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To cite this article: Catherine M. Vu MSW , Sara L. Schwartz & Michael J. Austin (2011) BANANAS: Providing Child Care Services to a Multi-Ethnic Community, Journal of Evidence-Based Social Work, 8:1-2, 29-44

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/15433714.2011.542395>



Published online: 16 Mar 2011.



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## ORGANIZATIONAL EXEMPLARS OF SUSTAINED LEADERSHIP

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### **BANANAS: Providing Child Care Services to a Multi-Ethnic Community**

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*BANANAS, Inc. is a nonprofit organization that has provided child care resource and referral services for over 35 years. BANANAS emerged as a grassroots effort initiated by a group of female volunteers who sought to build a network of women with children who needed childcare. As the organization developed, its leaders recognized and responded to additional needs, including resource and information sharing, workshops and classes, and political advocacy. Beginning as a collective, BANANAS has grown into a multifaceted service delivery and advocacy nonprofit operating with an annual budget of \$12 million. This history of the agency reflects the development of a unique community-based effort, its challenges and rewards, and the multiple successes that this pioneering nonprofit has experienced.*

**KEYWORDS** *Organizational history, community-based organization, grass-roots collective, child care services*

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Many thanks to the BANANAS staff for their welcoming smiles and a friendly hellos. We are especially grateful to Betty Cohen, Arlyce Currie, Blanca Nunez, Jo-Ellen Spencer, Don Jen, Judy Calder, and Eric Peterson for taking time out of their busy schedules to share their memories and experiences at BANANAS.

All written and verbal sources used to develop this case study can be found in the Appendix B.

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## INTRODUCTION TO BANANAS

BANANAS, Inc. is a vibrant, multifaceted, nonprofit organization with an annual budget of \$12 million dollars (2008). BANANAS has been providing Northern Alameda County (located in the San Francisco Bay Area of Northern California) with child care resource and referral services for over 35 years. BANANAS is more than just a place to find childcare. Its services are as diverse as the staff who delivers them and the clients who receive them. From workshops on children with special needs, to political advocacy for immigrant parents, to everyday problem-solving and trouble-shooting with families, this organization has become well-known for its ability to deliver a variety of services to a vast number of clients.

BANANAS offers free parenting information, workshops, and referrals to family childcare, childcare centers, preschools, babysitters/in-home caregivers/nannies/shares and playgroups. Additionally, BANANAS is contracted by the state of California and the Department of Education to administer childcare subsidies for parents in need and to offer trainings, workshops, classes, and technical support to caregivers and childcare programs to assure a wide selection of quality care. Services are offered in the following languages: Amharic Tigrinya, Chinese (Cantonese and Mandarin), English, French, Laotian, Mien, Spanish, Thai, and Vietnamese.

This noble work has not been without its challenges and conflicts. There have been times when BANANAS has been confronted with ethical dilemmas, responses to unpopular decisions, and failures that have tested their strength as an organization. This case study documents the rich history of BANANAS from its early beginnings as an innovative non-profit organization to the pioneering work that continues beyond its first 35 years.

## BANANAS—THE ORGANIZATION

BANANAS is housed in a two-story, open, spacious, and warm location where clients feel welcome. The organization owns the building, creating a sense of permanency and confidence that the agency will remain active in the community. The physical space clearly reflects the personality of the organization: controlled chaos in a professional but fun-loving, family-friendly environment. The front office is always lively and busy, with phones ringing, people talking, and kids playing. Surrounded by photographs of children, agency memorabilia, and kid-friendly paraphernalia, the office is usually swarming with people and activity. The posters and pictures create a sense of nurturance and support that emanates from the staff and the organization as a whole.

The office space is a maze of desks, chairs, and file cabinets that fit together to form a harmonious environment. The place is designed so that

no office space belong to single individuals in order to create a sense of teamwork among all staff and to reflect the organization's early beginnings as a collective. There is a special room that is designated as a baby room, complete with a crib and listening devices so that babies and toddlers can nap while their parents work. When there are no children sleeping in the room, it is used as an informal meeting space or a workroom. The second floor of the building houses the reference library and a large conference room that is used for evening classes and workshops (for up to 50 people), weekly staff meetings, and celebrations.

## Services

- *Child care referrals and information:* BANANAS provides referrals and information for parents and providers using an extensive database consisting of over 1,100 licensed family childcare homes and centers in Northern Alameda County. This database includes information on hundreds of in-home childcare providers and parent-created childcare (shares, playgroups, cooperatives, and exchanges). Tips on choosing childcare are provided via free handouts and conversations. Information is shared on a variety of topics including health, public policy, counseling, support groups, and workshops.
- *Counseling and support:* BANANAS offers a 24-hour “warmline” to help parents and providers with questions that they have about caring for children. Initiated in 1976, this phone service also provides referrals to other counseling and support agencies. Support to parents and providers is also in the form of workshops and college classes. The topics include *Spanish Parenting Classes*, *Parent First Aid and Emergency Care for Babies and Small Children*, *Inclusion is Diversity*, and *Caring for Kids with Mobility Challenges*.
- *Employment services:* BANANAS assists clients looking for employment through various referral methods, including a listing of public announcements and bulletins that are posted throughout the agency and contained in a file for clients to review.
- *Subsidized child care:* BANANAS is funded by the State Department of Education to provide subsidized child care through the Alternative Payments (AP) program and provides referrals to subsidized child care programs that help low-income Northern Alameda County parents pay for child care. With one subsidized program for infants in 1978, BANANAS now operates 17 programs for over 2,000 children.
- *Publications and libraries:* BANANAS has developed a range of publications and books for families and children, including a newsletter published five times a year and over 80 flyers offering information and ideas on childcare and parenting topics. These publications are translated into Spanish, Chinese, Laotian, and Vietnamese. The BANANAS library houses

over 5,000 books, videos, and 50,000 articles on parenting and childcare for clients to borrow.

- *Scrounge*: The “scrounge” is a service that provides for the free exchange of donated toys, clothes, equipment, diapers, and furniture. The scrounge has been a vital “component” of the agency throughout its history and the maintenance of it is even listed in job descriptions.

## Early Beginnings

In the 1960s, as more women entered the work force, a national interest in childcare issues and provision grew. The federal government funded programs called the Community Coordinated Child Care (4-Cs) that were designed to create community childcare agencies to provide resource and referral support for families in need of child care. Local advisory boards helped to allocate funds to community agencies. Berkeley’s 4-Cs advisory board was made up of local residents who were concerned about the quality and accessibility of childcare for the community. Despite the common interest of the advisory board members, differences arose due to the strict structure and regimentation of the board’s bureaucracy. As a result, two women, Sheila Darr and Mary Millman, left the Berkeley advisory council to form an organization that would be accessible to and actively engage community members in its provision of childcare services.

In 1973, Sheila and Mary formed a group of mothers who were interested in finding playmates for their children. What they discovered were needs in addition to finding friends for their children: they found that the community needed to come together as a village to raise its children in a changing economy where more women entered the workforce and needed childcare. Many families struggled to find adequate care for their children and felt isolated as they sought to meet their need for services. Sheila and Mary wanted to help women with children connect to other women in similar situations in order to share their experiences, knowledge, and resources.

A group of mothers who were concerned about childcare in the community formed networks via word-of-mouth. A phone line was set up at the Berkeley Women’s Center in the YWCA for local residents to call in and ask questions. The names, contact information, and issues of each caller was recorded and filed. An initial group of 10 mothers volunteered to answer phone calls during specified times and link families with one another to form cooperative child care arrangements. Weekly meetings were held in the homes of volunteers and included an array of topics about childcare and related issues emerging from telephone calls.

Over time, the meetings became longer and more intense, the number of phone calls increased and the questions became more complex, suggesting that issues went well beyond childcare. Reviewing the data collected from

the phone calls, the volunteers discovered that the topics raised by community members involved other concerns including public health, housing, mental health, consumer safety, and education. This inspired the founders to advocate on behalf of families in need on topics related, but not limited to, childcare. Based on what they discovered from community searches of bulletin boards, newspapers, and conversations in the park, the volunteers decided to organize into a formal organization to address the issues of child care as well as concerns related to the well-being of families and children.

The mothers envisioned a grassroots organization based on the premise that parents are the best experts when it comes to their children. The organization would be rooted in the idea that families are able and capable of making the best decisions based on their own needs when given supportive, non-judgmental information. Not only would this organization provide resource and referral support, it would support families in addressing their current concerns, whether about childcare or any other issue. Based on these principles, these pioneering women founded a community-based grassroots organization that they called BANANAS: A Place to Find Playmates.<sup>1</sup> The founding members selected their name for three reasons: (1) their children were at the stage of eating mostly bananas, (2) they sometimes felt that they were “going bananas” with the daily ups and downs of parenting and the search for quality childcare, and (3) they wanted a non-bureaucratic and memorable name for the organization. The mission of the new organization included the following:

- serve the diverse families of northern Alameda County (Alameda, Albany, Berkeley, Emeryville, Oakland, and Piedmont) with free information on child care family services;
- offer services to enable all families to choose from a wide variety of support services thereby encouraging maximum self-sufficiency;
- select services to offer which are based on the agency staff continuously listening and responding to the changing family needs of BANANAS clients; and
- play a role in society’s recognizing its responsibility to support families and child care providers.

The current goals of BANANAS’ are to:

- provide child care resource and referral services to the diverse and changing families of Northern Alameda County;
- facilitate the delivery of subsidized child care to as many income eligible families as possible while remaining clearly within BANANAS’ mission as a resource and referral agency;
- keep the name of BANANAS and its mission before the public;

- stabilize BANANAS' funding base in order to insure the ultimate fiscal health of the agency and to guarantee its long-term ability to deliver services professionally and efficiently; and
- evaluate needs and plan proactively (not retroactively) to carry BANANAS into the 2000s as a dynamic, responsive and effective agency.

## Governance and Decision Making

One of the ideals that the founding mothers established from the start was the importance of making decisions by consensus and operating as a collective. Popular in the 1960s and 1970s, collectives were a unique way of promoting shared decision-making. Even if members do not fully agree with every aspect of the decision reached by consensus, all members agree to accept or live with the decisions because they are involved in the process. With this outlined, each member of the group is able to voice her opinion about a particular issue until consensus is reached.

The collective approach encouraged the sharing of different perspectives and experiences. The volunteers came with different educational backgrounds, training, and life experiences. The common factor uniting these women was a passion for social justice and addressing the needs of children and families. With these shared values, the women were able to discuss the topics that came up for them and were open to listening to other viewpoints.

The collective was not without its struggles. Intense and heated discussions sometimes erupted over emotional topics. Collective decision-making requires long hours of debate and persuasion. As a current member of the executive team and one of the original founders of BANANAS noted, "Meetings would go on and on and into the wee hours of the morning in which temperamental people posed challenging issues. But all in all, it was exciting and good, and we got to learn more about each other" (Phone interview, May 17, 2007).

In 1976 the collective decided to move out of the Berkeley YWCA Women's Center and into their own space based on the reality that this strongly feminist organization did not include families or children in their feminist activism. For example, the Berkeley Women's Center did not allow men on the premises of their building, which made it difficult for BANANAS to hold meetings for families with fathers.

As years went by and the organization expanded, many of the original members left the agency and the ideals of collective decision-making needed to be adapted to the changing needs of the organization. While all staff had been involved in collective decision-making, it soon became apparent that a senior management committee was needed consisting of the four members with the most seniority. While these members divided their responsibilities formally, they continue to work together as a team to problem-solve organizational issues.

## ERA OF EXPANSION

The years after the 1974 founding of BANANAS as an IRS 501(C)3 non-profit organization, the agency sought expansion through funding from public agencies and private foundations. Moving to an office on Channing Way in 1974 provided an impetus to develop organizational systems, increase services, expand office hours for walk-in clients and workshops for parents.

As one of its early accomplishments, in 1974 the small informal voluntary organization wrote the first of many free publications called the *BANANAS Guide for Underfives* on inexpensive activities and local resources for families and children. The support from the community for the guides suggested that there was a great need for more services that were specifically tailored to families with children and child care needs. BANANAS' work was twofold: (1) to serve as a central contact point for parents seeking playgroups and child care and (2) to help providers of home-based child care programs with a way of reaching clients.

As a link between parents and providers, the agency sought to generate resources in order to expand services. For the first two years of BANANAS' existence, the services were provided on a purely voluntary basis. Members of the collective contributed innumerable hours of their time on the phone and in the office without pay. Funding was needed if the organization was to expand. In 1975, BANANAS received its first three-year \$24,000 grant from the San Francisco Foundation, which was used to pay for the work that had been carried out by the volunteers.

As the organization became more recognized in the community and its services validated, more funding was secured. In 1976, they received a ten-year grant from the Rosenberg Foundation. In the same year they received the \$10,000 John R. May Award for being an outstanding community organization selected by the San Francisco Foundation and \$10,000 from the Ms. Foundation. The California Department of Education provided the first funding for resource and referral services in 1977 and 1978 followed by state funding for AP programs to help low-income parents of infants and toddlers pay for child care. With these grants, BANANAS was able to greatly expand their services.

In 1973, the federal government passed the Comprehensive Employment and Training Act (CETA) to train workers and offer them jobs in public service. CETA provided funding for 12–14-month full-time jobs in public agencies or nonprofit organizations that enabled BANANAS to expand its staff. At the end of the grant-funded positions, BANANAS sought foundation funding in order to keep their CETA staff, three of whom are still a part of the agency today.

One of the most memorable events in the history of BANANAS was the receipt of funding from the State Department of Education as part of a pilot



program to assess alternative approaches to providing less costly childcare outside of the use of school districts and through the use of community providers. Known as the childcare AP program, in 1977 the Department of Education began to provide funding for eligible families to receive childcare from licensed family child care homes, centers, or exempt childcare providers on the provision that parents could choose their own childcare provider. The State authorizes local community organizations like BANANAS to administer the AP programs that contract with the parent to pay the provider directly. BANANAS incorporated an AP program into the organization in 1977. Not only did this new program allow parents to choose their own childcare provider (consistent with BANANAS principle that parents know what is best for their children), but it also provided new public childcare funding for eligible families and expanded the need for high quality resource and referral agencies. Unlike foundation funding, state funding meant that BANANAS acquired a stable source of funding. In 2008, government money (from the State, County, and City) comprises approximately 97% of BANANAS'S funding.

Another important funding source came from the 1997 CalWORKS program (California's implementation of the federal Temporary Assistance to Needy Families, or TANF), that provided state funding for childcare for parents on welfare. When state funding was made available for childcare through CalWORKs, BANANAS was faced with the decision of whether they should take advantage of the money that was being offered. On the one hand, the amount of money that was being offered would have allowed BANANAS to expand its services considerably, enabling the organization to more than double its capacity. Many staff wanted to take advantage of the state dollars because they felt that the money could provide more career opportunities for the staff and organizational growth for BANANAS. On the other hand, the increase in funding would mean that BANANAS would primarily serve parents who had just come from the welfare system. This contradicted BANANAS philosophy of serving everyone in the community, not just those who were poor. In addition, some staff did not want to take the money because they did not want to police and monitor families who were coming off of welfare to make sure that they were meeting welfare-to-work requirements. The organizational dynamics created by accepting Stage 1 childcare CalWORKS money might change the nature of the relationship that staff had with clients.

After lengthy discussion in staff and board meetings, BANANAS decided against taking Stage 1 money. While there were benefits to having millions of dollars added to the budget, the organization would have suffered in its relationship with clients. Instead of taking Stage 1 money, BANANAS decided to accept money from Stage 2 and 3 programs that would allow them to work with parents who came from an economically diverse population (e.g., parents who were either looking for employment or already working). By

keeping the interests of the community in perspective, not just focusing on what would add more money for it, BANANAS confirmed its commitment to work for everyone in the community, not just a specific population. Today, funding from CalWORKs contributes \$8 million, over half of the agency's annual budget.

### Fundraising

Although there were many successes in terms of funding, the lack of stable government and foundation grants led BANANAS to seek more stable and flexible resources of funding. In 1987 in collaboration with five other agencies, they began to promote Bingo nights at a local venue. It became a huge success, with an auditorium packed every week with local residents who wanted to try their luck at Bingo as well as support local nonprofits. The success was directly related to the willingness of the staff to work more hours. After three and one-half years, BANANAS had gained about \$350,000 from Bingo, but could no longer participate due to the extra demands on staff. It was decided that the money raised would be used to start an endowment, with the annual interest allocated to staff bonuses and pay increases. As of 2008, there is over \$750,000 in this endowment fund.

With diversified funding sources from grants, government, and fundraisers, BANANAS has been able to expand its focus beyond childcare information and referral to include all aspects of the family life. A diversified funding base gave BANANAS the flexibility and opportunity to advocate for the needs of the entire family. The careful planning of financial assets has contributed to the successes of the organization.

### Advocacy and Diversity

BANANAS has been heavily involved in advocacy since its inception; however, it has not always been easy or successful. There were times when BANANAS has taken unpopular positions to stand up for what they feel is best for parents and children and times when the organization's leaders came under attack for their actions or inactions. Through it all, the driving force behind their continued pursuit of social justice for all families with children has been the parents and the community that they serve. BANANAS' continuing efforts to improve the lives of families and children have contributed to their staying power in the community. Because BANANAS serves such a diverse population, they are able to gain a variety of different perspectives on childcare and family well being that inform their advocacy efforts and organizational values. Accurately representing and voicing the needs of parents has earned BANANAS continuing community support.

In addition to advocacy, BANANAS is committed to diversity related to both employing a diverse staff (experiences, backgrounds, and languages)

and a diverse client population. The organization's dedication to serving all people, regardless of ethnicity, race, or socio-economic background, has contributed to its on-going success in the community.

In the 1980s, BANANAS received Spanish language training funds in early childhood education that helped to expand services to Spanish-speaking clients. Agency materials were translated into Spanish for parents and providers in the community who had child care and family concerns. Education programs were developed to provide Spanish-speaking parents and providers with knowledge about various childcare topics, such as child development, health and safety, and child care policies for providers. These classes were held in the evenings and on weekends to accommodate working schedules. In addition to information and resources for Spanish speakers, advocacy was done on behalf of the Latino community.

As the need for Spanish services increased and the as the community changed, so did the needs of other populations. In addition to hiring a Latina staff member in 1977, BANANAS hired a Chinese-speaking staff member in 1980, Vietnamese in 1988, Thai and Laotian in 1994, Amharic in 1996, and Mien in 1999. In 2008, BANANAS was offering services in 10 different languages that helped to build rapport with a variety of different cultural communities.

### Community Action and Involvement

While the advocacy efforts of BANANAS have concentrated on childcare issues, BANANAS has also sought to address the more diverse and holistic concerns of families and children by engaging in considerable community involvement that has led to the following array of childcare and family support services:

- Legal services launched in 1978 as the result of a grant from the Boalt Law Foundation (University of California, Berkeley) to hire a lawyer to work specifically on childcare issues in the community. This service gave childcare consumers and providers an opportunity to address legal issues related to their childcare rights and responsibilities.
- Lobbying services emerging out of the efforts of BANANAS' Parent Voices, a parent-run grassroots organization that lobbies for high quality, accessible, and affordable childcare for all families. Parent Voices currently provides parents with a mechanism to share their struggles, hardships, and joys with legislators so that child care policies can be informed by the reality of everyday life for California families. Parent Voices helps make the personal stories of parents understandable to policy makers within a policy framework. What began as a small group of parent advocates has flourished into a statewide nine chapter organization that has made significant impacts in child care legislation in California.

- Community entertainment in the form of the annual Pickle Family Circus, begun in 1975, that provides a day of family fun with a small, outdoor, one-ring traveling circus based in San Francisco. It was an all-day event where families could get together to enjoy the food and entertainment and organizations could network with one another. BANANAS organized the event and raised funds from local sponsors and donors. Childcare centers and organizations could sponsor food and games to earn money for their programs. This event was extremely successful. Not only did it provide a fun activity for families and children, but it also contributed to community education where residents and local agencies came together to learn about community resources. This tradition continued for thirteen years until 1987, when the last circus event was held.

### Celebrations

In 1983, BANANAS celebrated its 10th anniversary. What started out as a small informal network had blossomed into a large, successful nonprofit organization that is well integrated into the community. As a community-based organization, BANANAS celebrated its anniversary by giving back to the community that had supported it through the years in the form of a party at the Pickle Family Circus. The 20th anniversary in 1993 was celebrated in the same fashion with free admission to a party at Fairyland Park at Lake Merritt in Oakland. Despite the rain, over 3,000 people attended to demonstrate community support for the work of BANANAS.

BANANAS has had many accomplishments in its first 35 years. These include securing funding, providing useful and effective services, launching successful advocacy campaigns, and producing well-received publications on child care and family support. While these achievements are important, it is the people impacted by the existence of BANANAS that is celebrated. Celebrations of staff becoming citizens are commemorated. Babies and marriages are celebrated with parties, presents, and cake. Retirees are honored with community gatherings. Staff anniversaries and birthdays are always announced at meetings. These connections and relationships with people are the strength of the organization.

### Struggles and Challenges

BANANAS has dealt with several significant struggles during its first 35 years. One of their greatest challenges involved the evaluation of its management structure and the recommendations for improvement made in the 1980s. Over a two- to three-year period that included the involvement of a consultant, it soon became clear that the recommendation of a new hierarchical approach did not fit with the style, pace, and history of the organization.

An emotionally difficult decision was made to return to the collective management structure, and the removal of several managerial positions. These actions created an unsettling atmosphere throughout the organization as staff questioned the decisions being made by the executive team.

Another difficult moment in the history of BANANAS involved the termination of a particular staff member. In the 1980s, when the collective nature BANANAS was still in place, the sister of a long-time staff member was hired to become a part of the organization. Based on a variety of performance issues, the relative needed to be terminated after five years of service. This caused significant tension among the members of the collective where some newer staff members accused the older members of being unfair and biased. Because there was no nepotism policy in existence at the time, the organization did not have the necessary procedures to handle the situation. Eventually, the terminated staff member left the organization, but not without taking an emotional toll on its members. In response to this incident, the collective approach to management was changed whereby staff members needed to be part of the organization for at least a year before existing members voted them into the collective.

## BANANAS TODAY

As a nonprofit, BANANAS operates with a Board of Directors, an executive team of four engaged in collective decision-making with extensive staff input, a staff of 38 and numerous volunteers. This organizational growth from a group of women volunteers into a \$13 million service and advocacy organization is quite impressive. The current Board of Directors consists of seven members in addition to the executive team as non-voting members. The board members reflect the diversity of clients (two men and five women, representing various sexual orientations, ethnic, educational, socioeconomic, and professional backgrounds). Retaining its roots as a collective, the Board of Directors includes the executive team of staff as part of its governance in order to provide the Board with an understanding of the daily activities and needs of the organization. The decisions reached by the Board are made by consensus in order to capture different points of views and include different perspectives.

The executive team consists of four women who have been with the organization since its early beginnings. Unlike other organizations, the executive team works along side their staff, often performing tasks similar to their staff. In addition to planning, organizing, and running its many projects, executive team members can often be seen answering phone calls, welcoming clients in the lobby, or accepting donations for the scrounge. The executive team uses a delegation approach with program managers by meeting with them as needed or to occasionally check in. Other than these

times, the executive team trusts that the managers are doing their jobs and adequately supervising their staff. The entire organization meets at Friday staff meetings, where executive team members hear about the issues facing different departments.

The staff at BANANAS is one of the biggest strengths of the organization. With only 38 members (not all of them full time), BANANAS is able to serve a large number of clients in a variety of different ways. Although the majority of staff is female, all are drawn from the diverse community in which the organization is located. The staff represents a variety of ethnic cultures, socioeconomic backgrounds, and diverse experiences. Many of the staff have either been former clients or have been connected to the organization in one way or another. The staff perceives the grassroots culture of the organization to be the major reason for so many people remaining with the organization for such a long time.

As an organization that started out with volunteers, BANANAS continues to value the volunteer efforts of community members and professionals. These efforts include leading workshops, contributing expertise to the creation of educational materials, and delivering services to clients. For example, BANANAS has asked lawyers from the community to do pro bono work for parents regarding immigration and other legal issues. Nurse practitioners have also donated their time and skills to educate clients on health and safety issues.

The annual operating budget of BANANAS has consistently grown over the years as illustrated in Appendix A. As noted, the organization's operating budget began its steady increase in 1982. The sharp spike between 1996 and 1998 reflects the initial government funding that was earmarked for parents leaving CalWORKs in Stage 2 and Stage 3. The years after 1997 show a fluctuation in annual budgets to indicate the changes within the organization. BANANAS currently operates on a budget of more than \$12 million. The organization's primary sources of funding come from the government, foundations, the United Way, private donations, interest income, and miscellaneous local contracts also contribute to the overall budget.

Government funding comes primarily from the State Department of Education that subsidizes a variety of BANANAS' programs such as information and referral, AP, and respite childcare. The state also provides funding from the CalWORKs program. Other government funders include the City of Oakland, the City of Berkeley, and Alameda County. BANANAS also receives government funding to run specific programs (e.g., the Department of Justice funds Trustline and state funding during the GAIN welfare program).

BANANAS also receives money from foundations, although these funds have declined over the years (15% in 1985 and less than 1% in 2004). Pursuit of foundation funding has also been challenging for an unconventional agency like BANANAS. Grants from foundations require adherence to narrow guidelines and may target specific populations. Since BANANAS provides

support for a wide range of family needs and serves all clients, it is difficult for them to meet the time-limited expectations of foundation grants.

BANANAS derives revenues from private donations, interest income, miscellaneous contracts, and an annual fundraiser. When BANANAS decided to buy its current building at 5232 Claremont Avenue in Oakland, the organization's financial consultants made the decision to create an entity separate from BANANAS to purchase the building. This entity, called Friends of BANANAS (FOB), would be financial sponsors of the transaction. Since BANANAS could not use state or foundation money to purchase the building, it used the money earned from Bingo as a down payment for the building. FOB, which has its own Board of Directors, owns and oversees the building.

## CONCLUSION

BANANAS began with a group of 10 dedicated and talented women who were committed to developing a grassroots organization that served children and families with childcare and support services. The spirit of the current staff can be traced to BANANAS' early days as a collective where every member was able to contribute her ideas and suggestions, giving her a sense of ownership in the fate of the organization. BANANAS has retained its mission of providing services to everyone who needs them, regardless of race, gender, or socioeconomic background. At times, this mission has precluded the organization from receiving grants and government funding.

One of the unique characteristics of this organization is its approach to information and referral as well as family support services for a diverse population within a community involvement framework. From participation in community events to delivering culturally competent services to electing a Board of Directors that reflects diverse communities, BANANAS has become a unique community-based organization. Another important feature of this organization is the prominence of relationships. Whether these relationships are between staff and clients or among coworkers, BANANAS creates a family-like atmosphere where people from different backgrounds are welcomed, respected, and valued. The organization has developed a culture that fosters these strong relationships and relationship-making abilities.

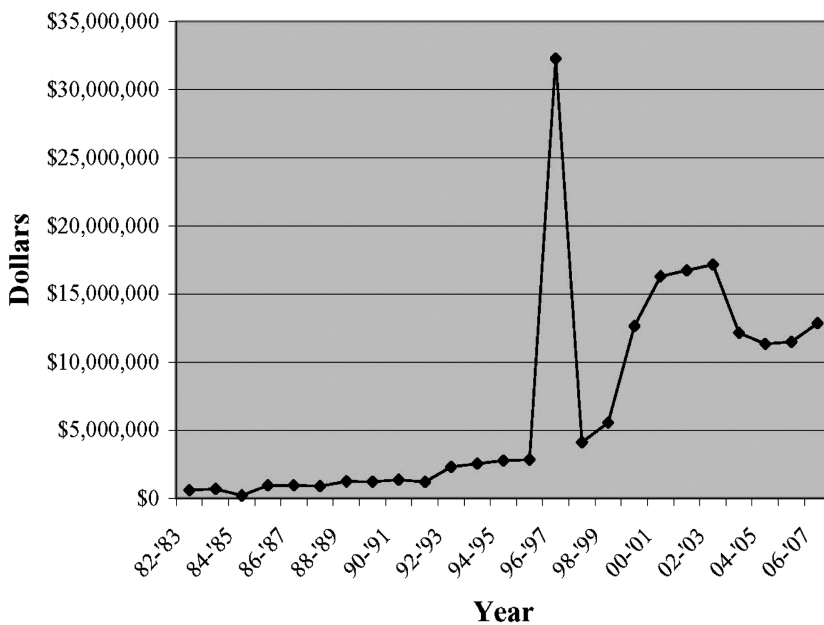
BANANAS has served its community for over 35 years. They have been through many ups and downs, all of which have provided learning experiences that have made the organization stronger. The driving force behind their continued service is the community itself. The staff at BANANAS continues to work for the needs of parents and families by providing services and by advocating for their rights and concerns. The close contact with the people they serve has influenced the staff's values and beliefs, and is

expressed as follows: “It is a privilege to work hard with and for families of this community, and we hope that we can continue to thrive and pass on this tradition to others” (BANANAS Newsletter, 1999).

NOTE

1. The name was changed to BANANAS Inc. after too many adults requested “playmates” for themselves, not their children!

APPENDIX A: OPERATING BUDGET FROM 1982–2007



APPENDIX B: SOURCES OF INFORMATION

Interviews

- Judy Calder—former staff
- Betty Cohen—Executive Director
- Arlyce Curry—Program Director (Resource and Referral)
- Don Jen—Board Chair
- Blanca Nunez—Program Director (Bilingual Services)
- Erik Peterson—current staff
- Jo-Ellen Spencer—Financial Officer and Alternative Payment Component Director



## Documents

BANANAS' Board of Director Meeting Minutes

BANANAS' Annual Reports and Financial Statements

BANANAS' Grant Proposals

BANANAS' Mission and Philosophy Statement

BANANAS' Organizational Chart

BANANAS' Organizational History Staff Survey

BANANAS' Policy and Procedure Manual

BANANAS' Publications and Newsletters

*Family Circle Magazine*. (1988).

Letters of Correspondence between BANANAS' leaders and funders

*Parenting Magazine*. (1997).

*Parent's Magazine*. (1980).