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’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 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.

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

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 trains and organizes parents to be leaders.

COFI trains and organizes parents using the COFI Model: first Self, then Family, then Community, and finally, Policy and Systems.

POWER-PAC is the cross-community organization of COFI-trained parents who work on issues beyond their own neighborhoods and regions.

LOCAL TEAMS are the first level of parents working together on neighborhood issues like their own schools.

COFI parents have implemented innovative policy programs that are drawing national attention. COFI is increasingly engaged with parent organizers around the country, organizing around the issues they care about. COFI parents are called upon as advocates, public speakers, and trainers.

"COFI empowers countless parents to see in themselves and to implement that leadership within the issues and to implement that leadership qualities within themselves and to implement that leadership in 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
COMMUNITY ORGANIZING AND FAMILY ISSUES (COFI)

WHO WE ARE

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.

THE COFI MODEL: FAMILY FOCUSED ORGANIZING

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.
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.

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.