POWER UP FOR KIDS!

Message from Larry Marx, CEO of The Children's Agenda

This year marks the 20th anniversary of The Children's Agenda, and I'm proud to report that we are having more impact improving the lives of children and families than ever before. From child poverty to exclusionary discipline in schools, from the County legislature to the State legislature, The Children's Agenda makes a huge difference in the health, education and well-being of our children.

As CEO for 12 of those years, I've watched and helped guide our evolution from an organization focused exclusively on local issues to one centered on policy change at both the state and local level. We've been an organization respected for distilling objective, credible research of evidence-based outcomes and best practices, and are also now an organization influencing policy and funding decisions in real time through original data and policy research. We were an organization with an estimable reputation for independence and courage, and we've added to that widespread respect as a collaborative partner for collective impact in 21 coalitions, an organizer of 40 courageously active "VIP" parent leaders advocating from their lived experience, and a springboard for action by 5,200 participants in our online Advocacy Network. Over our first eight years, The Children's Agenda had an average annual budget of $238,000 and 3 professional staff. Today, we have an amazingly talented 16-person staff and $2 million budget.

As Jim Collins writes about organizations that transform from "Good to Great," he notes that there is a "flywheel effect:"

"No matter how dramatic the end result, good-to-great transformations never happen in one fell swoop. In building a great company or social sector enterprise, there is no single defining action, no grand program, no one killer innovation, no solitary lucky break, no miracle moment.

Rather, the process resembles relentlessly pushing a giant, heavy flywheel, turn upon turn, building momentum until a point of breakthrough, and beyond. . Each turn of the flywheel builds upon work done earlier, compounding your investment of effort. A thousand times faster, then ten thousand, then a hundred thousand. The huge heavy disk flies forward, with almost unstoppable momentum."

But we live in a community and during a time with a different understanding of progress. Rather than a flywheel steadily moving from good to great, we are surrounded by expectations of a miraculous breakthrough, the singular Innovative Solution, and the "killer app" that is supposed to program our way out of growing social problems, and the hardships of families struggling to raise our children. In response, many promising programs and new organizations are announced with much fanfare, over-committing and subsequently under-delivering on expectations.

Not The Children's Agenda. We have been "The Little Engine that Could:" steadily building our organizational capacity, growing our base of influence, expertise and collaborative relationships. For 20 years, we've been pushing our "flywheel," turn by turn, and gaining real momentum. From helping pass Paid Family Leave and Raise the Age, to extending a tax credit to hundreds of thousands of families with children under 4 for the first time, at each turn, we are improving children's health, education and well-being.

The next turn of the flywheel is in your hands. If The Children's Agenda remains simply an organization, rather than a movement, we will have failed. It's your turn. Please join us and take action now. Together, let's achieve the escape velocity our children deserve for a better future.