



Garland Yates on involving organizers and organizing principles in MC

“We were trying to put families in a different place. We wanted to build a constituency of families connected to each other, beyond any organizational framework. It would be about making change happen based on what they thought, and building their capacity to do this.

“But to achieve this we realized that we needed to make connections with people on the ground who were already doing organizing. And we needed to use some of the understandings about how to engage and empower communities that come out of organizing.

“But it wasn’t just *fund* community organizing. It was build relationships with the organizing community. And work with them to help mobilize their constituencies. This kept us in a familiar conversation. It wasn’t abstract to them.

“The notion that we were going to build a constituency of families that wasn’t wedded to any one organizational structure *was* strange to people. They didn’t understand that. Their pedagogy was that you achieve community change by building the strongest possible organization. But they were intrigued.

“And they could see our commitment to the science and traditions of community organizing. They could see it in the way we went about our work: building relationships, doing research, building knowledge. These are some of the basic tenets of organizing. This became our foundation.

“With the other stakeholders, we had to help them feel comfortable about walking into a process that potentially was confrontative. We concentrated on making the space around the table safe. Not false or phony but safe. People still needed to be honest and talk with each other and deal with issues, but in a respectful manner. We used our influence to create that kind of environment.”