

WHO WE ARE

Founded in Chicago in 1995, COFI is driven by a vision of building a broad movement of parent leaders working for economic, racial and social justice for families. We train and organize parents of color (mostly mothers and grandmothers) who, in turn, have built local and citywide organizations that are fighting for change around issues affecting families, and attracting attention nationally to their innovative policy solutions and organizing steps.

WHAT WE DO

COFI provides intensive and systematic leadership development and ongoing expertise with a model called Family Focused Organizing. This unique and time-tested approach helps build family-supportive communities and adds the voice and experience of parents to shaping programs and public policies affecting their lives. The core of COFI is developing the capacity of parents to be leaders, with the skills and power to change the way things get done. Parents can be effective and respected ambassadors for their own interests.



“COFI has changed me and helped me become a better parent and better parent leader in the community. Before I didn’t have a voice... but now I have a voice.”

Talibah Moore, mother of three children in Chicago and a passionate advocate for increasing access to early learning programs. She knows first-hand the difference they made for her children.

4,000 parents have participated in COFI's leadership development program.

COFI has provided training and worked in partnership with more than 100 organizations.

COFI'S MISSION

Our mission is to strengthen the power and voice of low-income and working families at all levels of civic life—from local institutions and communities to local, state, and federal policy arenas.

COFI-TRAINED PARENTS HAVE WON NOTABLE PUBLIC POLICY VICTORIES



Return of Recess
Won the return of recess to the Chicago Public Schools



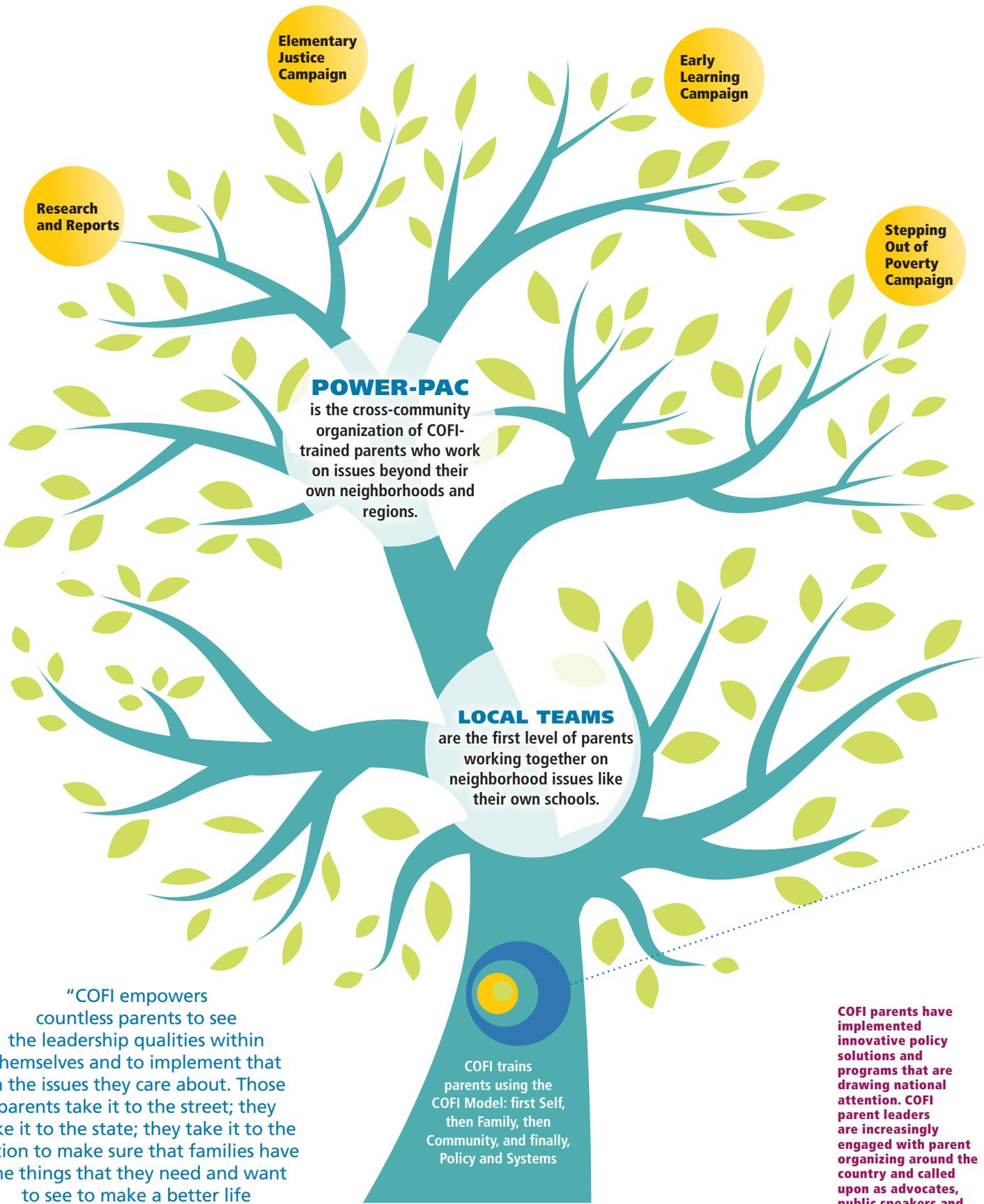
Restorative Justice
Persuaded Chicago Public Schools to end zero-tolerance policies and adopt restorative justice practices



No suspensions for small children
Got suspensions banned for children below second grade



Early Education
Won funding for peer-to-peer ambassador program that connects families to high-quality early education programs and information



"COFI empowers countless parents to see the leadership qualities within themselves and to implement that in the issues they care about. Those parents take it to the street; they take it to the state; they take it to the nation to make sure that families have the things that they need and want to see to make a better life for all of our children."

*Rosazlia Grillier,
COFI parent leader*

COFI parents have implemented innovative policy solutions and programs that are drawing national attention. COFI parent leaders are increasingly engaged with parent organizing around the country and called upon as advocates, public speakers and trainers.

COFI

COFI TRAINS AND ORGANIZES PARENTS TO BE LEADERS

THE COFI MODEL: FAMILY FOCUSED ORGANIZING

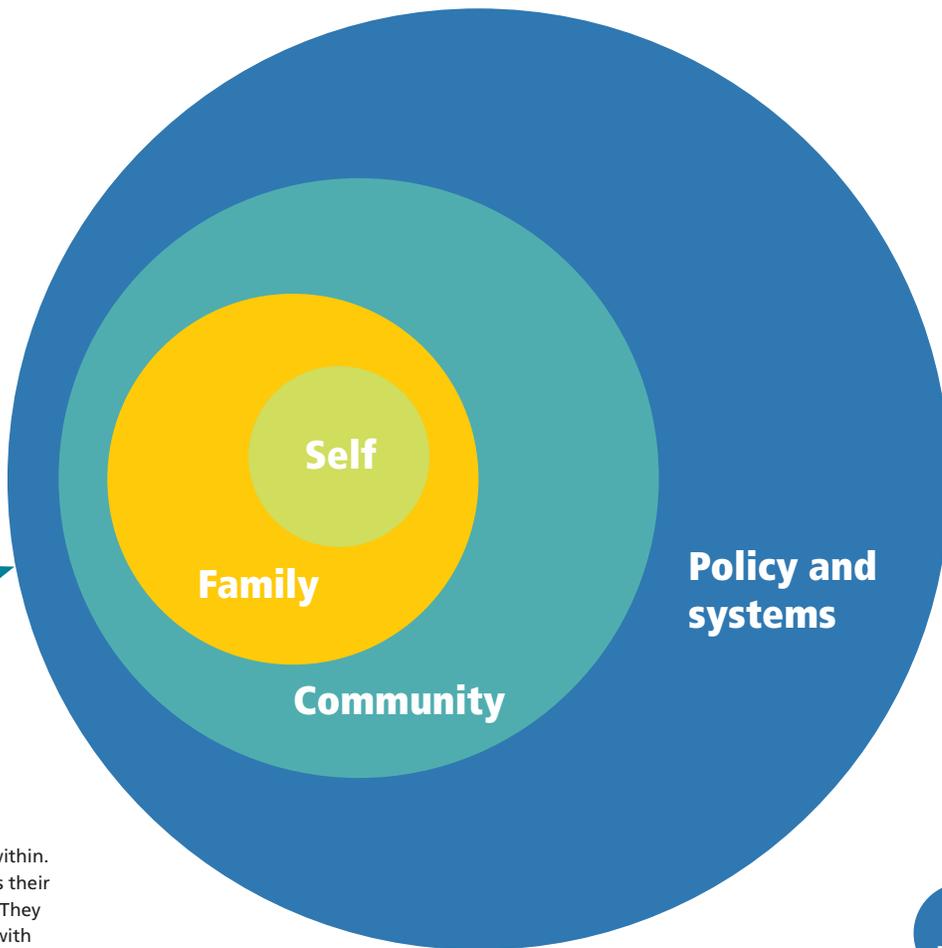
The COFI Model uses parents’ strengths and commitment to their children and to their neighborhoods to help make positive change in their own lives, their families and their communities.

The model emphasizes the commonalities between family and community leadership and between private and public issues.

COFI’s Family Focused Organizing is a systemic and proven model of how people who are far outside the centers of power become leaders, build organizations, and win.

Family Focused Organizing is distinct from, but can also be complementary to, more “traditional” community organizing models.

COFI targets its organizing work toward a population that is often not involved in traditional organizing or the public sphere—very-low-income families including public aid recipients, recent immigrants (primarily mothers), and grandmothers raising grandchildren.



By encouraging parents first to address their personal goals and dreams, COFI helps parents recognize that skills honed as a parent can translate to leadership skills in the larger community. It helps them realize that many day-to-day family struggles are rooted in public policies that have public remedies. Parents who become leaders can create change within themselves. They can also apply what they have learned to their communities and then to the larger systems that affect families and beyond.

Self

Leadership begins from within. Parents individually assess their needs, wants and values. They create supportive teams with one another, set goals, and establish plans for achieving those goals. Parents discover the commonalities between family and community leadership and between private and public issues.

Family

Parents become stronger leaders in their families. Parents support one another in gaining skills and confidence as family leaders, and also learn to set goals with their family members.

Community

Parents work together to create change in community institutions such as schools, day care centers and social service agencies. To make their community more family-friendly, parent leaders meet with neighbors, find common ground, develop new programs, organize community-wide campaigns, and realize the power of a collective voice.

Policy and systems

Parent leaders create a community-based policy agenda that starts with common concerns raised by parents, such as childcare, safety and school quality. Together, parent leaders organize to communicate their ideas and concerns to decision-makers. They work to change programs and challenge policies that aren’t meeting the needs of families, and they build partnerships with professionals to develop programs and policies that work.

FOR THOSE WHO WANT TO REPLICATE OUR MODEL, WE OFFER NATIONAL TRAINING, IN-DEPTH REPORTS AND IN-PERSON TRAINING

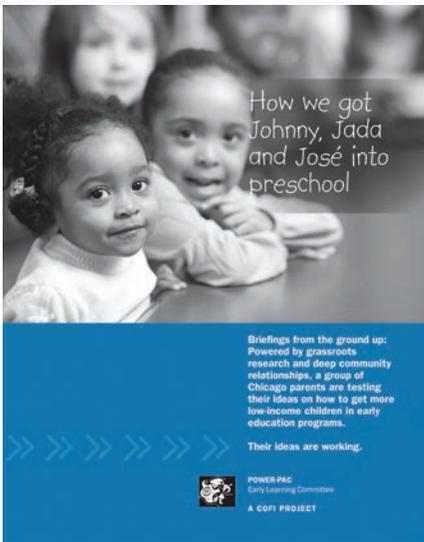
COFI is committed to sharing its learnings and building a movement of family focused organizers and leaders. Toward that end, we endeavor to document and disseminate the innovative solutions being implemented by parents and we train other groups and agencies in the processes and skills of Family Focused Organizing. Go to www.cofionline.org/learn-how/training-consultation/ for more information.



Policy and Systems Change
The COFI Way

How a diverse group of moms and grandmoms, raising their families in some of the toughest neighborhoods anywhere, engage decision makers

and win



As with all campaign efforts, COFI publications and trainings are developed in partnership with the parent leaders.

Early Learning Policy Briefs: After several years of successful implementation of parent-created innovative programs to reach more low-income children with high-quality early learning programs, COFI and POWER-PAC released a series of policy briefs on these efforts. These briefs provide compelling evidence that solutions to intractable community challenges can happen when there is real investment in building leadership capacity among low-income parents.

The COFI Way is generating a fresh look at how low-income parents of color are becoming effective, innovative partners in policymaking on the issues that affect their families every single day.

Packed with real-life stories and perspectives from parents raising families in some of the toughest communities anywhere and based on interviews with prominent policymakers who got to know the parents at decision-making tables, the report is creating great interest among policymakers, public officials, community and advocacy organizations, and foundations.

SHARE THE LEARNING

COFI actively pursues opportunities to share what we've learned about building parents' power with others. To build a movement of organized parents, COFI is committed to spreading the word and helping replication happen elsewhere. To read reports on our work, go to www.cofionline.org/publications/reports.