

## **THE ADVOCATE: HOUSTON'S CENTER FOR RENEWAL**

by Amy L. Sherman

### **Introduction**

Some of Houston's 4 million residents are largely invisible. Even some of the city's "points of light," though burning brightly among their neighbors in distressed and excluded neighborhoods, are hidden from the view of Houstonians with resources, power, and influence. Their good works are on display for those who seek them out and find them, but they are not trumpeting their own deeds. Working largely in obscurity, these men and women are faithfully rescuing men from drug addiction, serving as surrogate fathers to "throw-away kids," reconnecting the homeless to mainstream society, and taking responsibility for the revitalization of their impoverished corners of the urban landscape. Houston's Center for Renewal has searched them out, has become their voice and champion—connecting the grassroots community healers to the "well-resourced"—and in consequence, has dramatically multiplied their impact.

### **Mission and Background**

The mission of the Center for Renewal (CFR) is "to empower Christ-centered ministries that transform lives by encouraging effective compassion and by connecting resources to needs." Its literature describes CFR as "an intermediary institution building strategic partnerships between people of faith and people of good will, to solve the problems of our community together." Founded in 1997, CFR has served approximately 165 frontline ministries in Houston, large and small, offering social services ranging from youth ministry and welfare-to-work mentoring to residential care for the disabled and drug rehabilitation.

In its initial years, CFR's strategy was one of "casting the net wide." It sponsored a number of training workshops and seminars widely publicized among the faith community, and gave a variety of forms of assistance to any and all faith-based organizations (FBOs) that requested aid. CFR President Barbara Elliott explains that she spent the first year primarily "learning the community," getting to know the troubled neighborhoods and their leaders and developing a database of Christian ministries. She surveyed them to assess their needs. Most of the FBOs needed training—on fundraising, financial management, communications and public relations, volunteer management, and Board

development. Many of the churches needed vision and connections; education to better understand the needs of Houston's distressed communities; and practical guidance on how their congregations, given their unique assets, could make a difference. CFR met these diverse needs by offering a variety of relevant training seminars and meeting with faith leaders to advise them and to network them with potential ministry partners. Throughout, CFR also maintained its emphasis on connecting resources with needs, pointing foundations and individual donors to effective grassroots ministries and encouraging their investment.

Starting in 2000, CFR added a new track of service, focusing narrowly on a smaller number of "partner" organizations, offering each of them targeted, intensive support for a yearlong period. CFR continues to host training events open to the participation of many ministries, but invests a large portion of its energies and resources on its partners. Partners are selected through an application process. Elliott explains that, fundamentally, she is looking for ministries characterized by (1) an approach to service that is vigorously faith-based and holistic and (2) a willingness and desire to strengthen their "institutional readiness"—i.e., their administrative, management, and financial infrastructure. Such a heart and mindset, Elliott argues, makes it likely that the partnership with CFR will yield measurable results. In the screening process, CFR also looks for selected FBOs to have good relationships with local churches, a quality of leadership sufficient to produce measurable improvements, a lack of capacity to accomplish their goals alone, and specific needs within CFR's expertise and resource capacity.

Overall, CFR's operations fall into three categories, with one-third of the organization's time, energy, and resources supporting each: (1) direct training, capacity building, and consulting; (2) building relationships with foundations, individual donors, and the business community; and (3) "exposure" activities: telling the stories of frontline ministries through research, writing, and speaking. Though most of this case study focuses on CFR's assistance to frontline ministries, it is also important to remember CFR's important role among Houston's donor community. CFR has educated local foundations, including the McNair Foundation, the Houston Endowment, and the Rockwell Fund, about the work of effective, grassroots FBOs. It has worked closely with FaithWorks, a gathering of successful businessmen who are encouraged to invest their resources and personal time and talents in Christian "community building" ministries. CFR has sponsored a major FaithWorks conference and follow-up meetings aimed at connecting Christian businessmen to ministry efforts in the city. And Elliott has served, in effect, as a senior program officer

for the Equipping the Saints Fund of the Greater Houston Community, identifying and evaluating potential grassroots' grantees and providing technical assistance to grant recipients.

## Constituent Ministries Described

Most of the organizations that have participated in the CFR's training seminars are faith-based nonprofits, though some churches have attended. In total, CFR has sponsored 21 workshops in the past four years. As noted earlier, 165 front-line groups have participated in training events thus far. CFR has worked more closely with roughly twenty of these ministries. Several focus on programs for at-risk youth; these range from an innovative charter school called KIPP Academy, to a church-based tutoring program called KidsHope USA, to Inner City Youth, a neighborhood-targeted ministry in Houston's depressed third ward, to Homeward Bound, an organization fostering life skills in youth through outdoor adventures. Others, such as Restoration Outreach and Star of Hope, serve adults struggling with substance abuse issues and/or homelessness. CFR has also served ministries that are seeking to strengthen faith-based outreach in Houston by "connecting the dots." These include Mission Houston (which is attempting to mobilize hundreds of churches for intercessory prayer and pastors for cooperative ventures in community ministry) and Action Ministries (which utilizes its network of over 250 volunteers to deliver fresh food from grocery stores and produce companies to some 189 food pantries and shelters across the city). CFR has assisted both ministries in "start-up" phases as well as well-established organizations.

To better understand CFR's role as an intermediary, we conducted interviews with seven organizations whose involvement with CFR ranged from intensive to occasional. In the latter category, we interviewed Teddy Levron of Inner Cities for Jesus, who participated in CFR's two-day Fundraising Institute and Joe Mazzu of Brookwood Community (a ministry among disabled adults), who spoke of Barbara Elliott's work in communicating the unique vision of the Brookwood Community. More information is provided below about the other five grassroots FBOs; these have had greater involvement with CFR:

*Inner City Youth (ICY):* The brainchild of Prince and Sheila Couisnard, ICY focuses on leadership development among children and youth living in the Third Ward (one of Houston's most economically depressed and violent neighborhoods). The ministry began unofficially in 1992, when the Couisnards relocated to the Third Ward, to live where troubled kids were, and love them. "Our approach to outreach and intervention is really pretty simple," Prince

Cousnard says. “We spend as much time as possible with these youngsters.” In 1995, the Cousnards incorporated ICY as a non-profit organization and their informal, relational work with kids began taking shape into specific programs. Students are initially engaged in the ministry through various sports and recreational programs. (Over 600 boys and girls have participated in ICY basketball teams in the past four years; over 550 have played on softball teams organized by ICY.) Kids can also attend the after-school enrichment program. The heart of the outreach, though, occurs through the intensive discipleship program serving approximately 75 to 100 youth. The program runs full-time in the summer and continues weekly throughout the school year. The ministry has recently added a tutoring program for students with significant learning disabilities. In 2001, ICY had five paid staff members and a budget of approximately \$400,000.

CFR has worked more extensively with Inner City Youth than with any other frontline ministry. ICY staff have participated in CFR training seminars. Elliott has recruited new Board members for ICY and also led Board retreats to sketch out the organization’s future plans and goals. CFR has published its own profile of ICY and also secured coverage of the ministry in *World* magazine, a Christian newsweekly reaching 130,000 readers nationwide. Elliott has also connected volunteers from a suburban church looking for involvement with at-risk youth. CFR has assisted ICY in creating a brochure and carries information about the ministry on its website. It has helped to identify staff members for the ministry and worked closely with the administrator to design and implement a participant tracking system. In addition, ICY has obtained approximately \$200,000 in donations with CFR’s assistance in navigating the world of philanthropic foundations. Recently, CFR persuaded the wife of a wealthy Houston philanthropist to come on a personal tour of the Third Ward and see the children ICY works with. That Christmas Eve, this woman and her husband handed a check to Prince Cousnard to buy the land to build a new facility. Now they have pledged \$500,000 toward realizing that hope.

*City of Refuge/Refuge Community Development Center:* City of Refuge is a unique congregation deliberately blending suburban and urban members. The church is located at the Star of Hope homeless shelter, on the edges of both the low-income Third Ward and the “yuppie” medical center area. Through its WINGS/Friendship Circles ministry, the church is helping homeless adults to transition into secure employment and stable housing outside the Star of Hope shelter. Program participants attend an intensive, 40-hour life skills training course (WINGS); are introduced to a network of employers; and, if they

choose, are matched with personal mentoring teams (“Friendship Circles”) that provide encouragement and practical help for at least six months. Thus far, 90 individuals have graduated from the program, which has held 11 training seminars. So far 35 have been paired with a mentor, and 72 percent of the English-speaking participants are employed. CFR introduced Pastor Rufus Smith to the WINGS program and sponsored a WINGS training and a mentor training weekend. Elliott collaborated with the McNair Foundation in designing a collaborative strategy for their giving, and was able to integrate WINGS into their plan. She brokered a merger between two of the WINGS program providers, which has resulted in sustained funding for the program and a broader reach across the city.

In addition to its outreach among adults, City of Refuge also has an active youth ministry. Currently, they are focusing special attention on kids of middle-school age. CFR has helped the church to launch a new summer “Vocation Bible School” (note the “o” in vocation) for this age group by researching and identifying a faith-based, youth-oriented, entrepreneurship curriculum. City of Refuge was a partner ministry of CFR during 2001. The church’s 2001 budget was just over \$305,000 and it employs three full-time staff.

*Aldine Y.O.U.T.H.:* Founded—literally—out of the back of her car in 1990 by Aldine resident (and firecracker) Sylvia Bolling, Aldine YOUTH now boasts over a dozen programs serving nearly 5,000 households annually. Bolling acquired property in 1995 and converted the existing facility into a community center, from which multiple social services—such as a food pantry, GED classes, after-school tutoring, karate classes, a sign language choir, a senior citizens club, “Teen Explosion,” and WIC programs—now operate. Aldine YOUTH has three paid employees on staff; its budget in 2001 was approximately \$200,000. The ministry was one of CFR’s partners in 2001. Staff received training in fund-raising, grant writing, strategic planning, volunteer management, Board development, and special event planning. CFR published a profile of Aldine YOUTH, facilitated speaking opportunities for Sylvia Bolling, and helped connect the ministry to a suburban congregation that has become a source of on-going volunteer help and financial support.

*Restoration Outreach:* Founded by a former drug addict, Restoration Outreach is a residential recovery and discipleship program for men wanting help in “coming clean” from drugs. Founder Joe Hernandez has been ministering to such men for seventeen years through his affiliation with Victory Fellowship, an international evangelical ministry serving drug abusers. Hernandez incorporated Restoration Outreach in 1995 for his work in Houston. The ministry

operates two homes in the inner city, one for men going through the yearlong rehabilitation/discipleship program and the other for program graduates transitioning back into the world of work. Approximately 500 men have participated in the program. About 40 percent have stuck with the near-military discipline and highly structured routine of Bible study, prayer, chores, physical exercise, and work and actually graduated. Hernandez has also founded a church that reaches out to the families of the addicts and trains former addicts for leadership in the home and community. Restoration Outreach was the third of CFR's 2001 ministry partners. Hernandez and other staff participated in nearly all the training seminars and CFR helped the ministry to design its first-ever formal fund-raising campaign. CFR introduced potential donors from foundations and churches to Restoration Outreach, bringing several of them on-site to experience the work first-hand. When the Houston floods submerged the ministry, CFR connected Hernandez to a warehouse outreach to provide clothes, dry goods, and furniture. CFR also got Hernandez the opportunity to address 100 business leaders at the FaithWorks summit.

*Homeward Bound:* This ministry seeks to lead young men and women to Christ, to promote their growth in Christlikeness, and to encourage the building of supportive relationships through outdoor adventure trips. It began six years ago under the leadership of Norton Hindley, though Homeward Bound was officially incorporated as a nonprofit organization in 1999. Hindley had long dreamed of working with churches in the inner city, to enable urban kids to enjoy the life-changing experiences Homeward Bound was familiar in offering to suburban youth. CFR has helped Homeward Bound turn this dream into reality by connecting Hindley with specific inner-city churches and ministries.

### **CFR's Value-Added: Show Me The Money**

With its modest budget of \$150,000 annually, CFR's return on investment, measured by dollars garnered for frontline ministries, is striking. In 1999, CFR helped four local ministries to secure \$142,000 in new funding (\$100,000 for Inner City Youth; \$20,000 in start-up funding for Matchpoint/Reach Across Houston to launch a new mentoring initiative for highly at-risk youth; \$10,000 for Mission Houston; and \$12,000 for Action Ministries) and assisted four congregations in obtaining \$5000 each in seed funding to help them launch a Kids Hope tutoring ministry. That's a total of \$162,000, or an 108 percent rate of return. CFR has done even better in recent years; in 2001, it assisted ministries in obtaining nearly \$1 million in new grants. That's well over a 600 percent rate of return.



Moreover, ministry representatives we interviewed indicated that they were hopeful that more donations are on the way. Three—Rufus Smith of City of Refuge, Sylvia Bolling of Aldine YOUTH, and Gwen Canady of ICY—explained that their organizations were poised to launch major new capital campaigns. Each gave examples of specific donors or foundations that they have been introduced to through CFR that they intend to pursue for gifts to their capital campaigns. “The doors are open,” as Rufus Smith put it.

For these FBOs, association with CFR has served as a kind of “Good Housekeeping” seal of approval. Their credibility has been enhanced. Smith explains:

*When you go to certain places and are seen at a particular event, that enhances your credibility because the circle in which you are operating has credibility ... CFR has enhanced our networking. And as more people get to know you, they become more comfortable with you; they see that you're not 'fly by night.' It increases their confidence, and that eventually opens doors for you as well.*

Sylvia Bolling of Aldine YOUTH agrees. “CFR has put its stamp of validity on Aldine YOUTH, and it's opened up doors that would not have been opened.” Smiling, she related an anecdote about meeting builder David Weekley, the millionaire owner of David Weekley Homes. Bolling had been invited by CFR to address a FaithWorks gathering at which Weekley was a headliner. She spoke about her vision of expanding Aldine YOUTH's ministry facility. Weekley caught up with her in the parking garage, handed her his business card, and told her he “was very impressed” with the mission. He asked for some flyers about the ministry, and said he would like to “get involved.” Laughing, Bolling exclaims, “I would have never met David Weekley, and if I'd picked up the phone to call him, I'm sure I would have never gotten to talk to him! But now, when we're ready, that door is open.”

As Elliott has met ministry leaders over the years, often their number one request is for help in learning how to raise funds. In response, CFR has sponsored a two-

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day Fundraising Institute and a variety of shorter workshops on grant writing. For Teddy Levron of Inner Cities for Jesus, the Fundraising Institute “de-mystified” the world of grant-writing and cultivating relationships with charitable foundations. “To me,” Levron emphasized, “that two days was more valuable than just about anything else I’ve done in the last eight years, as far as getting an education.”

Joe Hernandez’ story is similar. The CFR workshops were the first formal training opportunities he has ever had as a leader of a nonprofit. Though he admits the preparatory work in designing a grant proposal “nearly broke his head,” the experience was invaluable in terms of helping him to learn to clearly articulate what his ministry does—and why, and how. A CFR staff member worked closely with Hernandez in writing Restoration Outreach’s first-ever

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official grant proposal. It was funded (\$5000 for general operating expenses from the Equipping the Saints Fund). The work that went into preparing this proposal proved its worth repeatedly: information gathered in that process was used to prepare the ministry’s first brochure and in writing a fund-raising letter that was mailed to a selected group of churches and individuals. The letter campaign garnered nearly \$14,000 in donations—the single largest amount of funding the ministry had ever gained in one effort. For the last several years, this truly “shoe-string” ministry had met its expenses through car washes, candy and bracelet sales, and an occasional chicken barbeque.

CFR has employed traditional strategies for connecting frontline organizations with donors: educating groups about potential grants, introducing ministry leaders to potential donors,

arranging for site visits by donors to see first-hand the work of these grassroots nonprofits, training FBO staff in the fundamentals of good grant-writing, and even lending staff to assist in actual proposal development. But Barbara Elliott has also successfully crafted an innovative and effective position from which she can assist ministries: she serves, in effect, as a senior program officer for a local charitable foundation, The Equipping the Saints Fund. Launched by successful businessman Peter Forbes in 1999, this Fund supplies resources (typically matching grants) to small but effective Christian frontline ministries to



build their organizational capacity. “Naturally,” Peter Forbes says, “I want my money to be used wisely and effectively for the kingdom [of God]. My partnership with Barbara Elliott and the Center for Renewal enables me to do that.” Elliott researches potential groups, assesses their capacity and effectiveness, evaluates their goals, and reports her findings to the Equipping the Saints board. “CFR provided a valuable services that I did not have the time nor the ability to perform,” says Forbes. “They were an ongoing interface with the social entrepreneurs. They screened and evaluated them for grant worthiness, and then followed up with them to ensure that the money was being invested according to our wishes.” Indeed, Elliott not only monitored the recipients for their success in securing the required match funds, but helped the groups to succeed by identifying other potential donors. “This partnership is extremely important,” Forbes says. “Barbara has the expertise to evaluate and support ministries, I have the money. Together, we can be much more effective.”

Other donors also acknowledge the value of CFR’s work as an identifier of neighborhood assets. When the Robert and Janice McNair Foundation decided it wanted to focus a significant part of its giving on one region of the city in a comprehensive effort to enhance learning in the schools, CFR was brought in as a strategist. After assessing three neighborhoods and their school feeder patterns, CFR recommended one to the McNairs, and embarked on a coalition-building exercise involving the principals of the elementary, middle and high schools, neighborhood ministry leaders, and education evaluators. The result has been a \$1.5 million project over three years, which has introduced auxiliary strengths into the school classrooms, new youth programs in school, art programming, mentoring, Urban Young Life programs, Boy and Girl Scout troops, teacher education, remedial summer programs, scholarships for graduating seniors, and adult education programs in language, GED, parenting and life skills. Over the past two years, fewer students have flunked out of high school, while test scores throughout the entire system are slowly rising. CFR now does an annual evaluation of the project.

## Telling the Story

Though obviously important, CFR’s assistance to frontline groups has gone well beyond money. For Joe Mazzu of The Brookwood Community, Elliott’s chief contribution has been her ability to articulate, on their behalf, their unique approach to service. The Brookwood Community is different from many facilities in its commitment to provide residential care for people with a wide variety of mental and physical disabilities and in its emphasis on enterprise. All residents are employed in the Community’s range of businesses—arts

and handicrafts and horticulture. Fully one-third of its \$5.5 million operating budget is raised through these business ventures. Brookwood has a clear-cut philosophy of care, expecting personal responsibility from residents, organizing activities on a family-like basis, and permeating all they do with an atmosphere of Christian love and discipleship. To retain full autonomy over its programmatic design, Brookwood deliberately accepts no government funding. Nonetheless, from time to time, various government regulations can impinge on their work or approach; in such situations, they find it crucial to be understood, to have advocates, and to possess the credibility that comes from having a journalist like Elliott heralding their work in professional publications.

Drawing on her journalism background, Elliott employs her communication skills in a variety of ways to help the frontline groups. As noted earlier, often these organizations are “under the radar screen,” receiving little or no publicity and lacking the administrative capacity for marketing themselves. CFR has written colorful, snappy one-page profiles of several of the ministries. Interviews with the constituent ministries indicated that they have widely used and distributed these profiles, inserting them in funding applications, passing them out at church conferences, sharing them with volunteers. CFR has also assisted ICY and Restoration Ministries in creating informational brochures and the CFR website affords its partner ministries with their own “web presence.”

Elliott has also published articles highlighting Houston charities in religious magazines such as *World* and secular publications oriented to the donor community donor, such as *Philanthropy*, *Culture & Society* and *The Gathering*. And she has made major presentations championing the work of these grassroots groups at national conferences of donors, including The Philanthropy Roundtable (a network of some 650 individual and foundation donors) and the State of the World Forum (a Templeton Foundation-sponsored event). She has also addressed policy makers on faith-based initiatives on Capitol Hill and think-tank conferences, and provided information for the Bush Administration. And she has taken the message of grassroots community healers to intellectuals through the Philadelphia Society and the Center for the American Idea.

## Building Capacity

Confronted by the tyranny of the urgent, many grassroots FBOs are strong in “street impact” but weak in internal administration. Several of the ministries we visited were launched without “institutional fanfare” from the simple dreams of their individual founders. Sylvia Bolling was concerned about unsupervised children in her neighborhood and initially ran what eventually became Aldine YOUTH out of the back of her car. Prince and Sheila Cousinard moved into the Third Ward because they wanted to spend time with inner-city youth. They are still convinced that their chief work is simply living their lives before those kids—lives centered on faith, commitment to marriage and work, faithfulness in Christian fellowship and love of neighbor, and adherence to traditional moral standards. These ministry leaders did not begin with 5-year strategic plans or systems for tracking their involvement in kids’ lives. They just lived in broken neighborhoods and loved those whom God brought across their paths.

Over time, their real-life experience in loving kids gave rise to a clearer picture of programs that could be established to structure their engagement with youth, turning sporadic acts of kindness into a more intentional pattern of daily and weekly involvement. This in turn made possible the participation of greater numbers of kids and families. But managing such growth eventually requires more helpers, more facilities, more money. At such a point, the enterprise either advances because a strong administrative infrastructure undergirds it, or it begins to collapse. The pedestrian tasks of raising money and accounting for it; mobilizing, training and supervising volunteers; keeping up records on where kids live, how often they participate in programs, and how they are faring in school; and securing facilities, vehicles, equipment, and insurance may be less rewarding than the actual moments of tutoring the child or coaching the team, but are irreplaceable. Shortcomings in “institutional readiness” can expose a ministry to costly liabilities (e.g., a lawsuit arising against a ministry volunteer accused of sexual abuse who was not properly screened and supervised); disqualify it from receiving foundation support; limit its effectiveness to track what it is actually accomplishing in the lives of its participants; and hinder it from growing qualitatively and quantitatively.

Consequently, CFR has emphasized building the organizational capacity of the frontline groups it assists. This work can be divided into two parts. The first involves strengthening these groups’ institutional readiness, which positions them for more effective impact in the future. The second involves CFR’s work in providing resources and consulting that has increased the constituent

ministries' current programmatic impact. CFR's engagement in both types of capacity building are discussed below.

CFR has contributed to the frontline organizations' institutional readiness through training and through pro bono management consulting services. For example, Elliott helped ICY to implement a client-tracking database, so that the ministry could establish good monitoring of the youth involved in their programs. The ministry now has each family complete a formal enrollment form for the child and is working on getting copies of all the participants' birth certificates. A database of involved youth is kept up-to-date by the program administrator, a woman identified, recruited, and interviewed by Elliott on behalf of the ministry. Eventually, ICY hopes its database will also capture information regarding each student's on-going involvement (or departure) from the ministry as well as information on their school performance and post-graduation activities.

CFR has also served the constituents by recruiting professionals to offer modestly priced bookkeeping and accounting services. For Restoration Ministries and Aldine YOUTH, this has meant a CPA to visit them quarterly, review the books, close them out, and trouble-shoot any problems. This work strengthening frontline agencies in financial management and accounting skills is what attracted Rockwell Fund to the Center for Renewal. Rockwell's President Terry Bell admits he has sometimes been "astonished" by the lack of competence of small charities in this regard, yet foundations like his lack the staff needed to help such groups pass muster. Bell is enthusiastic about CFR in this regard. "I think intermediary organizations are there to do on a wholesale basis what we [donors] all can't do on a retail basis," he explains.

CFR is also active in hosting training workshops focused on internal capacity building. Several of the constituents we interviewed, for example, had attended CFR's board development workshops. All praised the experience, and each was served in a unique way. For Norton Hindley, the training convinced him that that his board representation was too narrow. "I think when a ministry starts, somehow the [founder] just pulls some people around himself, who've caught the vision but are fairly localized," Hindley explained. "What the Center encouraged me to do was to try to draw more board members in from our constituent community." Hindley's board now includes an African-American professional who was raised in the Third Ward and an Hispanic pastor who teaches at a local Bible college. According to Hindley, these two have brought new perspectives to the board (e.g., on where to hold ministry events) as well as insights into navigating cross-cultural relationships.

For Sylvia Bolling, the board training was “liberating” in that it helped her through what she calls “board transition issues.” Laughing, she admitted, “As a grassroots mission, when you first start, if you can breathe, you can be on the board!” As her organization matured, she learned, board members needed to have a sense of their job responsibilities and role on the board. “We’re going to need some new members on the board,” Bolling explained, “and we’ve gone from ‘anybody can be on the board’ to knowing how to get the right people and to tell them ahead of time what they are supposed to be doing, so that they can make a decision about whether they want to serve in that capacity.”

The training has also helped ministry leaders to more clearly identify which responsibilities are theirs as executive directors and which belong to board members. Gwen Canady reported that ICY’s board members now are designated certain responsibilities and they sign a “director’s covenant” formalizing their commitments. “That did not exist before,” Canady emphasized.

For Rufus Smith, the board training helped him grow in confidence in recruiting new board members. “Before, I was always timid, and would ask, ‘Would you become a board member?’ and assure them that they didn’t have to come but three or four meetings a year,” Smith reported. “I thought that was a way of enticing them.” Now, Smith says, he realizes that it is a privilege for someone to join the board, and that if someone cannot even commit to attending a meeting, say, eight times a year, that person probably will not have much valuable input to offer.

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Interviewees also spoke highly of other CFR training workshops they had attended. Joe Hernandez of Restoration Ministries explained that the biggest help he has received from CFR came through the ministry self-assessment workshop, utilizing the Drucker Self-Assessment Tool. Despite many years of running the ministry, Hernandez reported that the workshop helped him for the first time to get a really clear definition of what the ministry does:

*I know what we do, you know, but once you spell it out, that's a good help in [communicating with] the men and the leaders. I can explain now what we do, how we do it—step by step—what we're trying to accomplish, and why.*

This exercise, Hernandez added, has greatly aided him in composing grant proposals, since foundations expect to hear this information clearly and succinctly. The self-assessment workshop has affected Hernandez' thinking in an additional way as well. "They talked a lot about talking to your customers," he explained. Consequently, Hernandez now holds rap sessions with the men in the residential home, asking for their opinions on what aspects of the program are the most helpful, and what they want more of, and less of.

Some of the constituent ministries rely heavily on volunteers, and reported that CFR's workshop on volunteer management had strengthened their ability to work effectively with volunteers. Sylvia Bolling walked away with new ideas on how to show appreciation to her volunteers, to help ensure their continued commitment. She plans to hold two or three volunteer appreciation luncheons annually and to solicit donations of in-kind items from local corporations that can be given as small gifts to hard-working volunteers. She and Don Taylor of City of Refuge Church also found the seminar's emphasis on "inventorying" volunteers' interests and skills very helpful. "If you match a person's gifts and desires [with their volunteer role], they will be more apt to stay here," Bolling explained. Taylor said he had never heard of the idea of writing "job descriptions" for volunteers but has implemented that approach now. "It's a good preventative measure [and] you get people who are really a good fit for your organization," he said.

These kinds of training workshops are available from other, secular organizations. But often the grassroots, faith-based leaders we interviewed have not been able to access them. Hernandez said he had never before attended a formal workshop on ministry management issues and did not personally know any organizations other than CFR offering such training. Other ministry leaders were aware of some other training opportunities, but the costs of attending those seminars was prohibitive, whereas CFR offers its workshops for free or at



a very affordable cost. All the leaders we interviewed were also grateful for the fact that the workshops they attended were taught from a distinctively Christian viewpoint; for some of these leaders, the messenger is nearly as important as the message. They wanted to learn from someone who understood their identity not just as social service providers, but as faith-centered institutions. Donors, too, recognize the unique service provided by explicitly faith-based intermediaries like CFR. As Michele Sabino, a former grant officer at the Houston Endowment (which has granted CFR \$100,000), reports:

*The venues available for nonprofit organizational development were not always amenable to the smallest and most emerging charities, and they rarely spoke to the whole notion of “faith-based” organizations. So we felt that the CFR fills multiple roles at the same time.*

Sylvia Bolling has attended sessions offered by various nonprofit resource groups, but asserts that CFR’s seminars have been more valuable to her for several reasons. Most importantly, she reports, she trusts that the speakers are available to her to give advice even after the formal event is over. “I wouldn’t feel comfortable picking up the phone and asking questions to a [United Way] presenter. But with CFR, I’ve got that deeper relationship. It’s just a different feel. They really know you.” Bolling says that she also appreciates that CFR sometimes hosts its training events right in the neighborhood, rather than in the typical downtown locations. That overcomes a barrier, she notes, since some grassroots leaders she knows feel uncomfortable attending programs in the fancy hotels “way across town.” Bolling has collaborated with Elliott in co-sponsoring a workshop on fundraising for grassroots faith-based organizations, with CFR picking up the tab for the event and Aldine YOUTH providing the use of their headquarters and recruiting leaders from their constituency to participate. They did the same for a workshop on Developmental Assets for youth workers, taking the training closer to neighborhood leaders.

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Bolling reports that she has also benefitted from networking with other faith-based leaders. From those connections, some new partnerships have evolved. The friendship she developed with Hernandez of Restoration Ministries, she explained, led to an active collaboration throughout 2001. Once per month, ministry participants and volunteers from Hernandez' church helped put on the Friday evening "Youth Explosion" program offered at Aldine YOUTH. Bolling has also struck up a friendship with Cathy Lawdanski, a frequent CFR workshop presenter. Lawdanski has now mobilized her home congregation, Northwest Bible Church, for active engagement with the Aldine YOUTH ministry. Church volunteers have hosted computer classes; designed a web site for the organization; completed maintenance and repair work at the facility during an occasional "Day of Service;" donated clothing and furniture; and provided refreshments for the monthly Teen Explosion gatherings. A women's group within the congregation has adopted the "Girls Night Out" program at Aldine YOUTH, providing refreshments, lesson plans, and crafts supplies sufficient for an entire semester's meetings.

### **Increased Program Effectiveness**

Though it is not a major focus on CFR's activities, the intermediary has helped frontline groups to garner new volunteers. "They've exposed us to a lot of churches," reports Joe Hernandez. Several of these congregations rallied around Restoration Ministries following the disastrous floods of the summer of 2001, providing multiple work crews for rehabilitation efforts. Churches have donated building supplies, carpeting, household and toiletries items, volunteer paint crews, and a new computer. Hernandez appears almost dazed by the outpouring of generosity, indicating that prior to his involvement with CFR, he was isolated from such support.

Gwen Canady also reported that Elliott had been instrumental in opening the doors of suburban churches to hear presentations about ICY by founder Prince Cousinard. This has not generated many consistent volunteers, but it has led to occasional service projects by churches and to approximately \$90,000 in annual support from the churches' missions' budgets.

Certainly, additional manpower helps the constituent ministries to expand their impact. CFR has also contributed, directly and indirectly, to increases in the scale and scope of frontline ministries in other ways. Homeward Bound has gained new ministry partners and extended its reach to include inner-city kids. Founder Norton Hindley had desired for years to expand his program, but numerous attempts to build partnerships with inner-city pastors proved unfruitful. Many expressed an

interest in the concept, but none followed through. Hindley needed the opportunity to develop a genuine friendship with an urban youth leader. He needed credibility and an introduction from a trusted third party. CFR, he explained, “hooked him up” with Couisnard from ICY and Dan Walmer from City of Refuge. The result: three outdoor adventure trips already involving over 100 inner-city kids, with several future trips planned. “We would not be in the inner city today if it wasn’t for the Center for Renewal,” Hindley says. He adds that through the new partnerships, Homeward Bound’s program has not only expanded quantitatively, but qualitatively improved, by the addition of the urban youth. “I’ve found that often these kids have more passion for the Lord than a lot of the kids in suburbia, because the suburban kids have got everything.” Hindley has developed a new program, Mission Up, that matches suburban and inner-city churches for joint camping trips. Eating out of the same stew pot, building a relationship on common ground, Hindley believes, sows the seeds for a healing across racial divides.

Like Homeward Bound, City of Refuge has enhanced its programs with a newly added component made possible through CFR’s help. From his background working with a transitional homeless shelter, Pastor Rufus Smith desired to see his church reach out to individuals struggling with homelessness and needing to secure decent employment. He learned of the WINGS program, an intensive 40-hour job readiness program that was achieving success in other cities, and caught a vision for implementing it in Houston. CFR was enthusiastic about the program, but recognized it would be stronger with an additional mentoring component. Volunteer “friendship circles” could be matched with WINGS participants to cheerlead the participants through the training and offer emotional and practical support to WINGS graduates as they applied their newly-learned skills and secured new jobs. CFR coordinated two weekends of training, one to teach church leaders about the WINGS model and one to train volunteer mentors to serve on the friendship circles. Program coordinator Don Taylor believes the mentoring component has been critical in the success of the program graduates.

CFR has not only facilitated new partnerships, helped birth new program ideas, and brought in resources for new program components. It has also introduced new tools to ministry leaders that are strengthening current programming and/or making likely future improvements. CFR has trained about 80 grassroots leaders, including its closest ministry partners, in the use of the SEARCH Institute’s tool for assessing what works in youth ministry. Ministry leaders we interviewed that attended this training were universally positive in their assessments. Moreover, when Rufus Smith announced to Barbara Elliott that he was creating a new summer vocational development program for jun-

ior high youth in the city, Elliott was able to locate a faith-based youth entrepreneurship curriculum that fit Smith's needs perfectly. He reported to us with delight that the lessons were age-appropriate and required little or no modifications for use in his inner-city context.

For many of the ministry leaders, these various forms of help have not only been inherently beneficial, but have served them because they freed up their time. In this way, CFR has contributed to the efficiency of the grassroots organizations. As Smith relates:

*CFR provides a valuable service in their "leg-work-logistics," so you don't have to be reinventing the wheel. It saves us a tremendous amount of resources, mental and physical. It frees me to do what I do best, which is not research and development and traveling around the country finding what works best in a certain regard.*

Joe Hernandez emphasized a similar point. He noted that the help he has received with grant writing, and the dollars garnered, have taken pressure off for his, and the men's, involvement in fund-raising activities. "Now that we get help from somewhere else, it gives us time to do the work we are supposed to be doing," Hernandez says. For Sylvia Bolling, the saved time has come about largely because of the repository of information Barbara Elliott is. When Bolling needs a specific kind of help, she can turn to Elliott for a referral, rather than having to invest hours researching. "Right now, if I needed an audit," Bolling says as an example, "I could call Barbara and she could probably recommend someone for that. I could probably find it out [on my own], but that's a lot of time that's not necessary for me [to take]."

## **Conclusion: The Multiplier Begets Multipliers**

The verb "multiplying" is perhaps the single best one to describe the activities of the Center for Renewal in Houston. Despite its limited staff and budget, this intermediary has set in motion a series of changes that have increased the quantity and quality of grassroots, faith-based social services. By connecting frontline organizations to new sources of money, volunteers, and ministry partners, CFR has enabled these groups to expand their reach, serve additional individuals, and launch new initiatives. By providing to frontline groups new tools, know-how, and advice, CFR has assisted them in improving the quality of their internal operations and, in some instances, of their programs as well (e.g., through the addition of extra components that have improved participant outcomes). By relying on the expertise and referrals provided by CFR, ministry directors have been freed up to concentrate on tasks only they can perform.

Through their association with CFR, these organizations have enhanced their own credibility and reputation, gaining access to resources they might otherwise have missed. Through their mutual involvement with CFR, ministry leaders have expanded their peer network, and they have learned from and encouraged one another.

The multiplication effect of CFR's work with these frontline agencies, though, has gone beyond all this. In several instances, the grassroots leaders, inspired and educated through Barbara Elliott's example, have themselves gained a vision for becoming multipliers. Rufus Smith has become a veritable evangelist among other inner-city pastors for the Vocation Bible School program his church designed with help from CFR. Sylvia Bolling has pounded the pavement to invite grassroots leaders from a variety of programs to CFR workshops. Knowing how much she has gained from this training, she is eager to expose others to it. And Joe Hernandez, who labored in obscurity for so many years, has identified six other Hispanic pastors to mentor and connect to the kinds of training and resources offered by CFR. "Barbara was an inspiration to me," Hernandez says, "just coming alongside of us and helping us. Sometimes it seems like nobody cares about what you are doing, you're just out there doing it. And it's encouraging to know that there are people out there who are willing to step in and give you a hand and help you do a better job," he adds. Having been on the receiving end, he wants to be an encourager of other ministry leaders, helping them, too, to multiply the difference they are making in their own distressed communities.

# case studies

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