

“Just Shut It Down: Bringing Down a Prison While Building a Movement”

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June 2, 2004: Judgment Day

For June, it was a remarkably forgiving sunny afternoon in the northeast delta region of Louisiana – in the small town of Tallulah. A group of people had gathered to bear witness on this occasion. A number of local officials, as well as state Senators Donald Cravins and Charles “C.D” Jones, school board members, parents of formerly incarcerated youth, advocates and lawyers, young people – many of whom had once been held behind bars in the barren facility across the road – and clergy had come together to herald this momentous occasion. On this June day, the facility formerly known as the Tallulah Correctional Center for Youth – once a notorious youth prison nationally known for its violence and corruption – was officially closed. It had been a long time coming. But even with its demise officially called for in legislation passed six months earlier, the sense of relief among the crowd was palpable. *“You just had to be there to make sure it was real – that not another single one of our children would be sacrificed to such a brutal place,”* said one long-time advocate.

10 Years Earlier: “If You Build It, They Will Come”

It was 1994 and the super-predator mentality of youth in the juvenile justice system had struck a chord among the political elite – thanks in no small part to a public climate of fear nourished by media hype. Laws making it easier to prosecute children as adults and place youth in adult prisons proliferated across the nation. With the highest rate of juvenile incarceration, the number of Louisiana youth confined in juvenile prisons was climbing at an alarming pace and would reach nearly 2,000 children locked up by 1998.

Richard Stalder, the Secretary of the Department of Public Safety and Corrections (DPSC), took his cue and successfully lobbied for more youth prison beds while three former cronies of then-Governor Edwin Edwards were looking for a good deal. Though they knew nothing about youth development or rehabilitation, these businessmen knew how to make a profit and how to sell a prison industry to an economically depressed region. As a result, the for-profit-run Tallulah Correctional Center for Youth (“Tallulah prison”) was opened in late 1994. It was intended to be a place of last resort, only for the “worst of the worst” – even though in its entire existence, the vast majority of its population of youthful offenders (nearly 75%) were locked up for non-violent offenses and over half of them had serious mental health problems. Moreover, its remote location ensured that nearly all of the hundreds of children confined there – over 80% of whom were African-American – were hours away from their homes and loved ones.

Within weeks of its opening, the Tallulah prison was placed under an emergency order by a federal judge due to rampant violence and incompetent management. For the following 10 years, the Tallulah prison would continue to be plagued with abuse and corruption while the beds remained filled with children who were only getting worse by virtue of being there. It would take a series of legal and political battles, coupled with the tenacity

and dedication of a group of parents, advocates and other concerned people, to eventually bring down an institution that should have never been built in the first place.

Litigation for Leverage – Youth for Inspiration - Parents for Vision

When the Juvenile Justice Project of Louisiana (JJPL) opened its doors in late 1997, its staff was almost immediately bombarded with complaints of violence and abuse at the juvenile prisons. Aside from failing to provide adequate medical or mental health care, proper food, appropriate education or other rehabilitative treatment, confined children were routinely and brutally beaten, intimidated with force and humiliation, encouraged to fight-it-out with each other, maced and placed in isolation for weeks or months at a time.

While the living conditions raised serious concerns at all of the then-four youth prisons, the combination of disturbing forces at the Tallulah prison made it an especially powerful target for system reform. Its genesis in a politically corrupt business deal and the fact that investors were continuing to financially profit, literally at the expense of children's lives, while Louisiana taxpayers were losing millions of dollars to this shady contract, made the violence and abuse at the Tallulah prison especially perverse. On the heels of a United States Department of Justice (DOJ) investigation, and after numerous failed attempts by DOJ to persuade the state of Louisiana to respond to the crisis in its juvenile prisons, JJPL filed a very public and aggressive class action on behalf of youth confined at the Tallulah prison. It was the summer of 1998 and the DOJ soon followed, suing a state over unconstitutional conditions in its youth prisons for the first time in its history.

The lawsuit was eventually settled with an agreement requiring monitoring as part of its enforcement. In the subsequent years, as a monitor of the settlement agreement, JJPL became well acquainted with the continuing problems at the juvenile prisons. We made regular visits to each of the juvenile prisons, meeting with hundreds of children over the years, reviewing thousands of files and documents, auditing countless official abuse investigations and participating in numerous expert tours of those facilities. In this watchdog and advocacy role, JJPL began to hold the juvenile justice system accountable and developed a deep knowledge of the system as well as an insider understanding of the key state and local players. JJPL also began to grow stronger ties with the parents of its clients – many of whom would later become the founding members for Families and Friends of Louisiana's Incarcerated Children ("FFLIC").

JJPL and its legal partners became increasingly frustrated with the limitations of the litigation and began to strategically use the media as a forum for building public support for reform. By going public with the information JJPL gathered, the litigation had the forceful effect of bringing significant press and court attention to the abuses and neglect suffered by incarcerated children; however, it still lacked a forum for any meaningful systems reform. At best, the litigation was a means to deterring further harm while gaining access to inside facts and records necessary for a different kind of advocacy.

As advocates, we had originally hoped to push for a reduction in the use of incarceration and some corresponding investment in community-based alternatives, while alleviating

the unconstitutional conditions of confinement in the juvenile prisons. But it took having the people at the table who were among the most deeply impacted by the Tallulah prison – the parents of incarcerated youth – to dream bigger: to actually fight to shut it down forever, for all kids. Indeed, initially parents wanted to go after the entire juvenile justice system but eventually determined, together with the advocates, that the likelihood of success was greater by targeting one facility as an example for broader reform. In doing so, these parents effectively held not only the system, but also us advocates, truly accountable to their children. As one parent (Assata) put it so well, *“do not put the fate of your children into anyone else’s hands and trust them to fight like you would fight.”*

The Birth of the CTN Campaign in the Context of a Movement for “Our Kids”

The “Close Tallulah Now” (CTN) campaign was part of a larger reform movement to change the way the public thinks about children, particularly children in trouble. The movement is about treating children like children. As JJPL’s motto begins, taken from James Baldwin’s words: “For these are all our children...”. It’s about challenging the systematic and systemic criminalization of childhood – from schools, to mental health professionals to juvenile courts and on. Because children of color are disproportionately represented throughout the Louisiana juvenile justice system, the CTN campaign implicitly addressed the devastating impact on African-American and poor youth.

Perhaps the most emotionally and visually gripping moment in the pre-CTN campaign era was the September 2001 debut of FFLIC with its “Mock Jazz Funeral.” This New Orleans second-line-style musical march was conceived to symbolize the lost freedom and dying dreams of their incarcerated children. Parents had begun to coalesce into a more formal group and decided they wanted to make a very public and powerful statement for their children – the Mock Jazz Funeral, complete with mournful trumpets and horns accompanying a horse-drawn carriage and casket, pulled through the gray and rainy streets of New Orleans, was the result. Senator Donald Cravins was among the people who spoke passionately at this event. *“Seeing all of those parents and others out there in the rain, demanding change for their children, made me realize how committed they were to this cause. I guess my fate was sealed to help them be heard – every time I saw a “redshirt” in the capitol I was reminded of that coffin and I haven’t looked back since.”* In fact, Senator Cravins would go on to become one of the early legislative champions of the CTN campaign, making it his personal mission to shut down Tallulah.

The early days of the “unofficial” CTN campaign in 2002 focused primarily on closing the Tallulah prison and discrediting Richard Stalder, the head of the Department of Public Safety and Corrections, an incredibly influential player in Baton Rouge whose “spin” of the media surrounding juvenile justice allowed policy makers to embrace the status quo. Several organized events and efforts were underway while simultaneously monitoring the juvenile prisons and gathering more material for various forms of outreach and advocacy. For example, in May 2002, FFLIC had parents testify at senate committee hearings arranged by Senator Cravins to propose the closing of Tallulah. The personal stories shared by the parents (Flora Watson, Mary Matthews and Grace Bauer), coupled with

expert testimony about the high costs and losses to the state in running the prison, always garnered a lot of press but there were more than a few setbacks along the way.

In addition, JJPL was appointed to the Advisory Board of a newly created Joint Legislative Juvenile Justice Commission (“JJC”). The JJC was assisted by the Annie E. Casey Foundation Strategic Consulting Group, which met with numerous stakeholders and conducted a study as part of its technical assistance. Using data collected directly from the state, the Casey Group issued a hard-hitting report finding that Louisiana over-utilized incarceration due to a lack of alternative programs. Significantly, they proposed a solution to the state’s fiscal crisis: close one youth prison and divert the nearly \$20 million in annual savings to more effective, humane community-based programs. The Casey report also highlighted the starkly disparate treatment of Louisiana youth of color in juvenile court sentencing (it found that black youth were *four times more likely to be incarcerated* than white youth and received significantly longer and harsher sentences than white youth for the same offenses regardless of prior offense history) and made several detailed recommendations for systems reform.

In our capacity with the JJC, JJPL staff helped recruit people to speak at numerous public hearings convened across the state to identify the most pressing juvenile justice concerns. We also worked closely with other state stakeholders to develop comprehensive reform recommendations (i.e. closing of Tallulah, diverting of savings to community-based alternatives with a focus on treatment and rehabilitation, creating a separate office for children and families apart from adult corrections, and numerous other aspects including indigent defense reforms, detention reforms and school reforms to promote positive behaviors) and to draft what would eventually become Act 1225 – the Juvenile Justice reform Act. It was in this role that another legislative champion was cultivated: then-House Representative Mitch Landrieu (now Lieutenant Governor) was co-chair of the JJC along with Senator Cravins. Their partnership would prove to be a critical, though not always comfortable one, to winning the support of their colleagues on the hill.

The formal CTN campaign did not actually kick-off until January 2003 when allies in the national juvenile justice field – Building Blocks for Youth (the Youth Law Center and Justice Policy Institute) and Grassroots Leadership – joined forces with JJPL, FFLIC and local allies Agenda for Children, Urban League of New Orleans and the Metropolitan Crime Commission to help push reform to the next level. The official CTN campaign would last until the end of the legislative session, six months later in June, but it would continue in a post-campaign posture for another year beyond that.

Rolling Up Our Sleeves and Getting Down to the Work of Building a Campaign

The CTN campaign coordinated legislative advocacy, media advocacy, outreach and grassroots organizing efforts in order to persuade policy-makers to close a prison and devote the funds to community-based alternatives as a way of fundamentally changing public policy away from incarcerating children. Hammering out the details of this approach at the very first strategy session in January were three JJPL staff and its director, the FFLIC coordinator and staff from Building Blocks and Grassroots

Leadership. In addition, there were members of the soon-to-be organized Coalition for Effective Juvenile Justice Reform (“CEJJR”) and two part-time Louisiana lobbyists who committed large amounts of their time to the CTN campaign.

The primary problem identified by those originally around the table was Louisiana’s public policy of encouraging the incarceration of youth. Three explicit campaign goals were initially identified: (1) close the Tallulah prison, (2) divert the savings from closing Tallulah to the creation of community-based alternatives, and (3) build a grassroots movement for greater reform. A fourth goal was added later: to secure the passage of the Juvenile Justice Reform Act, specifically provisions calling for the removal of youth and the funding from the DPSC. As a result, the main targets of the CTN campaign were the legislature, the governor’s office and the judiciary. The idea was to leverage public opinion for reform with support from the judiciary – since the Chief Justice Pascal Calogero Jr. had called for juvenile justice reform in his address to the legislature – and the legislature [through its work on the JJC] to overwhelm the executive branch. To date, Governor Foster had been very supportive of DPSC Secretary Stalder and refused to embrace any reform effort. The CTN campaign was determined to change this dynamic.

The convergence of critical allies gave the CTN campaign its legs. Key legislative champions were Democrats Senator Donald Cravins and Representative Mitch Landrieu, and Republican Representative Diane Winston and Senator Mike Michot. Chief Justice Calogero Jr. and juvenile court judge Nancy Amato Konrad were vital judicial supporters. The media itself became a critical ally as well; indeed, every local news source editorialized in favor of reform. But perhaps most importantly, the hundreds, if not thousands, of parents who had been hurt by the system gave the CTN campaign its true voice and moral authority. *“I remember the parents at the table in the beginning,”* recalls parent Grace Bauer, *“parents hurting for their lost children. Parents angry at a state that took our children, then blamed and labeled us bad parents with poor parenting skills. We were sick with fear for our children who were being beaten, raped and neglected at the hands of the same folks that called us ‘bad parents.’ Our children were isolated from us and we had no say in how they were cared for. We had no recourse for the atrocities that were happening to them. In the early days we didn’t have a lot going for us but we had hope and in our numbers we found strength.”*

From the January strategy session grew a framework for operationalizing the CTN campaign. Three committees were established – legislative, media and outreach – to do the bulk of the strategizing, day-to-day decision-making and work.. Each committee was headed by one staff person, except the grassroots organizing was managed by both a FFLIC and Grassroots Leadership person (Gina Womack and Xochitl Bervera). JJPL hired an outreach coordinator (Corlita Mahr) to organize the CEJJR and to assist in media work and event planning. In addition, one full-time JJPL campaign manager (Tamara Cyznek) was assigned to handle logistical planning, coordinate internal communications and develop media lists and contacts.

While the CTN campaign was a truly collaborative effort, JJPL essentially was the hub of all campaign activity. *“You must have a place with the capacity as the point of force –*

and that's what we were," says JJPL Director David Utter, *"someone with dedicated responsibility for providing information, doing media prep work, knowing where things were in the legislature and where to push and when."* Building Blocks provided on-going strategic support and media technical assistance, as well as assistance preparing several well-crafted PR and educational pieces, including a legislative briefing book entitled "Blueprint for Juvenile Justice Reform" (which was professionally designed and published by the Southern Poverty Law Center).

The CTN Plan of Action

The legislative strategy for the CTN campaign was straightforward, though not necessarily easy to implement. First, secure a vehicle – some kind of bill to close the Tallulah prison (when the session opened on March 31st, there were actually seven pre-filed bills, some over-lapping, dealing with juvenile justice reform). Second, identify legislative allies and build support for the bill(s) by gathering more signatories. Finally, neutralize opponents with well-researched materials, media and a solid base of support.

The organizing and outreach strategies were essentially merged. The plan was to coordinate eight big events, timed two weeks apart and coordinated with legislative drops, throughout the legislative session to focus attention on juvenile justice reform. Rather than a true "organizing" approach, the strategy employed more of a mobilizing effort to bring out large numbers of people to these events. The mobilizing was divided into two categories of constituents: parents and community members, such as faith organizations, service providers, concerned citizens, other advocacy groups, etc. The latter group would become the Coalition for Effective Juvenile Justice Reform (CEJJR) and the former would strengthen the FFLIC base.

The media strategy was planned to take place on several fronts – highlighting the eight organizing events, sending letters to the editor, seeking editorials in favor of reform, holding press conferences and so on. However, this was one area of the CTN campaign that was never fully realized, despite a good plan, because it was never properly staffed on the ground, locally. Instead, most of the media – with the exception of the handling of a youth's death in prison (as discussed below) – was pulled together in a rather haphazard manner. The campaign benefited significantly from JJPL's already-existing media contacts and relationships and, thus, our opinions and expertise were frequently sought out by reporters covering the juvenile justice issue.

Pulling all of this work together, the CTN team was vigilant in using every opportunity to frame an event or findings within context of the campaign. Whether it was publicizing the continuing atrocities uncovered through JJPL monitoring at the juvenile prisons, or seeking to open a juvenile court hearing to the public to shed light on youths' personal stories of abuse and mistreatment, or integrating the CTN message with the juvenile indigent defense reform work, or pushing to conduct a public opinion poll on juvenile justice reform issues (and then releasing the results) – the message always began with "Close Tallulah Now!" And "CTN" became the catch-all chant for larger reform.

Turning the Tide & Creating a Buzz: “Here Come the Redshirts!”

Creating and sustaining momentum once the legislative session got underway was critical. The CTN team held weekly meetings and had an internal listserv to maintain daily contact. Frequently, there were daily phone conferences as well in order to keep everyone up-to-speed on the ever-changing legislative scene, as well as to mobilize folks to attend events. The CEJRR continued to add members to its coalition and bring out people to the various planned events. The media had been covering the scandals in the juvenile prisons for years and now began to report on the larger reform movement, with articles and editorials appearing weekly – if not daily – in support of a system overhaul.

Rather than waiting for opportunities to spread the message, they were created through outreach, education and advocacy in big and small ways. Some of the regularly planned direct action events included:

- “1st Juvenile Justice Day” marking the beginning of the legislative session with a press conference to bring attention to the proposed juvenile justice reform legislation and to publicly kick-off the CEJRR with FFLIC;
- “Youth Justice Faith Action Week” timed during Easter with a full-page paid advertising with a “Prayer for the Future of Louisiana’s Children” written by a nationally-recognized pastor and signed-on-to by several local churches and religious coalitions, including ACT (All Congregations Together) and LIFT (a Louisiana interfaith group) in the Baton Rouge Advocate, the newspaper in the state capitol;
- Partnering with “Orange Day”, an annual mental health demonstration at the capitol, to highlight the connections between kids in the juvenile justice system and kids with mental illnesses;
- “Tallulah on Trial” demonstration during an Orleans juvenile court hearing on the abusive conditions at Tallulah (with JJPL attorney Sarah Ottinger representing several incarcerated youth and Judge Mark Doherty presiding over the case);
- A “Mother’s Day” event to shed light on the parents’ stories; and,
- “Juvenile Justice Day at the Capitol,” an event timed to coincide with committee hearings on juvenile justice issues and mark progress to date (which turned out to be less of a key event in terms of impact at the capitol but pivotal nonetheless for coalescing FFLIC members around the campaign).

In addition, aggressive legislative advocacy tactics were used to overwhelm the capitol. Legislative campaigns require a push-pull strategy to hold our champions accountable without alienating them. Having the ears and eyes of seasoned, professional Louisiana lobbyists was hugely important to the campaign. They had informal relationships and fine-tuned methods for getting good information and working with legislative staff. A detailed week-by-week timeline was created with planned legislative drops, meetings, calls, hearings, events and so on throughout the session. As the session continued, this timeline and the advocacy strategies were tweaked to take advantage of current events and media, sharpen the message, identify new targets and effectively respond to ever-changing amendments and legislative negotiations. David and the two lobbyists, and frequently Gina or Xochitl as well, constantly checked back with their legislative allies

through phone calls, emails and informal meetings in the legislative halls. It is important to note that because JJPL is a 501(c)3 not-for-profit, we determined it was prudent to declare a 501(h) election in order to allow for a certain percentage of expenditures to be spent for lobbying – this is something should be explored if a non-profit takes on an active legislative campaign such as this one.

The team was relentless in its spreading of the “Close Tallulah Now!” message and in its pursuit of supporters. Legislative drops were carried out weekly – including current news articles, legislator letters seeking co-sponsors with sign-up sheets, editorials urging reform and the closing of Tallulah, an article from “The Economist” about Tallulah, a Legislator’s Handbook prepared by Building Blocks and JJPL, a public opinion poll by the state’s premier good government group showing support for reform and letters eliciting support for reform from various constituents including Juvenile and City Court Judges Associations, the Law Institute’s Children Code Committee, CEJJR members, the Metropolitan Crime Commission, JJPL and others.

Beyond direct lobbying, public actions and legislative drops, FFLIC and CEJJR members were ever-present at the capitol – watch-dogging committee meetings, attending public hearings, testifying and putting in cards of support for bills, sending letters to and seeking meetings with their legislators, and so on. FFLIC had designed a bold, red t-shirt for its members with a logo of a parent holding a child’s hand through bars on the front and a CTN slogan on the back – they were soon coined “the red-shirts,” serving as both public shamers and symbols of hope and resistance. In building the coalition, more and more people donned the red-shirts with pride. The sea of red entering the halls of the capitol or into a committee room or a legislator’s office powerfully came to signal the public’s demand for reform. *“We took the legislature by storm, everywhere you looked were FFLIC members in red t-shirts,”* says one parent. *“We talked to every media outlet that would listen to us and it spread like wildfire. “Close Tallulah” became our mantra. We said it everywhere we went, to everyone we met, all the time. We planned rallies and we found friends. Instead of gathering one person at a time we were adding groups. Many of our children were diagnosed with mental illness so we had much in common with the groups that were fighting for mental health services. We had common ground with groups fighting for the rights of people with disabilities and those fighting for better education. By reaching out to these folks we educated ourselves and grew our numbers.”*

The leadership and dedication to reform was commanding in all arenas with legislative champions, parent champions, community champions and advocate champions beating the drum for reform. *“With a core of committed legislative allies focused on winning over their peers,”* says David, *“we were able to make it apparent that there was widespread support for this drastic policy change and that Governor Foster wasn’t going to be able to duck it.”* Indeed, within in a week of the legislative session opening there were 13 co-sponsors on the JJ Reform Act; in the next week, the list of co-sponsors grew to 67 from the House and Senate and with vigorous advocacy the list continued to grow until the opposition began to evaporate – but not entirely, as evidenced in the final days and hours of the session.

Unexpected Events: A Life Cut Short & Making the Most of the Missouri Model

There were a number of unplanned or unexpected events that undoubtedly impacted the direction of the campaign, including a pivotal senate committee hearing with several very close votes, a week-long, in-depth editorial series in the New Orleans Times-Picayune that deftly and thoughtfully fleshed out the nuances of the juvenile justice reform movement, and an unexpected opposing force of power from the governor's office and a northeast Louisiana legislative voting block that nearly knocked the wind out of the legislation. But two occurrences stand out in particular in terms of their magnitude.

On May 1, 2003, 17-year-old Emmanuel Narcisse was killed at the hands of a youth prison guard at the Bridge-City Correctional Center for Youth. One deadly blow to the head knocked Emmanuel onto the ground and unconscious. Within minutes, Emmanuel was dead. Emmanuel's death dramatized in a profound and tragic way the ultimate consequence of Louisiana's violent and misguided juvenile justice system. FFLIC, through Gina and Xochitl, immediately reached out to Emmanuel's mother and family, providing support and encouragement, as well as helping them to express their outrage in speaking about the pain of losing a child. Emmanuel's death saturated the local news. Rather than focusing on things that could have diminished the tragedy – such as Emmanuel's violent charge, his large physical size or allegations that Emmanuel was the aggressor – with JJPL and FFLIC's media work, the coverage instead placed Emmanuel's death in the context of the everyday violence and brutality in youth prisons, focused on the need for legislative reform and gave voice to the family and community members. The tenor of this coverage spilled over into the legislature and the unspoken image of Emmanuel's death was ever-present from that day forward.

Unexpected situations made for opportunities as well. Most notably was Missouri's success in effectively treating the most challenging delinquent youth in their juvenile justice system. Recognizing that the Missouri story was most compelling when witnessed first-hand, advocates identified critical stakeholders – legislators, correctional personnel, prosecutors, judges, sheriffs, executive staff, administrators and others – to participate in tours of the Missouri system. With tremendous support from the Annie E. Casey Foundation, approximately 75 people visited Missouri to tour the facilities; many met with Director Mark Stewart and spoke to children in that system about the effectiveness of Missouri's therapeutic model. Every person, almost without exception – if they hadn't believed in the Missouri approach before the tours – returned to Louisiana touting the Missouri model. Not only did this provide a vision for what could in fact be accomplished with reform, witnessing the Missouri experience themselves gave the legislative and judicial allies an incredible boost of resolve in pursuing the campaign.

The Final Hours: A Legislative Frenzy

“Legislative advocacy is just messy,” says David in describing one of the more exasperating challenges of the CTN campaign, *“it's all over the place. It's all about trying to get leverage but it's hard to even know where the power is half the time – it's a moving target.”* At no time was the inherent struggle of legislative advocacy – it being in

large part limited to responsive tactics with the vast majority of forces beyond your control – more pronounced than in the final hours of the legislative session. Persistence and rapid response tactics are essential right down to the wire when back-room dealings are status quo, at least in Louisiana.

Around mid-May, Representative Landrieu began serious bargaining negotiations with the opposition, most notably the district attorney's association and the governor's executive staff. Demands were made for extending the deadline to close the Tallulah prison, in addition to dropping several of the provisions in the legislation dealing with improving representation for youth, such as waiver of counsel protections and cutting back mandatory sentencing (which were referred to the Children's Code Committee and came back up in new legislation in 2004). FFLIC was completely frozen out of the process and JJPL was only consulted after it appeared the deal had already been struck. In addition, a Representative from the Tallulah region put an amendment on the bill at the last minute that required 40% of any savings to be diverted to the northeast region. This set off a fury among other legislators and suddenly, despite overwhelming support for some kind of reform, the legislation's passage appeared seriously threatened. Meanwhile, the CTN legislative team was making every attempt to mediate misunderstandings and push through the stalling, but its efforts were falling on deaf ears. It seemed everyone was at the table except the advocates and parents – those most knowledgeable of the issues and vested in its outcome.

“You think you know the score and then they change the whole game on you,” remarked one of the coalition members in the heat of the final days of the session. Perhaps we could have anticipated that the governor would come out strong in the final days when it's hardest to respond effectively. Perhaps we should not have underestimated the power of a potential northeast Louisiana legislative voting block to protect their own interests. Unquestionably, we put a lot of faith in a few people – how could one anticipate that our legislative champions would suddenly stop returning calls or refuse to meet with us, or start engaging in private negotiations that kept other team members at arms-length? *“Part of our feeling of powerlessness was due to having essentially all of our eggs in one basket. If Cravins was unable to pull it through, we really had no back-up plan. In retrospect,”* reflects David, *“this was a real weakness of the legislative strategy, but I'm not sure it was one we could have changed.”*

In the end, after a flurry of back and forth revisions and votes, a final version of the JJ Reform Act was passed by both the Senate and the House, with only minutes to spare.

Lessons Learned: Campaign Challenges, Tests-of-Will, Faith & Commitment

The trials and tribulations of the CTN campaign are too numerous and complicated to go into with great detail but there were overall lessons learned and certainly seminal moments, such as those unexpected events described earlier. Apart from those things already discussed above, some of the lessons learned include, in no particular order:

- The power of a clear and direct message cannot be overstated: keep it simple.

- Resources and capacity to carry out the campaign are essential – the campaign would not have succeeded without the full time staff on the ground, as well as the assistance from national partners and the financial resources to travel to the capitol on a daily basis, if need be, distribute thousands of pages in materials and make hundreds of long-distance calls over the course of several months.
- Legislative reform is inherently demanding and hard to control and the oppressive and exclusive capitol-hill environment can be very debilitating for organizing.
- If one does pursue a legislative advocacy strategy, try to have several legislative vehicles and more than one legislative champion to push the agenda.
- Organize and build your base of support before jumping into a legislative campaign, because once you're in the heat of the action it is very hard to engage in effective leadership development.
- Attempting to plan and implement a strategy when the train has already left the station and the participants are at varying degrees of involvement, capacity and engagement is next to impossible.
- Never plan a media strategy without a local media team member on the ground to carry it through.
- Seeing is believing – if there are any relevant, successful models, use them in any and every way to convey the potential of what is possible (i.e. Missouri).
- Clearly delineate the strategic nature of each person's role in the campaign – parent, organizer, advocate, lobbyist, ally, media liaison, etc. – and articulate expectations, especially how team members are accountable to each other.
- Develop and have fidelity to ongoing communication among team members throughout the campaign.
- Be intentional about building trust and capacity among coalition members – which is particularly challenging and essential where the coalition is comprised of grassroots people (mostly poor, mostly people of color) as well as advocates and professional allies (mostly white and middle or upper class).
- Ensure that the campaign is informed by – if not driven by – those most deeply impacted by the harm: the families involved in the juvenile justice system will better understand the problem and will be deeply self-motivated to change it.

Despite this last lesson, the challenge of “organizing” in the midst of a major legislative campaign effort proved to be extremely hard. *“While we were explicit in our goals about building a grassroots movement, our strategy did not really integrate leadership development and building a base of ownership with the parents,”* says organizer Xochitl Bervera. The natural tension between persons more acceptable to the policy-makers (i.e. lawyers and professional advocates) and persons that make those same policy-makers uneasy (i.e. parents) was never adequately acknowledged or addressed by the campaign. More effort could have gone into better preparing parents for the hostile atmosphere they would encounter at the capitol and for demanding public forums in which to express their angers and fears. In spite of this, however, some organizing did begin to happen through intentional efforts to educate the parents about the legislative process and specific bills on the way to the capitol and to debrief with parents in the bus rides home. In an odd way, the most disappointing experiences, and times where parents felt the most powerless during the campaign, became galvanizing opportunities for FFLIC.

One of the moments both David and Xochitl recall as a particularly painful and difficult one for the CTN team was in the final days of the legislative session, when Representative Landrieu got the Governor's people on board through some backroom dealings and compromises. No one on the CTN team was privy to Landrieu's behind-the-door conversations and only David was brought in, essentially after the deal had already been struck, to provide a kind of stamp of approval from the advocates (the deal extended the deadline for closing Tallulah among other things). The parents felt betrayed and David felt as if he had no real choice but to agree to the compromised deal. In the end, David bore the brunt of the parents' anger, *"not solely because of his proximity to power but also because of his proximity to us,"* recalls Xochitl. *"We never could have expressed anger like that to someone like Landrieu, but it was because David was an ally, who at the moment seemed to be acting like he represented the powers that had just cut a deal, that he became the focus of the parents's anger and distrust."*

While this experience speaks to deeper issues of trust among coalition partners and the inherent conflicting role of organizing within in legislative campaign, it also strengthened the bond among the parents. It became a lesson of sorts in leadership development and organizing. Indeed, the parents later demanded – and got – an "accountability session" with Representative Landrieu. At this meeting, they were able to raise their concerns, ask questions directly of Landrieu and have him explain why he made the deal. Even though he may have been uncomfortable in this session, Landrieu came to understand that he was accountable to a constituency beyond the capitol as well. It was Xochitl's seizing of this moment and deliberately encouraging parents to turn it in this way that sowed the seeds of a grassroots movement. *"The parents that had once been isolated were now united by this fight...I think long before we had a victory in the capitol we were celebrating because we were being heard,"* says one parent who was present as these events unfolded. *"FFLIC was growing, almost like a side effect of the campaign. The two, FFLIC and the campaign, fed off one another, strengthening each other in a sense."*

Post-Campaign: Making Legislative Reform Stick

As in a political campaign, one can easily underestimate what it takes to actually ensure change once the "race" is over, so to speak. A critical part of the success of the CTN campaign was developing and implementing a follow-through plan that focused on ensuring the implementation of fundamental aspects of Act 1225 – most notably, the actual closing of the Tallulah prison and the separation of the Office of Youth Development from the adult DPSC. In a sense, this required an entirely new campaign strategy and reinvigorated focus to put pressure on a new administration to effectively implement these changes, as well as committing to lasting long-term systemic reforms. *"I have to give it to David,"* says Xochitl in retrospect, *"only he understood strategically from the beginning how important the governor's race was going to be – getting the new administration on board was absolutely essential to cinching the victory of Act 1225."*

JJPL put CEJJR front and center as the lead coalition for carrying through the message from the CTN campaign. A strategy was put into action that worked on educating the

candidates, as well as the electorate, and making “juvenile justice” an issue in the gubernatorial race. A “Platform for Effective Juvenile Justice Reform” was developed by CEJJR, FFLIC and JJPL, with input from the Youth Law Center and the Justice Policy Institute. At every turn – luncheons, small speaking engagements, rallies, debates, etc. – candidates were asked to endorse the Platform. “Blast faxes” were sent almost daily to the media with facts and figures about the continuing abuses within the juvenile prisons, the millions of wasted taxpayer monies, the more effective use of alternatives to rehabilitate children, and so on.

Working closely with Building Block’s Liz Ryan (and with the Southern Poverty Law Center’s aid), more high-quality PR materials targeting policy-makers were developed. The “Juvenile Justice Reform Briefing Book for Louisiana’s Leaders” was distributed to gubernatorial candidates and their staff with a letter from CEJJR in September highlighting the JJ Reform Act and asking that they endorse the enclosed “Platform for Effective Juvenile Justice Reform.” This was followed up in November, just before the general election for all of Louisiana’s state legislators and gubernatorial candidates, with the “Juvenile Justice Reform Factbook for Louisiana’s Leaders.” Again, this resource was distributed to candidates and other influential decision-makers. It summarized juvenile justice-related research, facts, public attitudes and progress toward reform to date, as well as describing key principles of a model juvenile justice system and reiterating support for the Platform. Every candidate eventually endorsed the Platform and became well-versed in the juvenile justice reform movement underway.

But the CTN campaign continued even beyond the governor’s race. Once Governor Kathleen Blanco was elected, we continued to reach out to her chief advisors and administrators to push for an earlier date to closing the Tallulah prison and removing youth and the concomitant funding from the DPSC. Per Act 1225, Lt. Governor Landrieu continued to chair the Juvenile Justice Implementation Commission (JJIC), which was charged with overseeing the implementation of Act 1225. In her first official executive act, Governor Blanco took two significant steps. She formally separated youth from the adult DPSC (although she stopped short of creating an entirely separate Department of Children, Youth and Families which had been recommended by Act 1225). And she moved up the formal date for removing all youth from Tallulah, which felt like a huge success given the extended deadline the state had initially been given. Over the months, FFLIC and JJPL would continue to speak out at JJIC meetings, attempt to persuade key executive staff, release findings to the media and press for more swift and substantive action. Indeed, the special session of the legislature in the following spring of 2004 proved to be a formidable struggle to ensuring continued momentum within the reform movement. But the movement continues to grow.

The Ripple Effects of Reform

As the sun stretched across the June sky and various folks who had gathered to witness Tallulah draw its last breath as a juvenile prison began to peel off, a group of parents and local community members drew together in a prayer circle under the shade of an impressive oak tree. As they shared compassion for the suffering endured, they also

sought strength for their collective children's futures – they saw that the work was still not over. Transforming prisons into schools – real opportunities for growth and learning – was the next challenge. Another campaign – as part of the larger movement to treat kids as kids – was in the making...but that's another story. In this final passage, FFLIC parent and advocate Grace Bauer reflects on her part in the CTN campaign, conveying the personal impact of a campaign that is rooted in compassion and championed by those touched most deeply by its success, or failure.

“The wrap up of the campaign, from my point of view, was going back to Tallulah. That was a turning point in my life as well as my work. When Xochitl called me to go back there for the closure I was a little nervous. I wondered why she would want me to go back there and support anything this community wanted. After making the five hour journey there again after all of this time, my view and my perspective began to change. I was still very angry at that town and it's people for allowing that prison to exist in its midst. In our time of visiting Corey there I refused to go to their businesses and I never made an effort to be friendly to a soul there, in the prison or in the town. In my mind, my son would not be in that God-forsaken place if they hadn't allowed it to be there.

As I traveled back to Tallulah for the closure and thought of where we had been and where we have come, a change began to take place. I thought of the many Sundays we traveled to see Corey and how I felt at that time. I was vulnerable, I was paralyzed with fear and I have never in my life felt the anger I felt then. But like many other things on this journey it slowly sinks in that, without them, I could not be where I am today. Because of Tallulah I met some fine folks that changed the direction of my life and most likely the lives of my children. Being a part of FFLIC and JJPL has brought me to place in my life where I truly feel like I belong. Today, every day I wake up knowing who I am, what my beliefs are and that I am where God intends for me to be at this point in my life. Without the hardship that Tallulah brought to us, I would not be here. Our victory over corrupt politics and power in Louisiana has changed me as a parent and a person. FFLIC became stronger from the victory of the campaign but also because, with the victory of the campaign, each of us became stronger individuals.

Then I arrived at Tallulah and I saw a community struggling to bring a better way of life to it's people and the hatred that had made me less of a person fell away. In return, I was filled with admiration for a group of folks fighting against the same powers we had struggled with ourselves. I saw how the state had taken their proud culture and made their community into something ugly. I realized that the community had been as much a victim of that prison as our family had been. In the two days I was there I saw good people rallying together to save something within their selves. They were trying to save their town, where they were born and raised and the way of life that made them who they are. For the first time I was able to see the big picture and separate the facility from the town. I left there a better person, with a broader vision of my mission in this work.

When the first strategy meetings were being held I could not participate. Often times during the campaign I regretted that, because I felt I didn't have a true sense of what was happening around me. Going back to Tallulah brought me full circle.”

The Lifeline of the CTN Campaign

1994	<i>Tallulah prison opens</i>
1995	<i>Human Rights Watch Report on youth prison abuses</i>
1996	<i>U.S. DOJ issues emergency Findings Letter re: youth prison abuses</i>
1997	<i>U.S. DOJ issues final Findings Letter re: youth prison abuses; JJPL opens doors</i>
1998	<i>JJPL & DOJ sue state over youth prison conditions</i>
1999	<i>Education Settlement Agreement & Monitoring</i>
2000	<i>Conditions Settlement Agreement & Monitoring</i>
2001	<i>JJC created & JJPL on Advisory Board FFLIC kick-off with “Mock Jazz Funeral”</i>
2002	<i>1st attempt to close Tallulah – Senate Committee Hearing with FFLIC JJC Public Hearings across the state</i>
January 23, 2003	1st Strategy Planning Session for CTN campaign
February	Casey Report Released to JJC Work with JJC Advisory Board to draft JJ Reform legislation
March 31	Legislative session begins with 7 pre-filed juvenile justice bills 1 st legislative drop “1 st Juvenile Justice Day” at capitol to kick-off CEJRR
April 1-6	Legislative strategy mapped out & started work on handbook
April 7-13	2 nd legislative drop Seeking co-sponsors for bill & continued work on handbook Planning for direct actions
April 14-20	3 rd legislative drop “Tallulah on Trial” demonstration 4/14 Chief Justice Calogero speech to legislature with event 4/15 Finalize legislative handbook & planning for mental health day event
April 21-27 “Buzz” begins	4 th legislative drop 4/22 “Orange Day” mental health event 4/23 “Faith Action Week” & prayer (paid ad) in Baton Rouge paper 4/23 Piper Rudnick letter re: shady Tallulah contract goes public Senate hearing on JJ Reform Act – unanimously passed to floor Unplanned article re: Tallulah in “The Economist” Continued meetings for co-sponsors & planning for JJ Day
April 28- May 4	5 th legislative drop Emmanuel Narcisse killed by guard at youth prison on 5/1 JJPL & FFLIC work with EN family and media
May 5-11	6 th legislative drop “JJ Day at the Capitol” on 5/6 Senate hearing on Close Tallulah Act – passed with only 1 dissent Negotiations between prosecutors and legislators re: JJ bills
May 12-18	7 th legislative drop Senate Finance hearings on two JJ bills – fiscal note removed Rep. Landrieu backroom meetings to get Governor on board without

	<p>FFLIC and with limited JJPL input</p> <p>Senate passes both JJ bills (36-1) and (38-0) on 5/14</p> <p>House committee approves revised JJ Reform bill on 5/14</p>
May 19-25	<p>8th legislative drop</p> <p>Appropriations House Bill debated – no amendment to close TCCY</p> <p>House committees assigned Senate JJ bills</p> <p>Public Opinion Poll re: JJ reform released by CABL & YouWho</p> <p>On-going talks with legislators re: bill revisions</p>
May 26- June 1	<p>9th legislative drop</p> <p>House JJ bill vote delayed due to northeast legislator amendment to divert 40% of \$ saved from closing Tallulah to that region</p> <p>Religious ACT/LIFT event – no media prep so no press coverage</p> <p>Back and forth discussions between Landrieu and Cravins</p> <p>FFLIC accountability session with Rep. Landrieu</p> <p>Separate effort by Grassroots to pass economic development resolution to deter further use of Tallulah facility as a prison</p>
June 2-8	<p>10th legislative drop</p> <p>House JJ Reform bill passed floor on 6/2 (104-0)</p> <p>House bill sent to Senate committee for hearing on 6/5 while Senate version of same bill passes out of House committee – numerous back and forth efforts to coordinate bills and votes</p> <p>Advocates and FFLIC still shut-out of much process at capitol</p>
June 9-15	<p>11th legislative drop</p> <p>House JJ Reform bill goes to Senate floor and passes on 6/12 (34-0)</p> <p>FFLIC press release, public thanks and prayer at capitol</p> <p>1st strategy session for governor’s race in the fall</p>
June 16-22	<p>12th legislative drop</p> <p>Landrieu rejects Senate amendments to JJ bill and puts it into conference on 6/16 – advocates and FFLIC continued to be shut-out</p> <p>Governor’s office and DAs push for power on planning board for JJ Reform bill – attempts to get appointments to board stalls progress</p> <p>Senate separate Close Tallulah bill eventually dies in committee</p>
June 23	<p>Senate approves House JJ Reform bill with less than an hour left in the session and the House companion resolution passes with minutes to spare. JJ Reform Act of 2003 finally passed.</p>
<i>Post-Campaign</i>	<p><i>Work on governor’s race – endorsement of Platform for JJ Reform.</i></p> <p><i>Turn up prison monitoring to keep state from being released from settlement agreement.</i></p> <p><i>Work with new administration & JJ Reform Act Implementation Commission – Office of Youth Development removed from DPSC.</i></p> <p><i>Prepare for 2004 special legislative session, push for more legislation and maintain reform momentum throughout the session.</i></p>
June 2, 2004	<p><i>Last child removed from Tallulah – 6 months ahead of deadline.</i></p>