the 58 counties rely heavily on CWDA to represent them in Sacramento and CWDA has built a reputation as an important player on health and welfare issues at the state. In fact, because the state is grappling with the implementation of the federal welfare reform bill this year, CWDA has become perhaps the most important partner in the development of the state's new welfare legislation.

I was interested in working with CWDA to learn how social service agencies could influence policy. My intent was to learn some of the tricks of the lobbying trade so I could bring them home to San Francisco. In discussions with my mentor, Frank Mecca, the Executive Director of CWDA, we decided the best lessons would come from hands on experience. Therefore, I focused the majority of my internship on a specific project: obtaining a budget augmentation for Adult Protective Services.

THE ADULT PROTECTIVE SERVICE PROGRAM

Adult Protective Services (APS) has long been treated as a step child in the welfare family. Child Protective Services programs have traditionally been the center of attention, due in large part to the strong advocacy groups working on behalf of abused and neglected children. Income maintenance programs have become the focus of most welfare agencies in recent years as they struggle to implement the new federal welfare reform law. This inattention to APS has left the program sorely underfunded and by most accounts, an inadequate system.

Current state law only requires counties to receive calls of elder or dependent adult abuse or neglect and to investigate promptly. Unlike most other programs administered by welfare agencies, there are no mandated time frames for services nor are there any mandates that the investigation be any more than a brief phone call.

Last fiscal year (FY 1996-97), CWDA attempted to gain new funding for the APS program. This was a last minute effort and virtually no energy was exerted on the project. Nonetheless, the budget item was approved by both houses of the legislature, but was ultimately eliminated in the budget super conference committee, which is accountable for balancing the state's budget.

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Because of the acknowledged long-term neglect of this program. CWDA had a commitment to working harder for an APS augmentation this year.

We selected the APS augmentation as a good project for me to work on because it is small enough for one person to get their arms around and because it would give me a good understanding from start to finish of the process of getting something approved at the state. At least, that is what I thought on my first day on the job.

MY PROJECT

After speeding up Interstate 80, worried I would be late, I arrived in Sacramento just before nine a.m. I sat on the subordinate's side of an executive desk, with Frank Mecca on the important side. In between phone calls to various legislative staff and welfare directors, this young man with an impressive title provided me with some of the history about Adult Protective Services. He says last year CWDA asked for \$15 million, but maybe we should ask for more this year. He tells me he has some meetings scheduled at the capitol and I can tag along. We might see some people about APS, too, he tells me as he shows off a rolling toy he got from Taco Bell.

During the course of the first day, I realized how important CWDA has become in the welfare debate and I notice that no one brought up APS unless we did. We dropped in several offices of key legislators including the chairpersons of budget committees, the Speaker's Office and others. We asked for a few minutes with some staffers and rarely even considered speaking to the elected officials. Frank told them that I would be leading an effort to get a budget augmentation for APS and that we would be asking for \$25, maybe \$30 million. The staffers, all of whom know Frank personally, asked questions: What will the money buy us? What do we spend on the program now? Why should we augment the budget? Unfortunately, neither of us could adequately answer their questions, yet Frank remained optimistic that we could get an augmentation for APS, we just needed to do a little more work.

RESEARCH

Before my next visit, I did some homework on APS. I took Frank's old file on the augmentation, a proposal for new legislative language that a CWDA committee prepared last year and some state statistical reports. The published research all indicated the need for additional services in APS on a nationwide level. In order to begin to answer the questions the staffers had, we decided to conduct a survey of all counties that would determine the trends in funding and staffing levels, the services they provided, estimates of unmet need in each county and priorities for additional funding. I prepared a survey and with limited review by CWDA staff, we sent it out. I was a little uncomfortable that more people hadn't reviewed it, but was eager to get it out to the counties.

Shortly after the survey was sent, I began getting phone calls from representatives from each of the counties. Since I knew so little about APS, I couldn't always answer the questions. I also discovered some language should have been clearer in the survey to avoid the questions. I did more research and soon was able to answer any question about the survey.

ANALYZING THE SURVEY RESULTS

Unfortunately, the surveys came in slowly. We had to send out several reminders to get the surveys to come in. In the end, we received 48 out of 58 surveys - an unusually high response rate for most surveys, but disappointingly low for an organization that was only surveying its members. The second disappointing discovery was that the surveys were not always complete. Because we were asking for information that dated back nearly ten years, many counties could not or would not find the data we needed. This presented problems with analyzing the results because we couldn't simply compare the first year to the most recent year.

Nonetheless, the surveys allowed us to compile some powerful data on the inadequacy of the APS program (see Figure 1 for complete results):

- state funding for APS has dropped 35%
- staffing has declined as much as 23%
- reported cases are increasing but counties' ability to respond has decreased
- less than 20% of counties respond to all APS calls We also learned about the priorities for using new funding and how the funding would benefit the vulnerable population the program serves. We were able to take the survey results back to legislative staff and adequately answer their questions.

WORKING WITH THE STAFF

While the surveys were being distributed, tabulated and analyzed, we continued to work with legislative staffers. We found sponsors for the augmentation, but this took a surprisingly long time. A Republican Assemblyman had expressed early interest in sponsoring the augmentation, but we wanted bi-partisan sponsorship, so we sought a Democratic co-sponsor. We sought input of the Assembly Speaker's Office so as not to bruise any egos. A Democrat was identified and expressed interest, however her staffer would not return calls. In the meantime, we couldn't work with the Republican staffer until we had the co-sponsor confirmed. Finally, we cornered the Democrat in the halls of the capitol, explained to her what was involved, and gave her a copy of a sponsorship letter. As soon as she realized that there was no work required of her, she was eager to work with us. The Republican staffer was a bit put off that we had waited so long, but seemed happy to put our letter onto her boss' letterhead. Unfortunately it was more than a month before she sent the sponsorship letter to the Budget Committee Chairs.

At the same time, we were working with elder and dependent adult advocates as well as the Service Employees International Union in order to garner outside support for the budget augmentation. We initiated a letter writing campaign, providing all potential supporters with sample letters and survey results so that their effort would be as easy as possible. I also met with a CWDA APS Committee to foster the enthusiasm of some of the service providers who would benefit from the budget augmentation.

MORE DELAYS

Despite the delays from the sponsors staff, the budget committee was still anticipating the augmentation request because of the early work we had done with the staff. We had to drop the

idea of a Senate hearing because there was concern about balancing the budget (although a number of Senators expressed their interest in sponsoring the augmentation). The Assembly hearing was postponed twice - once because the hearing conflicted with a hearing on welfare reform and the second time because staff from two legislators offices couldn't agree on an agenda.

By the time I finished my BASSC internship, the fate of the augmentation was unknown because of the delays. However, the outlook was still promising. With interest from the Senators and Assemblymembers, increasing support from counties and advocates and the relatively small dollar amount of the request we had a good feeling that the augmentation would survive the rest of the budget process.

LESSONS LEARNED

My experience with CWDA taught me some basic ways that welfare agencies, with typically negative public images can powerfully influence policy.

Do your homework

Know what you are asking for and why you need it. Anticipate questions or controversies. Research is essential to garnering support. Lobbyists are required to know all of the details and do all of the research.

Always be truthful

Your reputation is everything. If you don't know the answer to a question, pledge to get one as soon as possible. You lose your credibility permanently if you lie, don't return calls or don't follow through on a promise promptly.

Staffers are just as important as legislators

If you can get the ear of a staffer, you will eventually get the ear of the legislator. The staffers influence what is important for the legislator. You need to treat them as if they were the legislator; remember, they are helping you achieve your goal.

Make it easy for others to support you

Reach out to potential allies and tell them how they can support your cause. Give them exactly what they need to help you. Minimize the controversial items contained in your proposal. The more supporters you have, the more likely you are to win.

Offer to do all the work

You are much more likely to gain legislative support if you are the one that writes the letters, rallies the advocates, does the research and pulls it all together.

Give someone else all of the credit

While most professional lobbyists have big egos, the elected officials have even bigger ones. Don't compete with the legislators for publicity. Give them the credit for your hard work so they will want to work with you again.

Because welfare agencies do not have money or a lot of staff to help lobby for their needs, individuals within the agency have to build a reputation as a source of accurate information that can assist with policy development. In being a credible, honest and knowledgeable expert in the field, legislators, the press and the public will solicit the agency's input, and believe us the next time we lobby for welfare.

Figure 1 Adult Protective Services Key Findings of the CWDA Survey* April 1997

Funding for APS has always been inadequate and continues to decline

- Over a five year period from FY 1991-92 to FY 1996-97, total funding has dropped 15% in the eight largest counties.
- The state general fund allocation for APS dropped 35% from FY 1991-92 to FY 1996-97 in the eight largest counties.
- Over the same time period, the county match has dropped 24%. Due to ongoing budget cuts, counties have been unable to provide matching funds to fully draw down state and federal dollars.
- County overmatch funds have remained at a low of 5 to 6% of overall funding.

Staffing for APS is declining and insufficient to meet the needs

- Social Work staff in the largest counties has declined 10% over the last five years, mirroring the trend in funding.
- Administrative staffing has dropped 23% over the same time period.

Reported cases are increasing despite underreporting of abuse and neglect

- Total active APS cases increased 4% between 1991 and 1995.
- The number of emergency response cases increased by 3% while emergency response actions decreased by 6%.
- Non-emergency cases climbed 11%.
- Counties report as few as 1 in 8 cases of abuse or neglect are reported because the community knows APS is unable to adequately intervene.

Counties' ability to respond to calls for help has faltered

- Less than 20% of counties respond to all APS calls.
- Very few counties can afford a comprehensive APS program:
 - 45% do not provide any case management
 - 62% do not provide counseling
 - 64% do not have a 24 hour hotline

66% do not provide money management services

94% do not provide legal assistance 96% do not provide diagnostic treatment services

100% do not provide employment or education services

- Counties reported they must triage calls and indicated they are unable to respond to the following types of abuse or neglect:

allegations of fiduciary abuse

need for money management

cases of self neglect

cases involving drug or alcohol abuse

cases of general neglect

persons in need of mental health services

persons in need of shelter

persons in need of long term interventions

County APS programs are extremely limited and continue to be scaled back

- Nearly all counties provided some form of investigations, emergency response and information & referral services continuously from 1988 to 1997.
- Only 36% of counties staff a 24 hour hotline to respond to crisis at all hours of the day.

Many counties reported reducing services from 1988 to 1997:

25% of counties reduced staff

23% eliminated or reduced money management services

19% reduced or eliminated case management

13% reduced **their hours** of availability

10% no longer conduct in-person investigations for non-crisis cases

Many counties never provided any of these optional services.

Counties prioritized new APS funding to be used to fill the gaps in the current system

- 50% of counties cited the need to be able to place elderly or dependent adults in emergency shelters, much like domestic violence shelters. 21% of counties cited the need for funds for other emergency needs.
- 44% of counties said new funds would allow them to do case management or follow-up work with victims to ensure they do not relapse into crisis
- 44% of counties said they would hire additional social work staff with the funds and 40% said they would expand their hours, with a goal of staffing a 24 hour hotline.
- Counties prioritized prevention and education activities. 35% of counties would provide outreach to the community to educate them on the needs of elders and the availability of APS. 13% would provide respite care for caregivers and 13% would perform other preventive services.
- 25% of counties would add money management or representative payee services. A number of health-related services were also prioritized: 21% would add mental health services, 10% would hire medical consultants and 6% would purchase emergency personal care services.

The elderly and dependent adults would benefit from this modest budget augmentation

- Counties will improve services available to victims of abuse or neglect by providing longer term services, to more people, and on a more timely basis.
- Emergency services, including shelter, will create a safe place for victims, literally saving lives.
- Increased preventive activities and longer term interventions will allow more clients to maintain independent living situations and their financial independence, also avoiding the

more costly institutionalization or repeat referrals that often occur without adequate intervention.

- All of these services enhance the quality of life for elderly and dependent adults by keeping them connected with society in a safe, healthy environment.

* The County Welfare Directors Association (CWDA) conducted a survey during February 1997 amongst the 58 California counties. Forty eight (83%) responded to the survey, which asked about funding and staff levels, caseloads and services in APS.