

Memo

To: Jeanne Allen

From: Mary

Date: 9/21/98

Re: Mothers

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Jeanne this is just a preliminary draft of my mothers report. I'm assuming you want something to bring to the board meeting. I'm not sure how detailed you want it, what format etc., what I've left out, I look forward to your input and thoughts.

In attendants on Friday, September 18, 1998:

*Virginia Walden* : Single mother and Outreach Coordinator for FOCUS, a charter support organization in Washington, DC

*Jackie Robinson*: Married mother of seven children, former home schooler

*Mirlanda Allende*: Single mother of 4 year old boy, Program Director for the African American Council of Christian Clergy in Miami.

*Sharlot Smith*: Married mother, works for a Denver insurance company and is the lead plaintiff in a class action law suite that is suing the state of Colorado.

*Gail Bennett*: Married mother, works as administrator for the Ogantz Avenue Revitalization Corporation in Philadelphia

*John Gardner*: Director of the Board of School Directors in Milwaukee

*Mary de Groot*: Single mother and Member Services Coordinator for CER

We met at the Marriott Suites hotel in Bethesda, Maryland in the early afternoon and worked until 10:30 that night.

During the first session we introduced ourselves and talked about our interests, activities and backgrounds, a meet and greet time. Gail Bennett had to leave in the early evening.

Once we got acquainted, we discussed the kinds of problems black women encounter in the world of white male conservatives; how difficult it is to represent a community of diverse people; dealing with the press and feeling isolated. The women were able to share their thoughts, experiences and emotions with great honesty and openness. By dinner a sense of trust was established and an interest in learning about each other had developed. It was clear that each woman, though quite different in personality and background shared experiences, concerns and commitment.

The next morning we met at 9:30 and John Gardner began what he called "democratic organizing" or how to develop a grassroots organization. I've included an outline of the training below. The morning session included a general discussion of what organizing is, as well as role playing and other theater techniques to help acquaint us with the art of persuasion. We discussed the pitfalls of recruitment, how to identify and match personalities and roles, and how to keep a group cohesive, on track and effective.

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We worked at finding a name for the group and setting goals for the future. A tentative name was agreed upon which has been changed to Mothers Alliance for School Reform. We decided we should meet again in January for further training. John suggested we meet in Milwaukee so we can all see for ourselves a city that has turned around its educational system. He felt it would be beneficial for the women to meet with other mothers who have been struggling in this movement and have seen change.

We agreed to keep in touch by phone and email. I have since sent them each more CER materials.