

WORKING PAPER SERIES

**BUSINESS LEADERS
AS LEGISLATIVE ADVOCATES
FOR CHILDREN**

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The Purpose of the Working Paper Series is to share ideas and potential solutions about how all American families can meet the basic requirements for the healthy development of their children.

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Business Leaders as Legislative Advocates for Children

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Reflections on Successful Legislative Advocacy for Children:

Lessons Learned from the Active Engagement of Business Leaders as Advocates for Children

By Margaret Blood

Several of Boston's key business leaders assumed active and very visible roles as advocates for children during the 1996 and 1997 Massachusetts legislative sessions. By forming alliances with more traditional children's advocates and other civic leaders, they successfully convinced public policy makers to create and fund several initiatives to benefit children, especially those from low-income families. These business leaders served in front-line positions in the United Way of Massachusetts Bay's Success By 6 Leadership Council, a volunteer committee comprised of 50 business, civic, labor, health, academic, social service and religious leaders, chaired by BankBoston Chairman and CEO Chad Gifford. This Success By 6 public policy effort aligned the concerns and messages of key business leaders and other influential civic leaders with those of child advocates and led to the passage of three child-focused legislative initiatives. These new laws included the development of a child care quality fund, the authorization of monies for a statewide newborn home visiting program for first-time teenaged parents, and the creation of a major children's health insurance program. Enactment of these measures was due, in large part, to the unusual and unexpected role business leaders played as "unlikely messengers" in broad-based advocacy efforts. [See the accompanying report, "Business Leaders as Legislative Advocates for Children," for more details on how such a strategy was developed and implemented.]

Why do business leaders make a positive difference in child advocacy?

- **Business leaders grab the attention of legislators and the press:** As one influential legislator put it, "Legislators and government leaders instinctively pay a lot of heed to what business leaders say and what they want and try to please them for a lot of reasons." Another veteran legislator told *The Boston Globe*, "When bank presidents advocate for child care, people take notice."
- **Their participation as advocates for children is counterintuitive:** When business leaders show up in policy makers' offices talking about children's issues, they are "unlikely messengers" for initiatives that do not usually have their active and visible support. This is so counterintuitive that policy makers are usually eager to listen to their recommendations. One legislative committee chairman described this dynamic: "The gestalt created when legislators see a leading CEO arguing for children is so counterintuitive. It is so unexpected. It really makes people do a double take. It is almost like he hardly has to say anything."
- **Perceptions matter:** Legislators tend to regard successful business leaders — most of whom are men — as levelheaded, conservative and fiscally responsible. These perceptions are quite different than ones policy makers often hold of advocates, most of whom are women. They are generally viewed as well intentioned, partisan (i.e., liberal Democrats) and moralistic. And these perceptions of business leaders make a difference in having legislators, as a group, be more receptive to their arguments.
- **Style matters:** Advocates for children tend to stress the "righteousness" of their position and

do so in ways that often leave legislators wondering whether and how to respond. Business leaders, who are accustomed to the quick, succinct delivery of key facts and the evaluation of possible solutions, bring this direct style to their advocacy. With legislators, these messengers and their approach work.

- **Making a credible “investment” argument:** Children are, by nature, long-term investments. No one carries as much credibility with public policy makers — when it comes to talking about how to invest money — than business leaders who make such decisions every day with their shareholders’ funds. Once business leaders are convinced that a child-focused initiative is a worthwhile investment, capable of reaping dividends down the way, they become credible messengers for investing in children.

What convinces business leaders to become legislative advocates for children?

- **Making a significant difference:** One business leader who became a legislative advocate for children put it this way, “Given limited resources, in terms of return on investment, advocacy for kids is the single most effective investment we can make.” It is a worthwhile cause, worthy of their time. As another business leader observed, “Executives who stay on the sidelines of society shortchange themselves. They miss a lot of enriching experiences; work such as this gives one’s life much needed proportionality. Too many financially successful people lack that balance.”

- **Improving the company’s image with employees:** Every business leader wants employees to regard their company as being a “good neighbor.” This helps with the recruitment and retention of workers. Media coverage of an executive’s work on behalf of children enhances this image of meaningful civic involvement.

- **Enhancing the company’s appeal to customers:** As one Boston business leader said of his experience working on child-focused legislation, “Being viewed as children-friendly or socially responsible is extremely important in a competitive environment. The tie goes to those who are regarded as being socially responsible.”

- **Strengthening leadership skills:** Becoming a visible advocate for children requires a business leader to sharpen his/her communication skills and, in some cases, develop new areas of expertise. This process can, in the words of one Boston CEO, make him or her “feel more confident and competent as a leader.”

How can advocates recruit business leaders to be “messengers” for children?

Be strategic: Look for business leaders who are already regarded by legislators and others as being part of the community’s “political cognoscenti,” a group of opinion leaders who, in the words of one public official, “absolutely drive thinking” on current issues. Not all business participants in such an alliance need to be in this tier of highly influential community members, but those who will play front-line roles should be.

- **Tap into their desire for civic involvement:** Many business leaders are eager to “give back” to their communities and are routinely asked for financial contributions or to play fund-raising roles in nonprofit campaigns. Seldom are they asked, however, to “roll up their sleeves” and get directly involved in an activity such as legislative advocacy for children. Ask them. Many will be intrigued by the request.

Where can advocates find such business leaders?

- **Seek out places where business leaders congregate:** A local United Way campaign is a likely place to find business leaders who are engaged in civic activities. Other venues for recruitment include the boards of organizations such as the Chamber of Commerce, Rotary Club, trade and manufacturing associations, state business round-tables, non-profit agencies, foundations and professional organizations. Another strategy is to connect with business leaders' spouses and family members who are often involved in volunteer and other nonprofit activities.
- **Recognize which business leaders might be better prepared for this role:** Businesses that are more heavily regulated by government usually produce leaders who have had significant experience interacting with policy makers. These leaders have, therefore, developed many of the skills of effective legislative advocacy, and those skills can be put to work for children. They also understand how relationships with legislators are begun, nurtured, and developed, which will prove valuable, too, in their work on behalf of children. Conversely, leaders from other industries, which have little or no contact with governmental agencies, are often pleasantly surprised by how rewarding they find the new experience of working on public policy issues.

How can advocates work effectively with business leaders?

- **Provide business leaders with data:** Use data when approaching business leaders with information. Numbers are an essential part of their culture and language. To be willing to advocate for particular issues, business leaders need to develop an understanding of what it will cost to properly address the problem (and what the cost of inaction would be) and what outcomes can be expected from the proposed investment.
- **Use business leaders' time sparingly and strategically:** Corporate executives have little time in their schedules to deal with issues that do not relate directly to their company's concerns. Convene meetings about legislative advocacy early in the morning, before the workday begins. Keep the meetings targeted on a specific goal and run them so they begin and end on time. Make it "an atmosphere of precision."
- **Take business leaders into the community:** Do not hold meetings in corporate headquarters. Get business leaders into the community, interacting with and hearing from those individuals — children, parents, and providers — who will be directly affected by any of the legislative initiatives that their efforts will help to enact. By doing this, business leaders' mastery of the issues will improve, as will their ability to speak from personal experience when they talk with policy makers and are interviewed by the press.
- **Create a concrete legislative agenda:** Do not attempt to work on more than two or three public policy proposals during each legislative session. This keeps business leaders focused on key objectives and sends an important signal to legislators about the seriousness and intent of the advocacy effort.
- **Maintain ties with other business and professional groups:** Business leaders want to be certain that their advocacy work does not create unforeseen difficulties for their business peers. Keep channels of communication open with business and professional groups who work on legislative issues as a way of checking on how the advocacy work to benefit children might be impacting other public policy questions.
- **Involve business leaders in broad-based advocacy coalitions:** By making children's legislative interests the focal point of an initiative, a diverse group of influential people can work together, despite their potential adversarial positions on a range of other issues. Creating this rare

opportunity for business leaders to work with their counterparts in labor, public safety, education, religion, health and social services can benefit their businesses.

- **Determine what other resources businesses can provide:** Companies often set aside funds to support civic causes. Some of that money might be used to pay for a media campaign to support the legislative strategy, or to sponsor a legislative breakfast as a way of meeting policy makers, or to host “thank you” events for legislators. These business leaders can also involve the expertise of their marketing and public relations departments in developing and implementing a strategic media campaign. It is essential to keep the children’s legislative agenda — and its “unlikely messengers” — as visible as possible, as a way of reminding legislators of the issues’ importance.

What strategies work best for advocates in such an alliance?

- **Seek out a mentoring relationship:** Advocates for children who are working with business leaders for the first time should find someone who is willing to be helpful in training them to understand the “culture” in which CEOs operate. This person could be a retired executive or someone accustomed to interacting with “outsiders,” such as an individual who holds a position in government or community relations.

- **Become “bilingual” and “bicultural:”** Business leaders and advocates each have their own language and culture that are likely to be quite different because of their orientations. Just as business leaders will need to get to know more about how advocates describe their world, advocates need to study the ways in which executives talk about theirs.

- **Be prepared to share the stage (or give it up entirely):** Advocates for children are accustomed to being “in the spotlight” when trying to convince legislators to pay attention to children’s issues. When business leaders become involved, they are likely to assume more visible roles. By being willing to relinquish this spotlight, advocates can benefit the children’s cause.

- **Be prepared to assume new roles:** Advocates for children might need to assume new roles within this alliance with business leaders. One essential role they can play is to be “trainers” of these new “unlikely messengers,” and provide staff support for business leaders who are accustomed to being well prepared for public appearances.

- **Develop a realistic timeframe:** Most business leaders will not be able to play an active role in legislative advocacy for an indefinite period of time. They need to know that their commitment has a beginning, middle and an end point, and a solid strategy to move from one stage to the next.

- **Resist the urge to engage in moral suasion:** When aligned with business leaders, advocates should not expect to win their support by solely asserting the “righteousness” of a particular position. This is not an approach that business leaders easily relate to, nor is it one that they are likely to use with legislators on behalf of children.

How many business leaders need to be involved? And can business leaders’ advocacy for children be sustained?

- **A small number of business leaders can make a big difference:** In Massachusetts, about a half dozen business leaders were actively involved in the Success By 6 legislative efforts at various times. In particular, it was the heightened visibility of one top executive — BankBoston

CEO and Chairman Chad Gifford — that resulted in Success By 6 being able to attract and sustain the interest of policy makers and the press.

- **Such efforts can be sustained, but should not rely on the extended involvement of any particular business leader.** This kind of involvement demands a commitment of time and focus that many business leaders are unable to provide for a prolonged period. These coalitions need to be reshaped often, in part, because circumstances in business leaders' professional lives change rapidly, as companies merge, demands change and they move on to other causes. However, the infusion of fresh insights and emergence of new messengers from the business community also sends an important signal that a number of different leaders care about what is happening to children at the state house.

- **Different kinds of coalitions need to be formed to advocate effectively on different issues.** In Massachusetts, business leaders' advocacy efforts worked because in each instance — whether the issue was children's health insurance or child care quality or a newborn home visiting program — their visible engagement was aligned with the strategies of particular advocacy groups that had already created foundations for legislative action. By engaging new and powerful voices from the business community as different issues arise, children can continue to benefit from the involvement of these leaders.

Business Leaders as Legislative Advocates for Children

A Case Study from Boston

By Melissa Ludtke

Eight o'clock in the morning, and the business of this day was about to begin for a unique group of business leaders. Usually their breakfast meetings don't involve learning about ways they can make meaningful differences that will improve the lives of children whom they are unlikely to ever meet. Today, however, it would be not only the content of their conversation that was unusual. The company these business leaders were keeping and the place they were meeting would ensure that this would be a morning that none would forget.

Finding their way up to the third floor of the Massachusetts State House and into the Senate Reading Room, an elegant enclave that is just across the hall from the Senate Chamber, each of these business leaders had a chance to reflect on the significance of this occasion. After all, this was the first time they were coming to this gold-domed building at the top of Boston's Beacon Hill with the strategic goal of trying to help pass bills that would benefit children. Today their job would be to gather the kind of information that would enable them to act effectively as powerful friends on behalf of youngsters who are themselves powerless to influence how the legislative process treats them.

The business leaders' breakfast partners were state senators and representatives who were sponsoring specific child-related bills, as well as key legislative leaders, the House Ways and Means Committee Chair, the Senate President, for example, people whose support would be essential if these bills were going to pass. (Also in attendance were influential leaders from other relevant sectors of the community who served with these business people on an initiative dedicated to legislative advocacy for children.) The legislators' task at this morning meeting was to educate these corporate and civic leaders about several bills in which they'd already signaled an interest. One bill would make it possible for the families of 160,000 children and youth (up through age 18) who did not have health insurance to obtain it. Others involved efforts to improve the quality of child care.

The morning's lesson plan included a cogent outline of the content of each bill accompanied by a detailed explanation of the ways in which these business executives could dramatically increase the chances that these bills would become law. On that point, the legislators' message was clear. In three months, the state's fiscal year would end and the 1996 legislative session would be over. None of the bills was assured safe passage. In fact, the road for each had hurdles that the business leaders' active involvement could possibly make disappear, if they were willing to stay engaged in the arduous legislative process.

Be persistent and forceful in your vigorous advocacy for these measures, the legislators urged them. These high-ranking lawmakers were convinced that if these highly-respected business leaders were willing to put forth strong arguments why these child-focused bills deserved to pass, then other legislators who might be inclined to be uninterested, or even hostile to them, might be willing to listen. Fresh arguments delivered by these new and "unlikely messengers" might be enough to make the difference.

Similarly, among the business executives who gathered in the Senate Reading Room that morning, there was an understanding — honed in previous meetings — that by acting as

“unlikely messengers,” they might be able to deliver what child advocates and like-minded legislators working on their own could not. Later, as he reflects on this meeting which one legislative leader called “pivotal,” Leo Breitman, the Chairman and CEO of Fleet Bank of Massachusetts, describes the dynamic he observed developing, a synergy of interests that, in his mind, would propel this children’s agenda forward.

“There was probably a disconnect for some of the legislators to see us actually wanting to advocate for something in which we had no personal stake,” Breitman says. “We weren’t there for our bank’s benefit or our company’s. I think the legislators were actually scratching their heads a little bit and saying to themselves, ‘What’s going on here? We have these business people advocating and there is nothing in it for them. It must be good. It must be good.’”

Just a few weeks earlier, many of these same individuals had come together for an introductory meeting, focused less on devising strategies than on building relationships with one another. The corporate leaders wanted legislators to know their intent to support these particular bills. And the legislators, not quite knowing what to make of this entry of a surprising new group of child advocates, arrived with a mixture of curiosity and hope.

It was in an exchange of greetings between Tom Finneran, the House Ways and Means Committee Chair, Charlie Flaherty, the Speaker of the House, and Chad Gifford, CEO and Chairman of BankBoston, that both the mystery and possibilities of these burgeoning relationships became apparent. Surprised by finding legislators of such stature at this initial gathering, Gifford turned to Margaret Blood, who was coordinating this unusual effort, and asked, “How did you get these guys here?” (As Blood later reminded Gifford, when an invitation goes out, as this one had, with the signature of a business leader of his stature, legislative leaders tend to respond.) After a moment’s hesitation, Finneran, who would soon become Speaker of the House, volleyed his query back to Gifford. “The question is not how we got here,” he said, “The question is, ‘How did you get here?’”

How did key business leaders become legislative advocates for children?

Creating a new strategy

The road these business leaders traveled to the State House, on behalf of children, was paved through the efforts of the United Way of Massachusetts Bay. In 1994, this Boston-based United Way put into place a “Success By 6” initiative designed to support preventive approaches to improve the lives of young children and their families. More emphasis would be placed on the front end of various social and educational problems, thereby preventing the roots of these problems from digging in while children are young. The concept was simple, and it held innate appeal to a businessperson’s notion of investment. Instead of spending a lot of money on the back end of problems, trying to remedy what had gone wrong, fewer dollars could be spent up front to prevent what by now was a myriad of predictable dire outcomes.

The idea for adopting this approach emerged out of a strategic review that this United Way conducted in the early 1990s. The findings led the United Way’s Board of Directors — many of whom are Boston business leaders — to craft this new direction and carve out a fresh image for this philanthropic institution. As Paul O’Brien, former CEO and Chairman of New England Telephone and a United Way Board Member, puts it, “We had to change the image of the United Way from an efficient cash register into something that had a little more soul.”

Determining what approaches could be combined to create “a little more soul” and, at the

same time, do a better job of helping children get the healthiest and safest start in life, became the Board's goal as it set out to provide an agreed-upon focus for Success By 6. To determine which blocks should be used to build its foundation, the Board decided to take a close look at how the first city to create a "Success By 6" initiative had designed its approach. (Nearly 300 localities now have initiatives that are called "Success By 6," yet there remains great variation in what each organization emphasizes and how it operates.) Led by the United Way of Massachusetts Bay's CEO and President, Marian Heard, key business and civic leaders whom Heard recruited to spearhead Success By 6, flew to Minneapolis to, in her words, "hear about their initiative and avoid any mistakes they had made."

What this group heard and saw that day became the catalyst for what Success By 6 in Boston would become. It wasn't that these Boston visitors decided to replicate what had been done in the Minneapolis model. They didn't. But what became integrated into the Boston strategy was the kind of emphasis that Minneapolis' business leaders put on their proactive involvement, regarding it as a significant way to spur greater investment in the early years of children's lives. "In Minneapolis, we listened to business leaders who were thinking outside the box and doing something that was successful and innovative," says Ira Jackson, BankBoston Executive Vice-President, a United Way Board member, and an active participant on the Success By 6 Leadership Council. "We heard corporate CEOs talk about how they did this and why they are committed to it, why it's become their passion. And hearing that was very powerful. They told us, 'It's cost-effective. It is investment and prevention rather than treatment and incarceration. And from a business perspective, it is finite. It is feasible. It has a high return. And it was reinventing the way United Way works. That could not have resonated more with us.... We came back to Boston very excited about the notion of doing things 'outside the box.'"

Focusing on prevention was certainly one aspect of the change that was about to occur in this United Way's approach to helping children. But despite this new direction, Success By 6 still lacked a comprehensive and concrete strategy, even as it was gaining influential backers whom Heard, a relentless persuader, convinced to sign on as members of its Leadership Council. (The Leadership Council eventually included business leaders such as O'Brien, Gifford, who chaired it, and Breitman, as well as influential leaders from other sectors of the community such as government, labor, health care, the media, religion, public safety, academia, and social services, more than 50 members in all.)

"I need you to do this," Heard insisted, as she spoke with civic leaders whom she suspected might be willing to become involved in such an effort for children.

"Well, what is it?" her typically befuddled listeners would reply.

"I have no idea, but we need you," Heard would say.

"I never said, 'trust me on this,'" Heard explains, as she recalls these initial conversations.

"I just said, 'we need you and together we'll figure out how to move an agenda for children.'"

On one point Heard was abundantly clear. When a top business (or civic) leader agreed to participate, that person — not a substitute, such as a vice-president or department head must be the person who would attend the four scheduled meetings each year. "No, you cannot be in Europe on a business trip. You must be at the meeting," she'd tell them. "An hour and a half. Starting on time. Finishing on time. At a location in Boston where we will share with you an issue related to children."

Exploratory committees were set up to think through possible approaches. As discussions

progressed, the efforts of the “public policy” committee — co-chaired by Paul O’Brien and Dr. Hubie Jones, a long-time child advocate and now special assistant to the Chancellor for Urban Affairs at University of Massachusetts at Boston — became central to the development of what Boston’s Success By 6 would become. O’Brien and Jones’ job was to work on establishing a constructive dialogue between members of the business community and leaders within the city’s social service and child advocacy communities. Out of this dialogue would emerge the identification of public policy issues that needed to be addressed if children were to get safer and healthier starts. As vital as it was to open such avenues of communication, what would become even more essential was to find ways for these parties, who have not historically been natural allies on many political issues, to work collaboratively to advance an agenda for children.

To some United Way board members, it was becoming clear that some form of political engagement by Success By 6 might be necessary to achieve its emerging goals. One overriding issue was what form such engagement might take. For example, did this mean that United Way would hire a lobbyist to promote a legislative agenda at the State House? That notion was not a popular one, and just the idea of political activity seemed an anathema to many members of the Board who were accustomed to raising money, not authorizing it to be spent on “lobbying” state legislators on Beacon Hill. As O’Brien puts it, “a rather lively debate” ensued among the United Way’s Board of Directors, which was chaired by Breitman. “We had to decide whether the United Way should be involved more proactively in public policy,” O’Brien explains. “And I’d have to say that initially that was a minority view.”

The debate that then took place among the Board members was intense. O’Brien became the leading advocate for “legislative engagement,” though precisely what he had in mind was not well defined, even in his own mind. What O’Brien had to work hardest to overcome was a view that this was an inappropriate role for an organization such as United Way to play. After all, as dissenters pointed out, the United Way contributors didn’t expect dollars they donated, which they assumed would be going to support the work of community social service agencies, to be used also to fund efforts to “lobby” politicians to pass legislation. Breitman sums up this perspective, “That is not what they gave us their money to do.”

Breitman contends that having improvement of young children’s well being as the ultimate goal “muted the issue” of whether proactive legislative engagement might be a proper course for the United Way to pursue. “How could you be against children?” Breitman says, as he revisits the debate. “Nobody could call you names for advocating for children, as opposed to advocating for other things that might look self-serving. Who minds a kid being a winner? I think what turned the debate is ‘Hey, we are lobbying for children.’” [See accompanying box, “Lobbying for Children,” for an insider’s look at this debate.]

Still central questions were not being addressed. Even though the Board seemed willing to consider legislative activity to promote policy changes to benefit children, what wasn’t at all evident was what this activity might look like, how it might be organized, or what role, if any, business leaders themselves might assume.

Lobbying for Children? Is this a role business leaders should play?

There was a belief held by some members of the Success By 6 Leadership Council that becoming a front-line political “lobbyist” was not an appropriate role for a top business leader to assume. “To their way of thinking, to act as a ‘lobbyist’ was like saying ‘I am up there peddling flesh,’” says **Carol Goldberg**, President of The AvCar Group, a Boston-based management consulting firm, and a United Way Board Member. “We constantly hear bad words used about those flesh-peddlers in Washington, and now you are suggesting that a nice person like me should do something like that.”

Goldberg recalls one of the early meetings when this issue was being discussed. “Folks at my table were very uncomfortable with the idea of business leaders becoming lobbyists,” says Goldberg. She didn’t share their apprehension, given that the issues at hand had to do with supporting policies that would help children. “I said to them, ‘Would you feel better if you saw yourself in a role as an advocate, going up to the State House to talk with people who vote on these bills?’ Calling them advocates, not lobbyists, and describing what they would be doing seemed to make them feel a lot better...there is a difference between a paid professional lobbyist and a human being who is active in the community. This is called active citizenship and getting business people to recognize that doing this is an integral part of their job is appropriate.”

**Carol Goldberg, President, The AvCar Group; formerly President and COO
of Stop & Shop Supermarket Company**

Figuring out a role for business leaders

As the idea of legislative advocacy continued to gain momentum, circumstances conspired to make Success By 6’s next steps more apparent. One step would involve the creation of an infrastructure to support and continue to define this particular United Way initiative. Another step would involve making decisions about which issues members of the Success By 6 Leadership Council might support.

One afternoon several people connected with this United Way’s burgeoning Success By 6 initiative attended a forum organized by The Boston Foundation’s Persistent Poverty Project. There, new and relevant findings were being presented based on a report about state legislative leaders’ understanding of children’s issues and their perceptions of child advocacy efforts. This report, entitled “State Legislative Leaders: Keys to Effective Legislation for Children and Families,” focused on trying to determine how legislative leaders define the issues of children and families and how they make policy decisions regarding children and families. The report’s

investigators went directly to those who held the greatest legislative power and, in those roles, essentially controlled the agendas of State Houses around the country. They interviewed 177 state legislative leaders who participated in this first-of-its-kind study examining the factors at play when it comes to children's legislation. The investigators were able to meet with more than half of the Speakers of the House, nearly half of the Senate Presidents, as well as majority and minority leaders and key committee chairs. The legislative leaders were asked to explain why things worked the way they did for child and family-focused legislation, and then were invited to suggest ways in which children's issues might receive better hearings and proposed bills achieve more positive results. [See accompanying box, "State Legislative Leaders," for detailed description of this study's findings.]

The person delivering the findings of this two-year investigation was Margaret Blood, who had directed the study. Prior to taking on that role, Blood had spent a decade working in the Massachusetts state legislature where she had founded the Massachusetts Legislative Children's Caucus, an office created to assist state legislators who wanted to sponsor and support bills for children. She'd also worked with some Boston pediatricians, teaching them to become "lobbyists" for children and, earlier in her child-focused career, she had been a community organizer who created an after-school and summer program for inner-city children.

From Blood's perspective, the study's findings confirmed what had been her own experience when she worked at the State House: Given the ways in which advocacy for children's issues is traditionally conducted, bills involving initiatives for children don't command sustained attention among legislative leaders and thus often don't become law. Though the study's legislative leaders said that children's issues were "important," the vast majority was unable to identify groups that advocate for children in their states. Nor were they able to articulate public policy agendas for children and families. And very few believed that most child advocacy efforts were as successful as they could or should be.

State Legislative Leaders: Key findings on effective child advocacy

“State Legislative Leaders: Keys to Effective Legislation for Children and Families.”

Funded by the Ford and Annie E. Casey Foundations, this work examined the attitudes, opinions, and perceptions of state legislative leaders regarding the issues of children and families and the effectiveness of legislative advocacy on their behalf. It was undertaken by the State Legislative Leaders Foundation, Centerville, MA. In all, 177 state legislative leaders were interviewed for this groundbreaking study [1993-1995] of child advocacy and its effectiveness (or more often, ineffectiveness) within the legislative process. Such leaders included speakers, senate presidents, majority and minority leaders and key committee chairs. Roughly half were Republicans, half Democrats. Nearly 90% were men and the vast majority, white. The average age was 51.

Legislative Leaders’ Beliefs: Child advocates are not politically effective. A majority of legislative leaders interviewed said children’s issues were “important,” but few were able to describe what child advocates wanted them to do or even who the key advocacy groups were for children. Asked to describe children’s issues, education topped the list, followed by child abuse and neglect, as well as poverty. Most admitted that they did not have a clear understanding about the “status of children” in their state and, in regard to their inclination to act, most said they were most influenced by experiences that shaped their own childhood (rather than by information advocates provided to them.)

Very few of the leaders said they were “comfortable” with the term “advocate” that is used by most who “lobby” for children. To them, this term conjured up images of “elitists” who might be well intentioned but who neither grasp how the political process works — many child advocates don’t connect well with the budget-making process and don’t participate fully in it — nor routinely contribute to political campaigns, as do other lobbyists. According to these leaders, child advocates lack “clear legislative goals,” are not connected to effective grassroots constituencies, do not set “realistic priorities” and rarely indicate satisfaction (or gratitude) for the bills that are passed. These legislative leaders said they feel more at ease with term “lobbyist” and understand more clearly what lobbyists do. Few among the leadership could name a child advocacy group; more were able to identify individual advocates, but many of these “advocates” were perceived by legislators to be “partisan.”

Legislative Leaders’ Advice: Engage “New Voices” on behalf of children: One key finding to emerge from interviews with legislative leaders involved advice they had about how to garner more sustained attention for children’s issues and be more effective in their passage. High on these leaders’ lists of recommendations was using untapped “lobbyists” for children — business leaders. Their professional and civic standing in the community make it imperative that legislators at least listen to what they have to say. When business leaders “lobby” on behalf of poor and low-income children, legislators tend to regard them as doing so not out of self-interest, a motive they often ascribe to child advocates. Rather, they view their concern as genuine and related to how the well being of these children might impact on the future well-being and economic strength of the community.

Perhaps of greater significance — and certainly of immediate interest to the folks from this Boston-based United Way — was the candid counsel legislative leaders offered about ways in which children’s issues might assume a more prominent place on the legislative agenda. Engage “new voices” in efforts to educate legislators about children’s issues and to advocate for passage of legislation, these leaders suggested. According to this report, the “old voices” that belonged to child advocates who come primarily from social service communities weren’t effective in getting the political process to respond favorably to their messages, which most often implored legislators to “do the right thing.” Be certain, too, these legislative leaders cautioned, that those to whom these “new voices” belong — people whom Blood calls “unlikely messengers” — are influential civic leaders whose professional standing commands respect from lawmakers because of the “clout” they wield in the community. Business leaders, many of these legislative leaders concluded, would be ideal “lobbyists” for children, precisely because they have such “clout” and their voices would be new and unexpected and, therefore, more likely to be listened to.

Yet, as Blood knew from her decade of observation at the State House, business leaders were rarely seen or heard when it was time to talk about legislation involving children. In ten years of working at the State House, Blood had never encountered a business leader who came there to speak with a legislator or testify before a committee on behalf of children.

What Blood revealed in her presentation resonated with those from the United Way, so much so that a short while after her presentation a top United Way official approached her with a job offer. Would she become the director of this still-undefined Success By 6 initiative? Believing, as she did, that Success By 6 contained essential ingredients that could truly put to the test the state legislative leaders’ advice for effective child advocacy, Blood accepted the job. But she did so only on the condition that the United Way’s business leaders agree to assume the kind of active advocacy role that she envisioned. From Paul O’Brien, in particular, she received the assurance she sought.

Now Blood took on her next set of challenges. With O’Brien’s help, she would need to convince other members of the Leadership Council — especially its business representatives — to become active in the legislative process. Then she would need to figure out ways of educating these new “child advocates” about issues they were going to support and how they could work most effectively within the legislative process. To accomplish these things, Blood brought an untested blueprint for action with her, one designed to give business leaders in Boston the opportunity to do for children what no other group of corporate leaders had done in any similarly organized way before. Hers was a blueprint that she hoped would result in a new kind of legislative strategy that would produce results.

Under Blood’s tutelage, corporate CEOs, company presidents and directors were about to become well informed, well-trained, and very engaged advocates for children. [See accompanying box, “Business Leaders as Advocates for Children,” for additional perspectives.]

One of Blood’s first on-the-job meetings was with Chad Gifford at BankBoston who was the Chairman of Success By 6’s Leadership Council. It didn’t take long for their conversation to bump up against the word “lobby.”

“Are you willing to spend time on Beacon Hill?” Blood asked Gifford.

“What do you mean?” he replied, “Up there lobbying?”

“Yeah, up there lobbying,” Blood said, echoing his language.

Business Leaders as Advocates for Children

“I don’t think business people would do this, even if they thought it was the right thing, if the numbers didn’t work. I know I wouldn’t,” says **Paul O’Brien**, former Chairman and CEO of New England Telephone. “Something that was very well intentioned but was clearly a consumption rather than an investment based item, I would feel obligated to say that you are not going to get a return on it. You might fix a lot of souls and it might be something that is worthwhile to do, but there isn’t the leveraged effect that you get with an investment. That’s the kind of argument we want to be able to make.”

“It sure is a lot easier to go up to the State House and lobby for kids than it is to lobby for changes in ATM banking legislation,” says **Chad Gifford**, Chairman and CEO of BankBoston. “When you are going up there for children, you are also lobbying — speaking up for a special interest group — but instead of the special interest group being shareholders, investors in BankBoston or the banking industry, it is everybody’s special interest. So there are very few legislators who don’t identify with you right away and want to learn more...the biggest frustration we have is not that people in business are bad. It is that they are busy and they are uneducated about these issues.”

“The whole magic of the thing is how counter-intuitive all of it is,” says **Ira Jackson**, executive Vice-President at BankBoston. “It is a bank’s CEO testifying not for a tax bill for his industry but for an additional investment by legislators in programs for kids. It is so compelling because of the clout these guys have in being able to make a business case, a conservative case for return on investment and efficacy...It was an argument that had never been heard in this way in the legislature.”

“Most business leaders know why they are good bankers, or whatever they are, and they are afraid of getting into an environment that is not something they understand and are familiar with,” says **Charlie Baker**, who was Secretary for Administration and Finance for Governor William Weld. “The greatest strength of Success By 6 is you were able to demystify some of this for these business leaders. Typically you didn’t send them into these discussions by themselves. Most of them came in pretty well briefed. They said about as much as they knew about the subject and didn’t go beyond that and I think there is legitimacy to doing it that way.”

“Clearly state legislators are dependent on the business community for support of all kinds, including financial support,” says Lesley College President **Margaret McKenna**. “So when someone who is the president of a major company in town comes and says, ‘You really need to support this bill on early childhood services,’ it is very different than someone coming from the early childhood community. For one reason, the business person — usually a man — doesn’t have anything personal to gain from it. So his approach is ‘this is very important to do. It is high on the public agenda. And it is important to me.’”

As Gifford reflects on this initial meeting with Blood, he recalls being concerned about even using the word “lobby” to describe what he and other business people might do. From his banking experience, Gifford knew that being a true “lobbyist” requires that one officially register as such. But that wasn’t what Blood was suggesting, even though she did repeat his use of the word as a way of underscoring the point about needing to make an ironclad commitment to pursuing a course of sustained and active engagement on children’s legislative issues. That day Gifford did agree to become a visible and vocal presence at the State House on behalf of children, if, as Blood indicated, his involvement would really make a positive difference.

“If I was head of the Leadership Council and if I believed in supporting the public policy issues that we were going to adopt, then for me not to be willing to go to Beacon Hill would have been specious,” Gifford says. “For me to say to Margaret, ‘No, you go up there to talk about children. I only want to go there when I want bank taxes done,’ well, I don’t think that would have been the right thing to do.”

Gifford’s enthusiastic embrace of this new assignment (along with O’Brien’s earlier assurance of support and the important mentoring role he played for Blood) was pivotal to Blood’s ability to begin to move the initiative ahead. She now knew she could count on these leaders’ backing as she moved ahead with her next task, persuading others on the Leadership Council to embrace the same role.

Her first meeting with Council members was held in a corporate conference room at BankBoston. Blood began by presenting findings from the State Legislative Leaders’ study, emphasizing their counsel about the important role that business and civic leaders could play as “unlikely messengers.” She explained some of the ways in which the visual and vocal presence of business and civic leaders whom legislators don’t normally expect to be advocates for children could make a significant difference in securing passage of bills that otherwise would likely disappear from legislators’ radar screens.

At the conclusion of her presentation, one CEO said, “It kind of makes me feel guilty that I go up to the State House to lobby for tax breaks.” In response, another business leader blurted out, “Good!” Clearly, Blood thought, her message was getting through.

As Blood surveyed the make-up of her audience that morning, it was clear to her what a potentially powerful advocacy force had been assembled for children. Along with Gifford, who was the host and BankBoston Chairman and CEO, was the CEO of Fleet Bank, the General Manager of the local ABC affiliate (which in the course of this initiative would broadcast editorials and stories about Success By 6), the Presidents of Lesley College and Radcliffe College, the Police Commissioner, Boston’s School Superintendent, the CEO of one of Boston’s top advertising agencies, the Secretary/ Treasurer of the state AFL/CIO, the publisher of The Boston Globe, the former Chairman and CEO of New England Telephone, the head of New England Life Insurance, and the former President and COO of Stop & Shop Supermarket Company, as well as several of the city’s leading physicians and religious leaders.

Reverend Ray Hammond, one of Boston’s religious leaders and a member of the Leadership Council, became a firm believer in Blood’s strategy of organizing “unlikely messengers” as he watched it reap results. “You always get a better hearing if you have people along that legislators don’t expect to see,” Hammond observes. “I think what happened here is that business leaders are seen as hard nosed, bottom-line, not given to the starry-eyed idealism of advocates who believe everyone is redeemable and all problems should be dealt with. I know

that I can't sell these issues as well because I'm supposed to believe that everybody is redeemable. So when legislators hear from somebody who is seen in a business context saying, 'This legislation to help children is important. It has bottom-line implications. It really makes a difference.' Well, because it's a different configuration of people talking about it, the legislators look and listen very differently. My sense is that was a large part of the success of Success By 6."

Legislators who sponsored bills that these business leaders either proposed or decided to actively endorse were also impressed by the altered political dynamic their presence seemed to bring about. Warren Tolman, then a state senator, sponsored a bill created by Success By 6 that would earmark funds from the sale of special license plates to support quality improvements in child care. Tolman later remarked on how support from people such as Gifford transformed this bill from being just another innocuous proposal into a much-heralded legislative victory for children. "If Chad Gifford comes and talks about banking, you can have an intellectual discussion about whether that's good for his bank and good for the Commonwealth. It may be one and not the other," Tolman says. "But when Chad Gifford comes and talks about children's issues, wait a minute. First of all, as legislators, we are not expecting that. Secondly, we see that he is not here to feather his own nest. He's here to help us point to where we should be focusing our attention. I think that is why that dynamic is so interesting...Seeing Chad Gifford on issues like this causes a legislator to scratch his or her head and say, 'hum, maybe there is something here. Maybe I should focus on this.' It is the old theory — Nixon going to China — when you look around and pause and say this is contrary to what I'd anticipate. It makes people take notice and sometimes you have to do things differently up here to get attention." [See accompanying box, "Grabbing Legislators' Attention," for more on views about how business leaders' involvement transforms the legislative process.]

Prior to this Leadership Council meeting, Blood had also met privately with Paul O'Brien, the former Chairman of New England Telephone and now president of his own telecommunications consulting firm. It was O'Brien who along with Hubie Jones, a long time children's advocate and university educator, had devoted time to meeting with key people from social service and child advocacy groups. The point of these meetings was to try to learn what specific issues might benefit from the Leadership Council's advocacy and attention and to set in place a constructive dialogue that would hopefully grow as plans for advocacy advanced. After all, a few key business leaders acting alone were not likely to make the kind of political difference that Blood envisioned them being able to make as a sort of unlikely and, therefore, powerful auxiliary force.

Grabbing Legislators' Attention: How business leaders do it?

“There are seven to eight thousand pieces of legislation filed each year at the State House in Massachusetts,” says **Warren Tolman**, a former state senator and frequent backer of child-focused legislation. “When you have people like Chad Gifford [BankBoston CEO] coming up to the State House not on bank tax reform but on matters related to children and not to his professional life, it calls attention to the bill. And if you get people’s attention up here, these issues will win. The issues that the business leaders from Success By 6 backed — the license plate fund for quality child care, health insurance for low-income children, a home visiting program for first-time teen-aged mothers and their children — are all issues that, on their merits, will win. But guess what? There are seven thousand other bills, many of which on their own are meritorious, but they are not going to pass. So often it’s just calling attention to an issue that can make a big difference.”

“For a moderate or conservative legislator, hearing a business leader say ‘we care about healthy kids because it has an impact on the economic well-being of our state,’ is very helpful,” says **John McDonough**, a former state representative who sponsored the health insurance bill for uninsured children. “They made arguments that were helpful in moving some legislators who might otherwise not have moved. And sometimes it’s not even the argument as much as it is the personal presence of these people; the gestalt created when legislators see Chad Gifford from BankBoston arguing for this is so counterintuitive. It is so unexpected. It really makes people do a double take. It is almost like he hardly has to say anything... Legislators and government leaders instinctively pay a lot of heed to what business leaders say and what they want and try to please them for a lot of reasons.”

“Having this kind of leadership from the business community provides some protection and comfort within this building when legislators can stand up and say, ‘Did you know these business leaders are in favor of this bill?’” says **Mark Montigny**, a state senator who chaired the committee that dealt with the child health insurance legislation and was the bill’s co-sponsor. “It gives legislators a comfort zone and makes some of them pay attention.... And it made people who wanted to stay with the Republican governor who vetoed the bill feel more comfortable.”

“The business leaders don’t make different arguments but they make them in different ways,” says **Senator Stan Rosenberg**, the former Ways and Means Committee Chair. “Whereas human service people will come in and speak for 30 minutes and give you a sort of human perspective on the issue and try to reach you emotionally, business people come in and give you a five-minute briefing. They are to the point. They give you several bits of information that lead to justification for taking the action, then they look for your response. And they actually listen to your response.... Human service people may come in and tell you all the problems and say this should be the solution but they rarely explain why that is the solution. Business people definitely bring a different way of packaging the issue and do so very efficiently.”

O'Brien shared with Blood some of the messages he had conveyed to the child advocacy community regarding the potential involvement of business leaders. "We have to have a finite number of public policy issues and we need to be concrete about what we're asking for so legislators can say, and it's a term I used all the time with politicians in my work on telecommunications legislation, 'we've given at the office.'" O'Brien told Blood, "That means that if legislators do this, they will satisfy the vast majority of their obligation, or provide a release from political pressure, on children's legislation." But even as O'Brien outlined his perspective, he acknowledged to Blood that this was viewed as a "kind of a fascist view" by those who worked in social service and child advocacy communities. "I clearly did not understand that the need was infinite and it should be supplied immediately," O'Brien acknowledged, alluding to how at odds the business view of this is from what exists among traditional child advocates.

Progress was made in these policy discussions, as the groups learned more about what each could do to assist the others if their mutually-agreed upon goal was to help children. At one point O'Brien described to Blood what his pitch had been to the child advocates: "Try us. You'll like us. See how effective this approach can be."

Several leading child advocates were willing to give this new approach a try, even if it meant sublimating some of their political objectives and ceding their front-line roles to business leaders who had not put in the time they had working in what were backwater political trenches. Others in the child advocacy movement were understandably more suspicious and wary of getting hitched up with these business leaders and taken for a ride that would, in the end, leave them no better off. Hubie Jones recalls some child advocates approaching him to air concerns. "They wanted to know whether we should be working with all of these business folks like this," Jones says. "Some of them asked me, 'Why are you doing it? And what's in this for Chad Gifford? Is this about him getting bills passed for his bank?'" Jones assured those who did ask that he was convinced that the motives of these business leaders were genuine and proper. They were sincere, Jones told his questioners, in their desire to use their clout to advance their children's legislative agenda.

Marta Rosa, who directs the Child Care Resource Center in Cambridge, MA and serves on the Success By 6 Leadership Council, was one of the long-time child advocates who was willing to give this new alliance a real chance to test its effectiveness. "Business leaders are much better than advocates are at identifying what they want, how they want it, and when they want it. Legislators like that because they have a lot on their plate and they can either say yes or no." On the other hand, Rosa says, "the child care advocacy community is viewed as fragmented and wanting too much of everything all of the time and never being satisfied. Business leaders know how to identify what a win is and what a loss is, as well as what to give up and what can be gained from a loss. They are much better at turning losses into wins than we are. It is a real corporate mentality; they are more trained into thinking about bottom-lines than we are. We are more compassionate. We are more emotional. We are more invested in children and families and sometimes I think, we, as advocates, get more caught up in the stories. You need some of that, but having an alliance with business then brings both of these things to the table. And the combination can be amazing." [See accompanying box, "Business Leaders and Advocates Come Together for Children," for comments on uniting disparate groups as an advocacy force.]

Deciding what children's issues to support

After Blood's message about the State Legislative Leaders' study had been delivered —

and apparently absorbed — she used the time left in her meeting with the Leadership Council to introduce a policy issue that her political insight and experience told her might be ripe for action at the State House. It was her hope that Council members would leave this breakfast not only resolved to become legislative advocates for children, but with a specific issue in mind they would be willing to learn about and, in time, embrace by their willingness to talk with legislators about it. But she was also cognizant of what O'Brien had told her about the specific criteria that would need to be met if business leaders were to support various pieces of legislation. Doable approaches that they could explain to legislators in business-like terms were essential ingredients.

If these business leaders were to advocate for increased public spending, they would need to be convinced that what was being proposed was legislatively winnable and would yield dividends in the future. And they would need to be comfortable making the case for passage based not on the “righteousness” of a proposed action, but on a realistic evaluation that by enacting this bill, the result would produce meaningful and measurable and lasting changes in children’s lives.

The issue Blood chose was providing access to health care for uninsured children, many of whom did not have coverage because their families could not afford to pay for it. The reasons Blood selected this issue were woven into the fabric of her overall strategic plan regarding the critical role of “unlikely messengers” that business leaders could play in advancing a political message and spurring an issue’s momentum. To have business leaders go to the State House and talk about the importance of health care for young children would certainly surprise a lot of legislators. It would be the kind of welcomed surprise that Blood was banking on to propel this issue forward.

“These business leaders have respect and ties to the media community, and when they speak, legislators are used to listening,” says State Representative and Majority Whip Barbara Gardner, who sponsored a bill that would pay for home visitors to offer counsel and assistance to first-time teen-aged parents in their homes. Business leaders supported this legislation in ways that were similar to the dynamic that developed during the debate about health insurance for children, and once again many of Gardner’s colleagues were surprised. Few would have expected CEOs to know or care much about a home visiting program that was, after all, perceived by many of the legislators as being primarily about reducing child abuse and neglect. This topic was hardly something that most business leaders think much about. And it certainly isn’t something that many of them are willing to set aside their highly valued time to talk about with legislators.

“The message they delivered around children became one that wasn’t expected and was a nice surprise,” Gardner says. “Number one, they were not up here looking for a tax break for their businesses. And number two; they were genuinely concerned and speaking about these issues in terms of their own experiences in this city. These kids, they told us, will grow up healthier as future employees. So they brought a vantage point with a longer distance to it...When people from social service agencies speak, they are often directly involved with a program. But business leaders aren’t, so I think that makes them more credible.”

Business Leaders and Advocates Come Together for Children

“If we are going to be effective as advocates, we have to figure out what speaks to business leaders,” says **Marta Rosa**, director of the Child Care Resource Center in Cambridge, MA. “Sometimes I think we are arrogant enough to think they care. But they have a million things to care about, and they aren’t living the life of a homeless woman who has no child care. So I don’t go into this relationship with them being judgmental, thinking that they should care about this and why the hell don’t they. I go in saying, ‘this is an opportunity to get them to care in a significant way.’”

“In 30 years of child advocacy, Success By 6 was my first experience in doing it with a connection to business in any serious way,” says **Hubie Jones**, who is special assistant to the Chancellor for Urban Affairs at the University of Massachusetts at Boston. “I think I had a bias against getting into those kinds of alliances, believing that they would constrain tough actions. And we didn’t need to spend a lot of time convincing, fighting with, deluding strategies by having business people as partners.”

“Has being a part of Success By 6 influenced your thinking about involving business in child advocacy?” Jones is asked.

“Yes,” Jones replies. “No question about it...To have the business people on Beacon Hill and testifying on behalf of children as business people, that was the power.” Jones’ presence at that same witness table at the legislative hearing was, he said, “a message to other child advocates that said, ‘yeah, maybe it’s alright to link hands, to join forces with the business community and not feel that peril is involved. Maybe it’s time to reconsider alliances.’”

“People from child care are always saying, ‘Okay, let’s get into a group, form a line and we’ll be last.’ It doesn’t matter where we are. We can be meeting with the Speaker of the House and we play out a set of presumptions that have to do with us believing that we are not going to succeed. First we say ‘we shouldn’t succeed,’ then ‘we haven’t succeeded’ and ‘we can’t possibly succeed,’ and finally, ‘Don’t let us succeed,’” says **Doug Baird**, President of Associated Day Care Services, New England’s oldest early education agency. “Meanwhile, the business guys are saying ‘we expect to succeed,’ and working with them, we did.”

“Members of the advocacy community see business people as a bunch of hard-hearted, extremely competent people who don’t have any feelings,” says **Paul O’Brien**, former Chairman of New England Telephone. “And business people usually think of the advocacy community as a bunch of wide-eyed, ultra-liberals who have no fiscal sense and are well intentioned. And neither of those views is true. What needs to happen is there needs to be more interaction, so an understanding develops about the strengths of each side so the whole is, in fact, stronger than the sum of its parts.”

Others offered similar observations about the political advantage that can come with decoupling a perception of self-interest from one’s advocacy of an issue. Margaret McKenna, who was a member of the Leadership Council and President of Lesley College, which specializes in the training of teachers, describes the altered dynamic that exists when business leaders act as child advocates. “The business person, usually a man, doesn’t have anything personal to gain out

of his advocacy on these issues,” McKenna says. “So his approach is, ‘This is very important to do. It is high on the public agenda. And it is important to me.’ Members of the early childhood community don’t have the same stature (as business leaders). I also think legislators see their requests as a ‘gimme, gimme thing,’ that there will be some direct benefit to these members of the early childhood community if legislation is passed. Often advocates are the ones who deliver the services, so legislators think it’s somewhat self-serving for them to be talking about more funding for better facilities and better wages for child care workers.”

Chad Gifford counters this view by addressing the less obvious self-interest that he believes, in part, ought to convince other business leaders to participate in this kind of advocacy. “The fact is you could say it’s hardly selfless (for us to be doing this),” Gifford says. “Where are our future employees going to come from? They will come from a healthier community, healthier society. So I could put a selfish spin on it.” He does, however, couple this admission with another. “The fact that you are speaking up for poor children and you are head of a large bank, I suppose, is an unusual combination.”

There is no more pressing child-related issue behind which business organizations and corporate leaders have flexed their political muscle than that of education, urging reform and demanding tougher standards and more accountability as ways of producing a better prepared workforce and a stronger economy. For business leaders, support for measures to improve schools is something to which they have developed an affinity. By now, the voice of business is no longer “unlikely” when education issues are on the legislative agenda. This wasn’t always the case, however, and the many years it’s taken to actually bring business leaders into the legislative process is instructive in helping to understand how difficult it can be to create such an advocacy force for children.

Carol Goldberg, former President and COO of the grocery chain Stop & Shop and a member of the Success By 6 Leadership Council, explains it this way. “I belong to an organization of CEOs, the Council for Economic Development, and it started talking about problems of public education back in 1984. And they still have it as key on their agenda because it’s taken so many years to get the business community to understand the issues and then to try to understand our role in seeing that public education is changed.”

Blood knew that education — and preparing children for it — had to be part of her equation in convincing business leaders to involve themselves in legislative advocacy. Her job was to make the case to the Success By 6 business leaders that access to health care was integral to their overarching mission, which was to prevent problems early in life that would interfere with children’s readiness for school. What Blood hoped would work at the State House — once legislation to provide health care access for children was being debated — was that the voices and arguments of business leaders advocating for this bill would generate momentum for passage precisely because of their unexpected advocacy on this issue. After all, this wasn’t strictly an education issue, but in the minds of Blood’s troops, the connection to children’s educational success would be clear.

Blood also knew because of her long-standing involvement at the State House with related pieces of children’s health legislation that a strong and broad coalition of groups was in the process of developing a legislative strategy on this issue. Organized by an effective non-profit group called Health Care For All, coalition members were looking for the right political moment and working behind the scenes to develop the most promising legislative package that would push this issue to the fore at the State House.

That political moment, Blood believed, was just about to happen. With the recent

appointment of Representative John McDonough as House Chair of the legislature's Joint Committee on Health Care, Blood sensed that he would use this powerful position to try to enact some kind of sweeping health care reform. In fact, two other health care issues required attention during the upcoming session due to prior actions by the legislature and the Weld Administration. Therefore, Blood knew that issues relating to health care would come to the forefront of the legislative agenda. Certainly, Blood conjectured, improving the worsening health insurance status of children could — and should — become part of the upcoming debate. [See accompanying box, "Success By 6: Its Successful Legislative Agenda," to learn more about the specific bills.]

Once a particular legislative approach was agreed upon, the coalition could provide essential links to information, staff support and a political game plan in which each party — including the business leaders — would find useful and complementary roles to play. And that's exactly what happened, even though Success By 6 never became a formal member of the coalition.

"As our range of supporters became more and more unusual, our impact became greater and greater," says Rob Restuccia, director of Health Care for All, which served as the primary force for bringing together and sustaining this broad advocacy coalition. "To have the business community supporting a children's health access program was just unheard of," he says.

"Would the legislation have passed without these key business leaders playing the roles they did?" Restuccia is asked.

"I'd say their involvement was probably essential," he replies. "If the business community had simply said 'no new taxes' (as popular Republican Governor William Weld did in vetoing the bill), our coalition could have come apart easily."

Of course, working alongside these already established advocates meant that Blood had to assume yet another role: She would take on responsibility for devising a strategy that would work for the health access coalition members and these business and civic leaders affiliated with Success By 6. Again, as with the social services agencies and child advocacy communities, building bridges of understanding and mutual respect would require time, effort and diplomacy. "Margaret was sort of advising us how to make the bill remain attractive to her players — the business leaders — and make sure we don't cross the line (where we'd risk losing their support)," says Restuccia.

Success By 6: Its Successful Legislative Agenda

During 1996 and 1997, several of Boston's key business leaders assumed active and very visible roles in forming political alliances to successfully convince legislators to fund efforts to benefit children, especially those from low-income families. These business leaders served in front-line positions within the United Way's Success By 6 Leadership Council, a volunteer committee of more than 50 business, civic, health, academic, and religious leaders, chaired by BankBoston Chairman and CEO Chad Gifford. The Success By 6 initiative aligned the concerns and messages of key business leaders with those of child advocates and led to passage of three pieces of child-focused legislation, due in large measure to the engagement of these business leaders as "unlikely messengers."

1. **Health Care Access Law:** Members of the Leadership Council played a very important role in the passage of legislation that expanded access to health care for Massachusetts' 160,000 uninsured children. By relying on a 25-cent increase in the state's tobacco tax, an estimated \$70 million will be set aside each year to help families secure health insurance for children who are 18 years old or younger.
2. **The "Invest in Children" License Plate:** Success By 6 created and advocated for passage of this first-in-the-nation special license plate that earmarks funds from its sale to improve quality in not-for-profit childcare programs.
3. **Home Visiting Program for First-Time Teen-aged Parents:** The Success By 6 Leadership Council worked closely with the Massachusetts Children's Trust Fund and the Healthy Families Massachusetts Coalition, groups that developed this initiative, to secure \$5 million in state funding to create a universal home visiting program for teen-aged parents and their newborns.

An excerpt from correspondence to Success By 6 Leadership Council Members:

"Powerful kids need powerful friends. The powerless kids of Massachusetts have such a friend in you. We in the Legislature are grateful for your efforts and pleased to work with you on important children's issues."

Warmest regards. Sincerely, Charles F. Flaherty, Speaker of the House

Training business leaders for legislative advocacy

Corporate boardrooms aren't the place for learning about why children need the help of business leaders. It's hard to focus the mind on what it's like for a child to be sick and without access to good health care when a chef is preparing individualized orders of breakfast to be served on fine china and eaten at a shiny mahogany table. Blood knew that if the reality and *raison d'être* of this commitment that business leaders were telling her they wanted to make was to get through, she had to move the Leadership Council meetings out of the glitzy rooms of Boston skyscrapers and into communities where these families lived. Visceral connections had to be made if the advocacy work of the business leaders was going to be heartfelt and genuine.

"I knew I couldn't get them on board with how urgent the need was for their voices to be heard from the board room of BankBoston," Blood says. "I had to get them out with the children, the parents and the pediatricians. And I also wanted them to meet with legislators to build relationships."

Blood chose the Department of Pediatrics at Boston Medical Center, the hospital that serves as the treatment center for many of the city's poorest families, as the site of the next Leadership Council meeting. Blood began the meeting with a succinct report on the facts about children's health care, showing ways in which important information could be woven to make a powerful argument for why this new approach was necessary. Then the Chairman of the Department of Pediatrics at Boston Medical Center, Dr. Barry Zuckerman — himself a member of the Leadership Council — led his Council colleagues and legislators on an up-close tour of the hospital's neonatal intensive care unit and in-patient pediatric ward. At each site, pediatricians and nurses described what the Council members and legislators were seeing in ways that linked their act of personal witness to their upcoming job as advocates.

To accomplish this, Blood spent time beforehand "training" doctors and nurses in how to make these linkages apparent in the limited time they would have with Council members and legislators. When the tour ended, Representative John McDonough talked about the challenges of closing the gap on the uninsured without "pitching" a specific legislative initiative.

"When business people see these babies and children and listen to us explain how having access to a primary care physician means that children won't end up having to be treated in a hospital as often, then they are better able to explain to legislators why such legislation is so important. They come away knowing that so much of what brings these children to the hospital can be prevented," says Dr. Zuckerman. "For legislators to hear business leaders deliver a similar message to the one they are hearing from us makes a big difference in whether a bill will get the attention of legislative leaders and eventually be passed."

The meeting ended with Chad Gifford making a pledge in front of his fellow Council members, legislators, and hospital personnel. "It is unacceptable that tens of thousands of young children in our state have no health insurance. And we in the business community should help do something about it." His comment made certain that the issue of children's access to health care would be their frontline concern in the months ahead.

As Gifford says, reflecting on the value of this and other site visits, "Margaret says to me that we're going to visit this pediatric unit that serves low-income families. And after a while, even the dumbest of us all of a sudden say, 'I get it.'"

In fact, Gifford believes that many more business leaders would "get it" when it comes to investing their time in advocating for children if they had an impetus to learn more about the

issues as well as the time to do so. “One of the issues for any business executive is that their lives are so busy. I could work at this bank, if I wanted to, twenty hours each day easily. Then add all of the receptions and entertainment and boards we serve on. In an environment like this, it’s very difficult for anybody, regardless of how enlightened or selfish they are, to really know what the issues are with children and what the needs are...The biggest frustration is not that people are bad. It is that they are busy and they are uneducated,” Gifford says. “For me, Success By 6 was a springboard for a tremendous amount of learning about what kids’ issues are. And learning is power. I was shocked to find out how many children did not have health insurance and talking about the very young and how much takes place in the brain during those years. It just sort of feeds on itself. You visit day care centers. You visit schools. You visit pediatric hospitals. So that when you go up to the State House, you realize how important what you are doing is.... Whether it’s me or anybody else, when one really sees what the issues are and feels we have a chance to make a difference, then it is not hard to want to be an agent for change.”

As the Leadership Council considered and developed approaches to support other legislative initiatives, Blood arranged to hold similar meetings at sites where the issues would be brought to life through what the business leaders saw and heard from people who might be affected directly by their actions. A meeting to consider support for home visiting legislation, for example, took place at a Boston public housing development. Business leaders — none of whom had been to public housing before — listened as a teen mother described how her visits from a home visitor taught her how to better care for her child. Suzin Bartley, Executive Director of the Children’s Trust Fund, the Massachusetts organization publicly charged with creating a statewide strategy for preventing child abuse and neglect, also spoke. She explained why home visiting was a credible investment in prevention, the kind of program she knew the Success By 6 Leadership Council members would be inclined to support. She emphasized, too, that the political moment was about to arrive at the State House when a vigorous push for such a program was likely to meet with success. If Success By 6 members would add their voices and advocacy to the chorus of support that already existed among child advocates, then passage would become much more likely, Bartley believed.

As Bartley would say later, after legislators appropriated funds to inaugurate a universal home visiting program for first-time teen-aged mothers, “It was an opportunity that was kind of waiting for them (the business leaders). It was a natural match.” In speaking with business leaders about their possible involvement, Bartley was sensitive to ways in which they would be most comfortable in presenting arguments for its passage. “We did not present home visiting as only being about child abuse prevention but we talked about it as an overall investment in children, about the increase (it could bring about) in immunization rates, in reducing the inappropriate use of emergency rooms and decreasing preventable injuries,” Bartley says. “And we talked about brain development from ages zero to three. This is an intervention that does not just address the prevention of child abuse. It has positive impact on the outcomes of both mom and child and potentially dad.”

Bartley’s comments that morning were tailored purposely to echo the message that Blood had been conveying to the Council members. (Blood had worked with Bartley to mesh their messages, just as she had “trained” the providers at Boston Medical Center to stay “on message” as they gave their tour to Council members.) In fact, when Blood introduced the idea of supporting home visiting legislation to the Leadership Council, she presented it as a natural follow-up to the health care access bill, the passage of which they had just succeeded in securing. By linking these children early on to the health system through the use of home visitors, the

children would be more likely to be cared for by a primary care provider and not rely on the inconsistent and costly care of emergency room physicians. By now, this was a message that these Council members could understand.

Howard Hiatt, a physician and former Dean of the Harvard School of Public Health who served on the Leadership Council, saw great value in the way these meetings brought disparate community members together to learn from one another. “The woman who is served by the health center must inevitably be affected by the presence of the BankBoston president who has come to listen to her talk about her family’s health problems,” Hiatt says. “And he, in turn, unless there is some kind of a steel wall between him and what he is exposed to — and there is no reason to believe that about any of the people who served on this Council — had to sense that this was about more than fundraising. He had to come away feeling that this is a woman with difficulties I now feel I understand better, and I now can appreciate the difference that the resources we are fighting for will make.”

By the time the legislature was ready to consider funding home visiting, the Success By 6 Leadership Council was fully engaged in advocating for it. They had absorbed the message from informed advocates such as Bartley. Blood and the bill’s legislative sponsors had also tutored them in effective ways to deliver their advocacy message. “Talking points” about each issue had been written so that the Council members could have with them a concise synopsis of how to describe the problem and its proposed solution. And after a careful examination of which legislators served on key committees revealed that some Leadership Council members were represented by these Senators and House members, Blood had also directed the business leaders in how to reach out and ask for their support for this legislation. (For many of the Council members, this was the first time they actually found out who their State Representative and Senator were!)

Because many business leaders live in wealthy suburban communities, their elected officials tend to be more conservative and less inclined to support legislation targeted at poor and low-income families and children. With these legislators, a business leader’s personal appeal — as a constituent — makes a difference. As John McDonough, sponsor of the children’s health care access legislation observes about its passage, “Six Republican Senators voted in favor of the bill. They were blown away by getting phone calls from the BankBoston CEO asking them to support this.”

Bink Garrison, Chairman and CEO of Ingalls, a leading advertising agency in Boston, had never contacted either his state Representative or Senator before Blood handed out a list of key legislators for the Success By 6 effort and he discovered his senator was on it. “First thing I did was to write her a note,” Garrison says. (Drafts of sample letters were provided by Success By 6 staff, as were samples of all-important thank you letters that Blood instructed each of them to send to their legislators when they supported some aspect of the Success By 6 effort.) “I mentioned that these issues were coming up and I thought they were important. And she called me back which astonished me. I think the expectation of a neophyte is that the political system doesn’t work. I was delightfully surprised that my state senator, upon receiving my message got back to me, as I would a client. She was attentive and favored what we were supporting. I invited her to come to the Success By 6 press conference we were going to have and she came. She clearly threw her support behind this. Basically she played ball with us, which I thought was great. And me, feeling gratitude, signed up gladly to play the fundraising game for her... This experience showed me a very positive side of government and its potential for action in doing good that maybe I had become a little cynical about.”

Garrison was also impressed by the way his business colleagues, especially Paul O'Brien, whose insights he particularly valued, worked on honing the message they would deliver. "It was Paul who said, 'Look. You have to focus what you ask for; you can't just go up there and say 'I want to help kids.' You have to make it doable and understandable, rational and realistic.' He truly helped shape the message strategy so it didn't sound like a bunch of hysterical liberals, but, in fact, it was rational and crisp. If he hadn't done this, we might have sounded like a bunch of bleeding hearts or something."

It was also O'Brien who stunned legislators, as well as some of his business colleagues, in the midst of a Leadership Council meeting held at the State House to "train" these new advocates. As discussion surfaced about how the children's health care access bill might be funded, O'Brien rose from his seat to defend the possibility of raising money through implementation of a 25-cent tobacco tax. This was something many in the business community were against because of their commitment to opposing any industry-specific taxes, lest the same strategy be targeted someday at them. Also, as mentioned earlier, Governor Weld, who had also made a "no new taxes pledge" and threatened a veto if the legislation came to him with any tax increase, was a figure that few business leaders wanted to take on, especially on the unpopular issue of a tax increase.

O'Brien adroitly offered political cover for his colleagues by reminding them of the relative merit of various approaches or, in this case, what he referred to as "sins." One key provision in the pending legislation had to do with the imposition of an employer mandate on businesses, forcing them either to provide health insurance for employees or contribute funds into a general pool. "The employer mandate would be a mortal sin," O'Brien declared. "The tobacco tax would just be a venial sin." In other words, he was signaling to them that it was best to embrace the lesser of two evils in order to achieve a social good - children's health insurance.

Later, when a Boston Globe reporter heard about O'Brien's statement, he wrote a story describing support in the business community for increasing the state tobacco tax to finance health care expansions. As O'Brien explains, when asked to describe the intent of his message to these other business leaders, "All I asked them for was non-interference (with the legislation), I didn't ask them to sign up." And, as things turned out, business organizations either endorsed the legislation (despite its tax increase) or kept quiet as the Republican Governor stuck to his no-new-taxes pledge and vetoed the bill. As Governor Weld's Secretary of Administration and Finance, Charlie Baker, observes, "Most of the business community took their leadership from these influential players." In the end, the legislature did override Governor Weld's veto, and thousands of families finally had a way to secure affordable health insurance for their children.

From his perch as Secretary of Administration and Finance, Baker saw the shifting political dynamic brought about by these business leaders' involvement. As the health care access legislative battles took shape, key members of the Success By 6 initiative visited Baker to inform him and the Governor of their plans to support passage of a children's bill, even if raising taxes on tobacco was necessary to achieve it.

The meeting with Baker began on a surprising note.

"Charlie," Chad Gifford asked, "how could it be that tens of thousands of little kids in our state have no health insurance?"

In retrospect, Baker admits that Chad's opening question startled him a bit. "You expect Chad Gifford to come in and talk about one set of things, and he comes in and says something like that. That's a different enough occurrence to make you think to yourself, 'Well, maybe this is something that is important to a lot more people than just him. And maybe it's something that

is important to a lot more people than just the people who are self-interested in it.”

Baker says that in his five years of being Weld’s Secretary of Administration and Finance, he was rarely surprised by what he heard when people came to his office to talk about political issues. “No one ever comes into your office, with the rare exception, and says anything to you that you don’t expect is going to be said,” Baker explains. “But in this case, I definitely felt this was a different way of approaching one of these discussions than I had ever seen before.... Any time you can get somebody to say something that seems out of place, yes, there is a real benefit. You demonstrate legitimacy by not having the same people who are expected to talk about it, talk about it.”

Business leaders acting as advocates

Blood’s strategy of providing such “unlikely messengers” to deliver messages of support also became a central feature of the home visiting coalition’s strategic plan once its legislative push began. At a committee hearing, pediatrician T. Berry Brazelton sat at the witness table with Thomas Menino, the Mayor of Boston. Their session was followed by business leader Paul O’Brien, Reverend Ray Hammond — each on the Leadership Council — Anne Gifford, Chad’s wife who was filling in for him since he could not be at the hearing, and Marian Heard, CEO and President of the United Way of Massachusetts Bay. “We had folks speaking at the hearing whom the Joint Committee on Human Services just does not see,” Bartley says. “Because key players in the business community were up at the State House saying ‘do this,’ it was a surprise. We also got a wonderful newspaper editorial in support of home visiting because of who was sitting in the editorial board meeting: Paul O’Brien, Marian Heard, Chad Gifford and me. The issue of home visiting went from being a little tiny blip on legislators’ radar screens to being a nice solid ‘This is what you should be doing.’ What a lovely thing to have as we headed into the Senate.”

The appearance of a supportive editorial in *The Boston Globe* was not a mere coincidence. As with other elements of the Success By 6 initiative, Blood regarded such media exposure as an essential part of her strategic plan. During each of the two years she directed this initiative, Blood scheduled editorial board meetings at Boston’s two newspapers as a way of seeking critical support for the initiative’s legislative agenda. To these meetings, she brought an eclectic mix of Leadership Council members, thereby visibly illustrating the appeal the issues had to a broad range of people who didn’t usually show up together at such meetings. And what happened at the State House with legislators worked well, too, with the editorial boards. That BankBoston CEO Chad Gifford was taking time to talk with them about instituting a home visiting program was unusual enough to grab their attention and garner support in the newspaper.

With health care access and home visiting, strong advocacy coalitions already existed, and specific legislative vehicles were emerging at the State House that members of the Leadership Council decided they could support. However, in the case of child care, which had been identified as another issue that Success By 6 wanted to address, Council members decided to create their own bill, proposing a unique approach to raising funds to improve the quality of care. Their bill — An Act Establishing a Fund to Improve Child Care Services Through the Purchase of Distinctive License Plates — proposed to earmark money from an additional fee of \$40 that car owners would pay to purchase special license plates to fund quality improvements in non-profit child care programs. (These quality improvements range from making professional

training available to providers to offering technical assistance to help them earn national accreditation, from purchasing educational materials to improving the curriculum for children.) This license plate would have on it a colorful stick-design of children and the words “Invest in Children.”

This legislative approach had obvious advantages, ones that did not escape those business leaders who were strategizing Success By 6’s initial foray into the public policy arena. Unlike health care access or home visiting, this bill asked for no large expenditure of public funds, only for legislative approval to allow these plates to be produced and sold. Corporate leaders, who often find themselves asking legislators for tax breaks as a part of doing business, sometimes find it difficult (though, as Success By 6 demonstrates, not impossible) to support measures that will require new expenditures of public funds. In this case, however, business leaders could say with confidence that the expenditure of public money would be minimal, whereas the potential benefit was big. What also appealed to these business leaders was the fact that these funds would accumulate because citizens would choose to contribute.

The second advantage to Success By 6 of proposing this bill resided in its sole ownership of at least a piece of a major child-focused public policy issue, quality child care. If perception matters in politics — and everyone agrees it does — then owning a part of this issue would provide Success By 6 with a lot of visibility and credibility in the legislative arena. Because of the engagement of Chad Gifford and his Council colleagues, this proposal received an inordinate amount of attention by print and broadcast media and, in turn, by legislators. The press conference to announce the bill’s filing was held at a non-profit child care center in a Boston public housing development. Reporters from several local papers and a television station were at the press conference, but other members of the press picked up on the story as word of the legislation spread. And as the bill worked its way through the legislative process, it remained a highly visible proposal, the kind that legislators couldn’t ignore. Approval of it did get bogged down temporarily in political wrangling as many other organizations tried to convince legislators to support their license plate proposals to raise money for their particular cause. However, only the “Invest in Children” license plate passed.

“High profile. Strategic, yes,” says O’Brien, as he explains why Success By 6 decided to propose its own child care measure. “The license plate put us on the map in terms of highlighting the entire issue of investing in children. We got public exposure, and it was easy for Channel 5 to get their arms around the license plate.”

Channel 5, Boston’s local ABC affiliate (WCVB), editorially supported Success By 6 (its General Manager Paul LaCamera served on its Leadership Council) and it also produced and broadcast advertisements to support the public policy agenda. “I’ve been involved for a long time in doing joint media/business/community initiatives. While they always do a wonderful job raising public consciousness about an issue, there isn’t usually an outcome you can point to other than raising public awareness,” LaCamera says. “But this time, we passed meaningful legislation.” The Success By 6 ads and several special features produced by WCVB were paid for out of the marketing budgets of BankBoston and Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Massachusetts, as well as with in-kind contributions from Channel 5. [See accompanying box, “Success By 6 Public Awareness Campaign,” for examples of its televised advertisements.]

“There were a lot of other license plate bills proposed, but this one gave legislators the chance to say, ‘Kids are more important than this group or that group that wants one.’” O’Brien says. “And to others in the business community, we could say, ‘we aren’t using government funds but we are using a public vehicle to improve child care.’”

From Blood's perspective, the license plate also worked as a legislative vehicle for Success By 6 because, as she learned from her discussions with the business leaders, "CEOs like products." As Blood later explained, "I wanted something that could teach the Council members the legislative process and this worked as a way to engage an entire coalition who had never worked together."

Chad Gifford testified at the Senate Ways and Means Committee hearing called to consider this bill. As could have been predicted, his appearance in Room 222 of the State House brought many more committee members to the hearing room than normally show up for such hearings. And a lot more members of the press showed up to document this moment. As one legislator puts it, "When bank presidents advocate for child care, people take notice." Another legislator explains that Gifford didn't even need to say anything at the hearing; his presence spoke volumes about why this bill was now likely to pass.

"Just having him there, wearing the Success By 6 button, creates the effect that you want," says former State Representative John McDonough. Kevin Fitzgerald, a long-time champion of children's legislation and Boston state representative, explains how the presence of the business leaders helped. "Their presence shed a spotlight on these issues. When they came up to testify, they brought the media. They brought the lights. They brought free publicity. They shared information that we couldn't do from this end. And they had to take time to do what they did and that wasn't lost on anybody," Fitzgerald says. "I can be passionate about these issues and people will say, 'That's great, but he's from the neighborhood.' Chad Gifford and Paul O'Brien walk in the door and say 'From a business point of view, investments we make today will make a difference and this is why.'... People hear it from Chad and they go, 'That's right. Oh, I understand. I get it. We are not just throwing money away on those people.' That changes the dynamic of how people think money is being spent."

Success By 6 Public Awareness Campaign:

WCVB-TV, the local ABC affiliate, had signed on with the United Way to create a two-year public awareness campaign about Success By 6 sponsored by BankBoston and Blue Cross and BlueShield of Massachusetts. In its messages and programs and special reports, WCVB-TV had addressed such issues as parenting, child safety and child development. When Success By 6's Leadership Council decided to focus on advocating a public policy agenda, both the station and campaign sponsors had to be convinced to create new ads to spotlight this message. The station agreed, and also headlined some of these issues as part of its news coverage. The visibility provided by WCVB's Success By 6 public awareness campaign was pivotal to its success at the State House.

What follows is text from these public awareness spots:

House on the Hill: (Camera moves from a residential house to the State House.)

From house to house children are treated differently.

Do the people in this house care about kids? (Image of a residential house.)

You can't just walk in and check.

You can't demand the folks in this house do what's right for small children

But you can at this house. (Image of the State House is shown)

Call your elected officials and ask how important children are to the adults in the house on the hill.

Chad Gifford, Chairman and CEO, BankBoston (Camera follows Gifford as he walks up the State House steps.)

Everyday people here decide how to invest in the most valuable resource.

No, this isn't the stock exchange.

It's the State House.

And the resource is the children of Massachusetts.

Our elected officials want to know what you think.

Invest a minute to let them know.

Because investing in children should be everybody's business.

Bob Shafto, CEO, The New England (Camera follows Shafto as he moves through an early childhood center.)

We can double the chances of a child getting a job in the future by providing quality early education now.

Take the time to let your elected officials know that you support their efforts.

Let's all work together to strengthen and expand early education.

Success By 6 Public Awareness Campaign (continued)

Ralph Martin, Suffolk County District Attorney

Paul Evans, Boston Police Commissioner

(Camera shows the two of them standing in front of library bookshelves.)

The sooner parents involve their young children in reading, the better.

Because the facts are that 75% of all incarcerated young adults can't read very well.

And one of the most common reasons children don't learn to read is because they don't see their parents reading.

Let's support our elected officials' efforts to expand education programs for children and adults.

And show our children that reading is enjoyable.

We'd much rather see a child with one of these. (Holds up a book.)

Than a young adult with a pair of these. (Holds up handcuffs.)

Margaret McKenna, President, Lesley College (Her voice is played over a scene of a very young baby being held by a nurse/social worker. Then the scene shifts to her sitting at her desk.)

If the maternity ward is the last place a child is seen by a doctor, the chances for that child doing well in school drop dramatically.

A child can't learn if he or she isn't healthy.

Regular visits with a health care provider make it easier to spot a problem before it starts to affect how children do in the classroom.

Tell your elected officials you support their efforts to help all children learn and stay healthy.

In his testimony, Gifford framed the issues of quality child care to play into this unexpected dynamic, emphasizing his relationship to these issues through his role as a corporate leader. "As a banker," he said, "I know the value of making good investments. Passage of this bill would show that the Commonwealth is acting on the most important kind of investment: the children and families of Massachusetts. Not only is this bill good public policy, but it gives individual citizens of our state a tangible opportunity to 'invest in children' while quite literally 'driving the message home' across the state and across the country."

Ardith Wieworka, the Commissioner of the state's Executive Office of Child Care Services, which oversees the license plate fund, observes that it was not only Gifford's professional stature — but his gender, as well — that made his testimony so influential in the

bill's passage. "I also think it is persuasive when men advocate on child care issues," Wieworka says. "I am not making a sexist remark by saying this. I am making a real observation about when you have men going to talk with male legislators — the people in power in the legislature are men. And when you have men going to those men advocating on child care issues, it is more persuasive than when you have child care advocates who are primarily women doing the same thing."

Can other business leaders become advocates for children?

Charlie Baker, who left state government and became a corporate CEO, believes that every community has within it what he calls a "political cognoscenti," an influential group of opinion leaders who "absolutely drive thinking" on particular issues. In essence, what Success By 6 did was corral some key members of Boston's "political cognoscenti" and strategically bring their influence to bear on a clearly defined, manageable package of legislative initiatives to help children. Baker describes Success By 6 as a very good example of politics working effectively at "the wholesale level," as opposed to the retail level where the "grassroots" child advocacy constituencies customarily operate. "Success By 6 was absolutely a wholesale success," Baker says.

Potential exists in other states, Baker says, for similar "wholesale" approaches to be tried when it comes to children's legislation. "I don't mean that it's been figured out in many states how to create such an alliance for children between and among the wholesale players," Baker says. "But I am saying that there are the ingredients for it. In every state, there are a whole bunch of people who are considered to be relatively influential and important, but I don't think they've been pulled together."

A number of factors conspired in Massachusetts to make this effort succeed, including geographic proximity and a legacy of political activism. In Massachusetts, its centers of commerce, politics and media are located in the same city, Boston, where its capitol sits. The State House's gold dome is visible from the windows where corporate leaders spend their days. To schedule a visit with a legislator, for example, does not involve an entire day for travel. In Boston, the State House is often a ten-minute walk from downtown office buildings. But in a state such as California, where its capitol is located in Sacramento, far away from the headquarters of many major businesses, getting corporate leaders to devote the time it would take to make such visits would be more difficult to do. (Business leaders can also meet with legislators in their home districts.) Time is such a valued commodity that it must be factored into any equation that involves the active participation of corporate executives. But this factor of time also can work as a plus; the fact that a business leader takes time to advocate for child-focused legislation sends an unmistakable message to legislators: Pay attention! This matters!

In a state in which such factors aren't in place, putting together this new kind of advocacy alliance will undoubtedly present many challenges. Judith Rouse, a Success By 6 staff member in Boston, says that when people from other Success By 6 groups come to discuss creating such a project in their area they tell her, "Our State House is three hours from where much of our state's business community is located. So it is difficult to get the two together." In rural states, great distances make it tough to bring individuals together, not to mention the challenges of maintaining a watchful eye on State House activity and an active, persistent presence as bills move through various stages of consideration. Also, in this era of globalization, those who

actually operate a business are often located in a different state or country. This makes it impossible to involve community-level “captains of industry” whom legislators come to know and with whom they form relationships.

Because Massachusetts’ legislators congregate in Boston during much of the year, the city’s major media outlets — two daily newspapers and a number of local broadcast stations — concentrate their attention. Thus, it is easier to focus a “message” and saturate “the market” when major media outlets are centrally located. In a more geographically diverse state such as New York, legislators who convene in Albany aren’t exposed to the same media outlets as many of the corporate leaders who work in New York City, for example. It should be noted, however, that one reason Success By 6 was successful was its skillful targeting of legislators’ hometown papers. Letters to the editor, written by key civic and business leaders, were submitted to local papers in communities where specific legislators lived. And politically advantageous moments captured on film — such as a state legislator’s visit to a local child care program with an influential business leader — were submitted to small town newspapers that don’t have the staff to photograph such events. Targeted press releases about work done by a legislator on aspects of the coalition’s agenda were also provided to local editors. The legislators who played key roles in the passage of Success By 6-supported bills, were thanked at a reception held at BankBoston. Press releases and photographs of legislators receiving their plaques were sent to their district newspapers. BankBoston also funded an advertisement to increase public awareness of the accomplishments of Success By 6 and to commend state legislators for their support. This ad appeared in three Boston newspapers. [See accompanying copy of this advertisement.] Some legislators even wrote columns for their local newspapers highlighting their involvement passing legislation backed by Success By 6. Many legislators also sent out their own press releases about their work on these bills. Similar kinds of media strategies — along with the all-important letter writing to individual legislators by constituent business leaders and other influential leaders — can be designed for use in every state.

State legislative schedules also vary from state to state, with some legislators only meeting for a limited time every two years. Though the Massachusetts legislature is in session during much of the calendar year, the length of a state’s legislative session should have little or no impact on whether such a business/child advocacy alliance on behalf of children can work. Its design might need to be different, given the length of the session, but its fundamental approach could remain quite similar. In every instance, the focus of the business leaders must be on connecting with legislative leaders who set the session’s agenda and with key committee leaders who control the budget-making process. It is, after all, the intersection from the world of the business with those who wield power within the legislative body to create the momentum necessary for children’s agendas to grab attention of both legislators and the media. What made Success By 6 so effective was that these business leaders became part of an unlikely alliance with religious, labor, academic and health leaders, as well as child advocates. And together this unlikely group of messengers found ways to win the support of policy makers by coalescing around the same message on behalf of children.

Given various competing demands on their time and requests for service, it can be extremely difficult to convince corporate CEOs to sign up for such a project because of the time it takes for them to become educated about the issues, trained for and engaged in legislative advocacy for children. It was, many of Boston’s business leaders suggest, only the extraordinary dynamism of Heard’s personality in her role as head of this United Way and her persistence that convinced them and other civic leaders to commit their time and energy to work on this

emerging initiative. After all, each had to pledge that he or she — not a stand-in — would attend the four annual Leadership Council meetings. Also, to organize this kind of effort requires a commitment of resources to hire a well-qualified staff, one with proven political experience, knowledge about the issues, and skills to bring disparate parties together. When corporate leaders put their business reputations on the line to argue for passage of children’s legislative agendas, they require the same high level of preparation by skilled staff that they would for meetings in their boardroom. Such expertise can be hard to find and not inexpensive to hire.

Finally, child advocates might worry — as Boston advocate Hubie Jones did — that there might be too many discomfiting tradeoffs when advocacy coalitions with business leaders are formed. That the business leaders will steal the limelight is a given that needs to be acknowledged and accepted up front if these alliances are going to be held together for children. That these corporate leaders might gain other advantages for themselves and/or their business interests is open for debate, though most of the Boston business leaders acknowledged that they did gain greater respect from legislators because of their involvement with Success By 6. And they enhanced their company’s reputation among employees and customers. “Do I and this bank have more respect in the community? I don’t have a clue,” says Gifford, of his involvement in Success By 6. “Do I feel more confident as a leader? Yes, I feel tremendously confident that my values are right, and for anyone to feel confident, that’s worth a lot.”

Leo Breitman finds it equally difficult to measure the impact his participation in Success By 6 had on business. “Does it make you warmer, kinder, gentler and does it raise how the consumer feels about the bank? Does it get you any business at the end of the day?” he asks rhetorically. “We will never know the answers to those questions. But you try to create an awareness of how you are perceived in the marketplace and how you want to be perceived. All I know is that when we show up at the State House to talk about ATM machines, legislators are just as ready to kill us as they were the day before.”

Whether by advocating for children’s issues, business leaders then receive better treatment by legislators on business-related issues is also a question that has no definite answer. “I do think you run the risk of enhancing the prestige of business people who are in other contexts (of doing business) doing things you might otherwise disagree with,” says Reverend Ray Hammond. “I think you need to recognize that up front, every time you bring groups like this together. When we, in the black religious community, get together with the police or political figures from outside our community to work on various issues, we begin by saying, ‘Look, there are things that we’re going to disagree on, but here are some things that we both recognize as being important. And on these issues, we are going to find ways to cooperate.’”

Like many of his legislative colleagues, former State Senator Warren Tolman acknowledges that political success correlates fairly closely with the nurturing of one-on-one relationships. There can be little doubt that involvement in a child-focused initiative can mean that legislators come to regard a business leader in a different way. And this different perspective can carry over to encounters on issues such as corporate tax breaks that reduce the amount of funds available for things such as public schools. But, as with many negotiations, how they are handled matters most.

“I give these business leaders a lot of credit for coming up here on these other issues, as long as they don’t try to take advantage, while they are here for children, to say ‘oh, by the way, let’s talk about bank taxes,’” Tolman says. “Quite frankly, I think it’s good to develop a relationship with someone you can rely on and trust. I was able to separate these issues all the time. In this case, I think familiarity does not necessarily breed contempt.” State Senator Mark

Montigny is unequivocal in his belief that such involvement by business leaders will help them with other State House business. “It absolutely helps (the business people),” Montigny says. “In politics, it’s relationships. Whether it should be or should not be, it is relationships.” Montigny sees some potential for conflict — or at least confusion — as business leaders make what could be regarded as competing demands in their visits to the State House.

For example, as members of Success By 6, they might be asking a legislator to fund a child-focused program with state funds but, at the same time, they or their corporate lobbyist, might be asking for reductions in their business’ tax rate. “I don’t know if this gets reconciled (in legislators’ minds),” says Montigny, who before he became a state senator was the head of his city’s Chamber of Commerce. “I think it leaves a state of confusion...every one of us separately and in a very fluid way is going through a process of reinterpreting our relationships with entities and with individuals. With the business community, there is no one answer. There is no one person saying, ‘Oh well, they are doing good here, but bad there.’ It is always changing.”

On one point, there can be no dispute. Children benefited from this unique alliance that was struck among corporate and civic leaders and members of the child advocacy community in Boston. [See accompanying box, “Success By 6: What is the on going impact of these laws?”, for description of how these initiatives are continuing to benefit children and families.] And Success By 6 demonstrated how these “unlikely messengers” were able to capture the attention of both legislators and the media, and how this increased focus helped to propel bills from back burners to top-line agenda items that were pushed forward by legislative leaders.

Looking back at the success of Success by 6’s public policy initiative, Marian Heard relishes the fact that they achieved what few believed possible. “Many people told me it couldn’t be done. Many people told me that this community would never work in a collaborative fashion. They told me that the business community would not work with the agency providers and that the agency providers would not work with labor leaders and that the labor leaders would not work with the business community. They’d just suggest any match they wanted to and I’d nod and say, ‘Thank you so very much. I appreciate that information.’ And, of course, I went marching on.”

Success By 6: What is the on-going impact of these laws?

Three pieces of child-focused legislation were enacted during 1996 and 1997, with some of Boston's business and civic leaders playing pivotal roles in their becoming law. Now, several years later, the initiatives and programs these bills created are continuing to reap benefits for the state's children. What follows are descriptions of how these initiatives that began as words on paper and were pushed forward by the efforts of Success By 6 and others continue to make positive differences in the lives of children and their families.

1. **Health Care Access Law:** Enacted into law despite Governor William Weld's veto in July of 1996, this bill has resulted in thousands of families being able to obtain health insurance for their children. In part, this is because of revenue generated by the 25-cent tobacco tax mandated by this new law. During the past fiscal year, this tax provided \$95 million to help fund this program. Also, this law became the forerunner for federal legislation passed by Congress in 1997 that created — through a national tobacco tax — the Children's Health Insurance Program [CHIP] to support similar programs in every state. Because of these initiatives, so far an estimated 50,000 fewer children in Massachusetts are uninsured.

2. **The "Invest in Children" License Plate:** Since this bill became law in November of 1996 (and the license plate became available in April of 1997), some 6,000 of these special plates have been sold. From that sale, \$150,000 has been raised and allocated to the "Child Care Quality Fund" created by this law. In 1999, the Executive Office of Child Care Services awarded the Fund's first grants to nine non-profit child care programs. These grants total \$84,574 and will be used to support quality initiatives ranging from specialized training for teachers to technical assistance for national accreditation, and from translation services to the purchase of toys and equipment.

3. **Home Visiting Program for First-Time Teen-Aged Parents:** In fiscal year 1998, \$5 million was appropriated to launch the universal newborn home visiting program statewide. The next year the legislature increased its funding to \$7.8 million and in 2000 that figure will rise by another three to five million dollars. As of May, 1999, 2,025 teen parents (along with their newborns) were enrolled in the program. This figure represents nearly half of the teen parents who give birth in Massachusetts each year. Slightly more than half of the participants began receiving services while they were pregnant. A comprehensive evaluation has been developed with funding from two national foundations.

Representative Barbara Gardner: As chief House sponsor of the newborn home visiting initiative, she reflects on the long-term impact these legislative campaigns had on those who were involved in them:

"It is kind of like throwing pebbles into water: there are all sorts of rings that form out of this one idea. I bet dollars to donuts that some of these people who were involved in Success By 6 have now gone on to do other things related to children's issues somewhere else in this city. Not that they wouldn't come back up to the State House, but they're hooked into the importance of these issues. Permanently."