Better Together
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Introduction

In *Better Together,* we invite you to join us on a journey around the United States. You will visit big cities, suburbs, and small towns and meet people engaged in a wide variety of activities. You will see bustling branch libraries in Chicago and an evangelical church in southern California that attracts more than 45,000 members, a middle school in a small town in Wisconsin where sixth-graders develop and carry out local improvement projects and a neighborhood of Boston that has rescued itself from catastrophic decline, an arts project that expresses through dance the history and work of a naval shipyard in New Hampshire and an activist organization that represents 60,000 families in the Rio Grande Valley. What these and the other undertakings described in this book have in common is that they all involve making connections among people, establishing bonds of trust and understanding, building community. In other words, they all involve creating social capital: developing networks of relationships that weave individuals into groups and communities.

Interest in social capital and research on the subject have grown dramatically in recent years—from a handful of esoteric research articles in the early 1990s to hundreds of new publications each year a decade later. Scholars, government officials, leaders of nongovernmental organizations including the World Bank, the United Nations, and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, and busi-

ness practitioners have increasingly recognized the essential contribution of social capital to the economic and social health of countries, regions, cities, and towns, to the success of organizations, and to individual accomplishment and well-being. Many of the stories in this book show the positive effects of social capital, the ways that people in relationship can reach goals that would have been far beyond the grasp of individuals in isolation. At the same time, these people enjoy the intrinsic satisfactions of association, of being part of a community.

As used by social scientists, *social capital* refers to social networks, norms of reciprocity, mutual assistance, and trustworthiness. The central insight of this approach is that social networks have real value both for the people in those networks—hence, networking as a career strategy, for example—as well as for bystanders. Criminologists, for instance, have shown that the crime rate in a neighborhood is lowered when neighbors know one another well, benefiting even residents who are not themselves involved in neighborhood activities.

Just like physical capital (tools) and human capital (education), social capital comes in many different forms—a coffee klatch, a civic organization, a bowling league, a labor union, the Ku Klux Klan. As that last example illustrates, social capital can be put to morally repugnant purposes as well as admirable ones, just as biochemical training can be used to concoct a bioterror weapon or a life-saving drug. Social capital is a powerful tool, as our stories will illustrate, but whether it is put to good use or ill is a different issue.

Among the many different forms of social capital one distinction will be especially important for our purposes in this book. Some networks link people who are similar in crucial respects and tend to be inward-looking—bonding social capital. Others encompass different types of people and tend to be outward-looking—bridging social capital. Both bonding and bridging social networks have their uses. Bonding social capital is a kind of sociological Super Glue, whereas bridging social capital provides a sociological WD-40. If you get sick, the people who bring you chicken soup are likely to represent your bonding social capital. On the other hand, a society that has *only* bonding social capital will

look like Belfast or Bosnia—segregated into mutually hostile camps. So a pluralist democracy requires lots of bridging social capital, not just the bonding variety.

The problem is that bridging social capital is harder to create than bonding social capital—after all, birds of a feather flock together. So the kind of social capital that is most essential for healthy public life in an increasingly diverse society like ours is precisely the kind that is hardest to build. For this reason, in our case studies we have paid special attention to the challenges of fostering social networks that bridge the various splits in contemporary American communities.

Community building sometimes has a warm and fuzzy feeling, a kind of "kumbaya" cuddliness about it. Some of our stories fit that image, but others allow us to see that building social capital is not free of conflict and controversy.

- First, some of our protagonists are building social capital precisely because it can empower disadvantaged groups (like Mexican Americans in the Rio Grande Valley or clerical workers at Harvard) in their struggle for greater influence. Social capital represents not a comfortable alternative to social conflict but a way of making controversy productive.
- Second, by organizing some people in and others out, social capital can sometimes have negative effects on "outsiders." We'll see evidence of this in the role of part-time workers at UPS and in the forced annexation of East Portland. (This is one reason why bridging social capital is especially important.)
- Third, even when the effects of community ties are wholly admirable, the means by which they work can be unsettling. Social capital relies on informal sanctions and gossip and even ostracism, not just on fellowship and emulation and altruism. The solidarity that enabled Boston's Dudley Street neighborhood to rebound rests in part on camaraderie and shared aspirations, but in part on fear of what the neighbors would say about those who did not do their part.

In short, the concept of social capital is not treacly sweet but has a certain tartness. Nevertheless, each of our stories illustrates the extraordi-

nary power and subtlety of social networks to enable people to improve their lives.

Even as the value of social capital has been more and more widely acknowledged, evidence has mounted of a diminution of social capital in the United States. In *Bowling Alone*, one of us (Putnam) has shown that whereas during the first two thirds of the twentieth century Americans were becoming more and more connected with one another and with community affairs, the last third of the century witnessed a startling and dismaying reversal of that trend. Beginning, roughly speaking, in the late 1960s, Americans in massive numbers began to join less, trust less, give less, vote less, and schmooze less. At first people hardly noticed what was happening, but over the last three decades involvement in civic associations, participation in public affairs, membership in churches and social clubs and unions, time spent with family and friends and neighbors, philanthropic giving, even simple trust in other people—as well as participation in the eponymous bowling leagues—all have fallen by 25 to 50 percent. A variety of technological and economic and social changes—television, two-career families, urban sprawl, and so on—has rendered obsolete a good share of America's stock of social capital.

Bowling Alone presented a sweeping statistical overview of several decades of decline in sociability and civic participation across the United States, but it closed with the optimistic hope that social reformers might invent new forms of social capital to replace the dying forms. *Better Together* does not suggest that the downward trend has suddenly reversed itself. We do not yet see evidence of a general resurgence of social connection or involvement in the public life of the community. But hidden within that broad statistical truth of the erosion of social ties is a tremendous variety of particular experiences. A general decline does not mean decline everywhere, in every situation. We began this project on the assumption—based in part on the evidence of particular cases that came to our attention as we traveled the country, speaking about social connectedness with Americans from all walks of life—that new social capital was

being created in interesting ways in many places and situations, even as overall levels of association and participation continued to fall.

To write this book we descended from the statistical heights of *Bowling Alone* to ground level, entering the living room of Catherine Flannery, a longtime resident of Roxbury, Massachusetts, who has seen her neighborhood unravel and then knit itself together; a classroom in North Philadelphia where an Experience Corps volunteer was helping a second-grader learn to read; a meeting room in a United Parcel Service hub in Greensboro, North Carolina, where package handlers discussed how to help new employees adjust to the job. We sat in the pews of a Los Angeles church that had undergone explosive growth and in the office of a coordinator of neighborhood associations in Portland, Oregon.

We focus on these social-capital success stories, hoping and believing that they may in fact be harbingers of a broader revival of social capital in this country. We hope and believe that they may perhaps guide and inspire others who are seeking ways to build social capital and to accomplish goals or solve problems that are as challenging as those faced by the groups described in *Better Together*.

Many readers of *Bowling Alone* and others who have understood the value of social capital have asked what can be done to build or rebuild community and social relationships. Indeed, as we have traveled the country in the past few years, speaking with tens of thousands of our fellow citizens, the toughest challenges have come not from scholarly critics but from ordinary Americans who have asked, "So, if you're right, what can I do? What are people out there doing to address this problem? Are there exceptions to the general collapse of community in America?" Despite the flood of recent academic research on social capital, these practical questions remain largely unexplored. We hope that the examples in this book can supply some answers to those important questions.

We want to emphasize that this is a book of stories about social capital, not a textbook of social-capital creation or a casebook designed to elucidate or test a particular theory of social-capital development. We mention this partly to caution readers not to look for the strict defini-

tions, quantitative measures, or rigorous theoretical frameworks that might belong to a different kind of study but that we have not tried to develop here or impose on this material. *Bowling Alone* presented and tested a wide variety of hypotheses about the causes and consequences of social capital against evidence as rigorous as could be discovered. *Better Together* aims instead to illustrate some of the ways in which Americans in many diverse corners of our society are making progress on the perennial challenge of re-creating new forms of community, adapted to the conditions and needs of our time.

Our aim in telling these stories as stories is not to excuse ourselves from the rigor of social science, but to gain the positive advantages of storytelling. We believe that stories, with their specificity and ability to express the complex realities of particular people and places and their possibly unique ability to express thought and feeling simultaneously, are the appropriate medium for capturing a sense of how social-capital creation works in real life. It is no coincidence that the chapters that follow include numerous examples of people building social capital by sharing stories about their experiences. The rich mixture of events, values, feelings, and ideas that stories communicate has long made storytelling an important mechanism of social connection. Stories help us relate to one another. The U.S. Army uses the term "ground truth" to describe the real experience of soldiers in the field—the moment-by-moment truth of being in combat, as opposed to generalizations about combat or theories about how it should occur. In these stories, we have tried to capture some of the ground truth of social-capital creation—the ways it really happens rather than theories or frameworks describing how it might or should happen.

We should say a few words here about how we chose these particular twelve stories. We do not claim that they are the dozen best contemporary examples of social-capital building in the country (whatever "best" might mean in this context), nor do we claim that any of them is an unalloyed success. Indeed, we have sought in each case to explore some of the shortcomings and remaining challenges that are inevitable

in practical efforts to build community. Nevertheless, we believe that all the cases make valuable and interesting contributions to the social-capital discussion.

We applied two main principles in choosing our cases. One, as we have already suggested, was to focus as much as possible on substantial cases of social-capital success. In our preliminary investigations of candidates for inclusion, we looked for evidence of longevity, scope, impact, and established reputation that would give us reasonable confidence that we had found genuine stories of social-capital development. (We also favored cases that exhibited some particularly creative or innovative approach.) Overall, we sought examples that are robust and successful enough to serve as convincing and potentially instructive models of social-capital creation. In about half of the cases, we were able to draw on the valuable work of other researchers to help confirm that the activities and organizations we had chosen had enough substance to stand up to scrutiny and to reward attention.

Our second basic principle in selection was to include as much variety as possible. The social-capital development described in this book takes place in the Northwest, the South, the Midwest, the Northeast, and southern California. It happens in big cities and small cities, in suburban communities, and in small towns. Some of these efforts are strictly local; others have ties to national or regional organizations. One is mainly youth led, one brings together children and senior citizens, and others focus on adults or a wide range of age groups. The organizations and examples we examine include a labor union, a pair of churches, an arts program, a community development corporation, a large business, a city library system, and the history of citizen participation in an entire metropolitan area. When faced with a choice between a story that differed from the others (in region, setting, participants, or purpose) and a story that might be "stronger" in terms of scope or success but resembled one we had already settled on, we opted for greater variety.[1]

Why this emphasis on variety? For one thing, we sought to illustrate the point that social capital can be created by different people in differ-

ent situations for different purposes to avoid any implication that successful efforts belonged only to certain kinds of groups with certain aims in certain settings. We believed variety would make it more likely that readers interested in working to build social capital in their many situations would find inspiration and guidance in one or more of the stories. We also hoped that we might find some underlying similarities among the diverse cases and that—because the cases were diverse—those similarities might suggest useful general principles or techniques of social-capital development. We selected these twelve stories from a pool of more than one hundred examples that have come to our attention over years of traveling, speaking, and meeting people and groups interested in the subject of social capital and convinced of its importance.

Our aim has been to learn from these varied experiences rather than impose themes on them or use them to illustrate pre-existing pet ideas. In fact, when we began we did not know what, if anything, we would discover in the way of common themes or general lessons in these diverse settings and activities. We did bring some basic questions to our exploration of these stories, however. One is whether the success of the endeavor depended on the involvement of a charismatic leader or had a structure or some form of shared or distributed leadership that would enable it to survive leadership changes and especially the departure of a visionary founder. In other words, we asked whether these groups or programs were self-sustaining. A related question is whether the social capital–building techniques and structures we saw could be replicated in other settings (related because reliance on an individual charismatic leader argued against a program or group succeeding elsewhere without that unique leadership). We also asked what kind of social-capital creation was going on in these cases: whether it was primarily bonding or bridging social capital. And we tried to discover the mechanisms of social-capital creation in these different situations, looking not only for evidence of new and strengthened relationships but for insight into how these bonds were formed.

In the interest of telling these stories as stories, we do not ask and answer these questions directly in every case, but they shaped our investigations, and the answers are usually evident, if not always explicit. In our reflective concluding chapter, we deal more explicitly with those questions as part of our effort to draw some general themes and lessons from these dozen cases.

In fact, several themes have emerged from the stories. In our last chapter, we draw out those themes in some detail in an effort to derive some usable lessons about how and why social capital is created. One lesson is that creating robust social capital takes time and effort. For the most part, it develops through extensive and time-consuming face-to-face conversation between two individuals or among small groups of people. (See especially the chapters on Valley Interfaith, HUCTW, and Tupelo for examples, but other cases also demonstrate the point.) It takes person-to-person contact over time to build the trust and mutual understanding that characterize the relationships that are the basis of social capital. So we see no way that social capital can be created instantaneously or en masse.

A second conclusion, related to the first, is that social capital is necessarily a local phenomenon because it is defined by connections among people who know one another. Even when we talk about social capital in national or regional organizations (United Parcel Service or the Texas Industrial Area Foundations, for example), we are really talking about a network or accumulation of mainly local connections. The Internet and the World Wide Web, though much in the news as technology that would transform community and relationship, play a surprisingly small role in most of our stories. We do devote one chapter to craigslist, an online bulletin board/community, to try to understand some of the limitations and promises of this developing phenomenon, but our investigations strongly suggest (as we have indicated) that trust relationships and resilient communities generally form through local personal contact.

The concluding chapter also summarizes some of the dilemmas that face would-be social capitalists. Many of the cases illustrate, for example, that for creating bonds of trust and reciprocity smaller is often better, but

for extending the power and reach of social networks bigger is often better. We believe that some of the cases also illustrate how this dilemma can be resolved, at least in part, by creating networks of networks, that is, by nesting smaller groups within larger, more encompassing ones. The cases also allow us to explore the challenge of reconciling cohesion (bonding) and heterogeneity (bridging), for many of the protagonists of our cases have discovered an impressive array of strategies for finding unifying themes in the presence of diversity. Storytelling itself turns out to be an unusually effective technique in this regard, as does the creation of common spaces, both physical and virtual.

The endeavors we have studied also suggest that social capital is usually developed in pursuit of a particular goal or set of goals and not for its own sake. For the most part, the people and groups we describe here seek better schools, neighborhood improvement, better contracts with their employers, economic advantage, or some other particular good, with social capital a means to those ends and an important fringe benefit but not in itself their main aim.

After its extensive marshaling of evidence of decades of deterioration of social capital in the United States, *Bowling Alone* found reason for optimism amid the doom and gloom by looking back a century to another era when a decades-long decline in social capital gave way to (and in some sense stimulated) a renaissance of social connection that, among other things, saw the creation of now familiar fraternal and social-service organizations. That book expressed a hope that the downward trend of the last three decades of the twentieth century might also end in a new era of social-capital growth, possibly with the creation, again, of new kinds of institutions and forms of association. If *Better Together* provides insight, unlocks new ways of thinking, and sparks enthusiasm that contributes in even the smallest way to such a revival, it will have more than justified our hopes and efforts.

CHAPTER 1

{ *Rio Grande Valley, Texas* }

Valley Interfaith

"The Most Dangerous Thing We Do Is Talk to Our Neighbors."

In the early 1990s, teachers and administrators at the Palmer Elementary School in Pharr, Texas, began working with Valley Interfaith, a coalition of church and school groups, to organize parents and other area residents to improve the school. Pharr is in the Rio Grande Valley, not far from the Mexican border. Many of Palmer's students came from "colonias" in the surrounding area—unincorporated communities of mainly Mexican Americans and Mexican immigrants, among the poorest localities in the poorest region in the United States at that time. Many colonias lacked even such basic residential services as electricity, sewers, and paved roads. The lack of adequate sewers forced the closing of the elementary school several days each year. Eighty-six percent of the students at Palmer were classified as economically disadvantaged; 58 percent had limited proficiency in English.[1]

Significantly, the teachers did not ask parents to come in to the school but made visits to students' homes, asking parents about their hopes and worries regarding the school and their children. For many parents, it was their first real connection with the school, the first time anyone had bothered to ask their opinions. For the teachers, it was a first glimpse of their students' lives outside school. In *Valley Interfaith and School Reform*, author Dennis Shirley quotes school principal Salvador Flores: "When we first started doing our home visits, some of the teachers would come back to the school crying when they saw the conditions

that the children were living in."[2] These home visits, the face-to-face conversations between a teacher and a child's parent or parents, gradually built up a group of parents who believed enough in the possibility of improving the schools (and believed enough in the goodwill of the teachers) to meet together to take the next step in organizing and planning. These were the parents who came to the small- and medium-sized gatherings known as house meetings organized by Valley Interfaith with and for the school.

The heart of a house meeting is when participants break into small groups of six to ten so they will all have a chance to express their concerns and listen to stories about what has brought them there, why they care enough to act. Later, the groups will describe the issues they discussed to the meeting as a whole and all will vote for what they consider the most important ones—part of the process of developing an action agenda to address the problems that matter most to the people affected by them.

In a small group at one of the Palmer Elementary house meetings, an older man who seemed restless and distracted while others talked interrupted a parent and launched into a tirade against the school district: how the people who worked for the district cared only about their next promotion, how they didn't care if streets around the school were safe or if drug dealers prowled the neighborhood.[3] It wasn't the first time the man, Mr. Ortiz, had spoken out; he was raising his grandson and regularly launched into similar tirades at these meetings. The group leader tried to get him to talk more directly out of his and his grandson's experience, but he went on in the same loud, angry style and then crossed his arms and turned away from the group, mumbling angrily to himself while others talked.

After a while, the leader addressed him: "It's obvious that you're angry about things at this school. I'm angry, too, because I want my daughter in special ed to get the services she needs but the district is cutting back. That's why I'm here—to organize so we can make sure our kids succeed. Can you tell me a story about something that happened to make you so angry?"

For a moment, Mr. Ortiz stayed as he was, arms across his chest, body twisted in his chair. Then he dropped his arms and turned to face the group, his face softening. His voice, when he spoke, was different, too. This was a man speaking about the pain in his life. He told about his other grandson, the one who had been hit and killed by a car outside his elementary school five years earlier.

The group's frustration and impatience with Mr. Ortiz melted away. They could see him as a man who had suffered a terrible loss and had had no way to express that pain except through his rage. Another member of the group who had not yet spoken said, "I've never lost a kid, but I know what that kind of being powerless feels like." Then she told the story of her daughter, who had joined a gang. Mr. Ortiz looked at her and listened. He nodded when she said, "It's too late for my daughter, but damned if I'm not going to do something so that other parents don't have to go through that pain."

Father Alfonso Guevara, pastor of Christ the King Church in Brownsville, Texas, and a longtime leader in Valley Interfaith, says, "We make private pain public." The house meeting was part of the process, a step toward making the pain public in a local group to build the energy and commitment needed to bring that pain—and the actions needed to relieve it—to a wider public stage where officials would have to recognize it and respond.

Relational Organizing

It's called relational organizing. The Southwest Industrial Areas Foundation network, of which Valley Interfaith is a part, builds its membership through one-on-one conversations and at house meetings like the one Mr. Ortiz attended. Catalina Mendiola, a local organizer, says, "The heart of our work is one-on-one meetings with people. Organizing is all about building relationships. It's not about meetings. These are not counseling sessions. They are not an interview. It's a conversation. You're building a relationship here. Not extracting information. Not pushing an agenda. And the only way to do this is to leave yourself open to be

changed by the conversation."[4] Unlike activist organizations that develop a public agenda first and then try to attract people who support it, the IAF encourages the emergence of local agendas from these conversations. Similarly, it allows each organization in the network to develop its state or regional agenda; it does not impose one from above. The IAF's power to make progress on the issues it takes up resides in the relationships. Although people come together because they have similar concerns, building relationships is the first priority, the foundation for defining and acting on public issues that represent an accumulation of personal and local concerns. The professional organizers who work for the IAF organizations see their primary job as finding and training the leaders in the community who will develop a following to devise and carry out the organization's agenda. The "Iron Rule" of the Industrial Areas Foundation is "Never do anything for anybody that they can do for themselves."

The Texas Industrial Areas Foundation originated in the Industrial Areas Foundation movement created in Chicago in 1940 by reformer Saul Alinsky. (The name, which survives in organizations that have few or no industrial workers as members, refers to the Chicago industrial areas where the work began.) Alinsky believed that reform could best be achieved when the citizens of poor and neglected communities organized and exerted power on their own behalf. He saw doing *for* others as less effective and as a kind of welfare colonialism. The inability of these citizens to accomplish much previously, he was convinced, stemmed from their isolation, not from any lack of intelligence, skill, or desire for a better life. Alinsky's idea shapes and motivates the Industrial Areas Foundation organizations of the twenty-first century.[5] At present, more than sixty IAF organizations representing more than one thousand institutions and a million families are active in the United States and the United Kingdom.[6]

Ernesto Cortés, Jr., brought the IAF concept to Texas, beginning with his native San Antonio. Cortés had had organizing experience with the United Farm Workers in the Rio Grande Valley when he went to Chicago for leadership training with IAF organizers there in 1971. After that training and a year of organizing with the IAF in several northern cities, he returned to San Antonio in 1974 to apply and adapt what he had learned. Through hundreds of one-on-one conversations with community figures from the mainly working-class Mexican-American West Side of San Antonio, he learned about local problems while establishing personal relationships with members of the community. Cortés worked closely with church congregations, rooting his organization in the networks and values of those institutions—an innovation that made it possible to tap into well-established ties of trust and mutual interest, as well as shared religious beliefs that supported justice and social action. Professional and lay leaders in the churches drew other members of their congregations into the conversation about local needs, forming groups large enough to get the attention of local politicians.

Those organizing efforts in parts of San Antonio that had largely been ignored by city government led to some early local successes: the installation of pollution controls to reduce the noxious fumes of a hide-processing plant, a footbridge over a drainage canal, traffic lights at some dangerous intersections. The neighborhood accomplishments and the continued work of Cortés and activist clergy led to the creation of Communities Organized for Public Service (COPS), a movement based on two dozen churches in San Antonio organized to respond to problems that affected the whole area—problems having to do with drainage, parks, and libraries, for example—that could not be addressed one parish at a time.[7] The first IAF organization in Texas, COPS is still thriving and effective more than twenty-five years later. In 1978, a second IAF group was founded in Houston, the Metropolitan Organization, a network of thirty-two churches. In 1982, Valley Interfaith came into existence.

Over the past twenty-five years, Texas IAF organizations, individually and as a statewide network, have improved underperforming schools and created effective job-training programs, helped direct hundreds of millions of state and federal dollars to infrastructure improvements in neglected parts of Texas cities and the small colonias in the Rio Grande

Valley, and helped pass living-wage laws and health-care regulations. The network now represents about half a million Texans.

In training programs, in conversation, and in his writings, Cortés emphasizes participation, relationships, and "relational power." He argues that we are social beings, defined by our relationships with other people—with "family and kin, but also with less familiar people with whom we engage in the day-to-day business of living our lives in a complicated society." Without organizations that connect people to political power and public participation, these broader social relations "disintegrate." "There is no time and energy for collaboration," he writes, "no reciprocity, no trust—in short, no social capital."[8] The IAF strives to rebuild or replace some of the lost networks of relationships—lost social capital—organizing in churches and schools "to reconnect these critical institutions around a vibrant culture of relational one-on-one and small-group conversations."[9]

Getting individuals to articulate their needs and the possibilities they see and creating relationships that knit individuals into powerful groups is the core of the IAF's work. Cortés lays out the principles underlying the organization's methods in his response to a college student who asked what "motivates people to support a cause with actions as well as words":

> When I hear your question, what I think you're really saying is, "How can I convince people to do what's good? How do I get them to do what's right? How do I get them to follow my agenda?" That's not organizing. What I mean by organizing is getting you to recognize what's in your best interest. Getting you to recognize that you have a child, that you have a career and a life to lead, and that there are some things that are obstacles to the quality of your life. I need to get you to see how you can affect those things through relationships with other people.[10]

If the people who live on the West Side of San Antonio or in the unincorporated colonias of the Rio Grande Valley see their first priority as getting paved streets and drainage, that becomes the primary action

item on the local agenda. If the parents of schoolchildren in an elementary school in Austin worry most about the dangers their children face crossing busy streets near the school, then getting a stop sign installed or a traffic pattern changed will be their first goal. Other aims and actions may follow, once they experience their collective power. "Winning creates imagination," says Sister Judy Donovan, leading organizer of Valley Interfaith. "Once they see they can get a stop sign, they start thinking about what might be done in the school." Successful action gives people lessons in their own power.

Member after member of Valley Interfaith recalls the same two victories as moments when they truly understood what their collective efforts could accomplish, banishing their old feelings of powerlessness. One was the passage of a half-cent increase in sales tax that politicians had previously tried and failed to pass. Valley Interfaith agreed to work for passage in exchange for a commitment that roughly 30 percent of the tax revenue would go to support the organization's family-friendly agenda. "We went out and did house meetings," says Joe Hinojosa. "We negotiated for weeks with the city to get agreement on where the money would go before we agreed to support it."[11] The other was the drive to change political representation in McAllen from at-large commissioners to single-district commissioners, a modification that would open the door for representatives who were not part of the all-white elite that had governed the city for many years. Those involved saw the victories not only as important in themselves but as revelations of what was possible.

The group had to overcome the charge that they were radicals. "We had this mayor for twenty years—Othal Brand—who used to throw us out of city council meetings. He said we were too radical, that we were communists, dangerous. . . . Yeah, the issue still comes up some, but he's gone now, and we have won single-district commissioners," says Hinojosa. "The most dangerous thing we do is talk to our neighbors."[12]

There is nothing abstract about the issues they take on, or the events that motivate them. Father Bart Flaat, pastor of St. Joseph the Worker and a longtime Valley Interfaith leader, describes going to bless the house

of a parishioner during his first months in McAllen, a city near the midpoint of the highway that crosses the Rio Grande Valley east to west and about ten miles from the Mexican border. After the short ceremony, the family asked him to visit a sick neighbor. Entering the house next door, he found a woman with a high fever and an injured leg that was obviously gangrenous. Why didn't she go to the doctor? he asked her. She could lose her leg or even her life if the leg wasn't treated soon. She told him that even a doctor in Mexico would cost forty dollars, money she did not have. Enraged at the idea of this woman losing her leg for lack of forty dollars, he gave her the money himself. The woman's plight was no isolated case. Finding people in his congregation concerned about the unavailability of health care, Father Bart began working with them and Valley Interfaith to get a free clinic built in the area. Four years later the clinic opened.

Relationship-building is a way of looking at the world, not just a strategy. The IAF Alliance Schools initiative has procured money for physical improvements in schools, for in-school clinics, and for changes in the school day (toward block classes rather than shorter class periods, for instance); but as in the case of Palmer Elementary, the core of its school-improvement efforts has been building relationships: between the school and the community; between students and teachers. Relationships are not just the engine of reform, they are one of the goals of reform. So, for instance, Houston's Metropolitan Organization worked with teachers and parents at Jefferson Davis High School to introduce block scheduling in the school, the longer classes meaning more effective teaching and more opportunities for teachers and students to get to know one another, to have genuine relationships. As Dennis Shirley points out, the IAF organizations see schools, and learning, as embedded in the community, not as isolated institutions that can be fixed by applying the latest philosophy of teaching.[13] Unsurprisingly, the document in which the Texas IAF describes its vision for public schools is subtitled "Communities of Learners."[14]

Two IAF job-training programs, Project QUEST (Quality Employment Through Skills Training) in San Antonio and VIDA (Valley Initiative for Development and Advancement) in the Rio Grande Valley, use relationship building to bring potential employers into the process. Before enrolling trainees, IAF leaders negotiate with employers to get their commitment to hire the individuals who successfully complete the program. The employer promises good jobs with good pay; QUEST and VIDA agree to deliver well-trained, productive workers. Thus the interests of both sides are served.

Similarly, the IAF maintains working relationships even with politicians who often disagree with its aims. The organization exerts public pressure on politicians, notably at "accountability sessions," highly ritualized performances in which each politician has a minute or two at most to tell a hallful of voters whether or not he or she supports the IAF agenda. The IAF plays hardball. But it also works to develop solutions, not just voice grievances. Through "research actions," members educate themselves in the political, legal, and budgetary details of their issues, in part to know where to exert pressure, but also to be able to offer officials practical plans. The accountability session is only one moment in an ongoing relationship. Public commitment by the politicians comes after long conversations with up to a dozen IAF leaders to hash out the issues. The relationship continues after the session, not only because the IAF keeps an eye on the politicians but because it works with them to turn verbal commitment into action. "No permanent allies, no permanent enemies" is a core principle. The organization neither endorses nor opposes candidates but works with whoever can help it achieve its goals. The IAF has built relationships not only *with* outside individuals and groups but *between* outside groups. In 1998, when the Texas Water Development Board withheld $100 million in funding because it judged that Hidalgo County was not complying with state subdivision rules, Valley Interfaith discovered that the officials and agencies involved had different understandings of the problem and were not communicating effectively with one another. Interfaith organized a meeting of all the parties during which each had a chance to

explain its view. That conversation led to a joint understanding that freed up the money.[15]

The Valley and the Colonias

In 1999, 39 percent of the residents of the lower Rio Grande Valley in Texas lived below the poverty line, compared with 17 percent in Texas overall and 14 percent nationwide. Per capita income in the area was less than half the national average.[16] Forty percent of working-age adults lacked health insurance (compared with 28 percent in all of Texas and 15 percent nationwide).[17] Sixty percent of Valley adults lacked a high school diploma (compared with 28 percent in Texas and 24 percent nationwide). For a long time, agriculture had been a main source of jobs. Citrus groves and fields of sweet onion and aloe vera still employ some in the valley, but service work now dominates the economy.

The colonias are the extreme embodiment of the Valley's deep economic and social problems. Colonias are unincorporated settlements of residential property that, until recently, were mostly sold by developers with no services—only a promise of running water, sewers, electricity, and paved roads that was seldom kept.

As resident Idaleica Valdez told us, "I thought I was done with this forty years ago when I grew up in a colonia with no water or sewers. But it is still there. Look at this. Look at these roads. No curbs, filled with holes. When it rains these are streams of mud. Weeds all over. They allow them to build and sell houses that have cracks in the walls and holes in the floors. We don't have police here. No library. About to lose some of the limited bus pickup for our kids. At Benavides Elementary School the teachers have to wash the kids' clothes sometimes because their parents can't afford to buy water to do laundry. These people are so poor. They don't think they can do anything."[18]

Until 1995, the colonias appeared on no official map and in effect had no official existence. Thus there was no chance of their being included in plans for infrastructure improvement. The families that

bought a plot of land in a colonia for $100 or $200 down and a small monthly payment often first lived on the land in a used trailer or small mobile home. When they had saved some money, they began building a house, one room or even one wall at a time. Driving through the colonias today, you see properties in all stages of development. Some still have only trailers, patched and rusting, or shacks made of tin roofing. In many cases, the old trailer sits behind a small cinder-block house—one or two rooms—and serves as a kitchen. Here and there you see more ambitious construction: a house of several rooms, a mobile home with an added carport or a small extension. IAF organizations across Texas worked together to craft, build support for, and pass (in 1995) a bill requiring that all new residential property be sold with water, sewage, and electrical service and a paved road. As of 2002, about 25 percent of colonias still lacked running water, a sewage system, drainage, and paved roads. More than two hundred thousand of the Valley's one million people live in colonias.

La Pradera colonia was built in 1998, after the new law came into effect, so its houses border a paved road and have electricity, running water, and septic tanks. Though it is one of the newest colonias, La Pradera looks old. The second- or third- or fourthhand trailers are battered; the unpainted walls of the houses look worn and dingy. The road that connects La Pradera to the rest of the Valley is unpaved. One rainy February day, a school bus slipped off the muddy surface into a ditch. The accident occurred before the driver had picked up students, but the residents could easily imagine the same thing happening with their children on the bus. Above all else, they wanted to see the road paved.

The Power of Stories

In one-on-one conversations and in house meetings, organizers and leaders elicit people's stories. Abstract ideas do not connect people, and social action, when it is not rooted in the heart of people's life experi-

ence, withers in the face of opposition and disappointment. At Palmer Elementary, real stories broke down the barriers between Mr. Ortiz and other members of his group. At a house meeting at the Nikki Rowe High School in McAllen, during an early stage of participation in Valley Interfaith in the spring of 2002, parents and students gathered in groups of half a dozen to express their concerns about the school and their hopes for it. One woman explained her commitment to her children's education: "I couldn't go to school. My dad died when I was young; I had to work for family survival." That simple statement had a more powerful effect than the long, generalized list of complaints another woman reeled off. To be effective, these conversations have to be face-to-face, so people can read each other's emotions, can express sympathy and work through disagreement together. (Later, Sister Judy Donovan, marveling at how earlier organizers had managed to stay in touch with members of the organization before the days of cell phones—she always has hers with her—goes on to say, "But the problem with a cell phone is that it makes you think you've had a conversation.")

Many of the women who have found their voices and vocation as Valley Interfaith leaders tell stories of watching their mothers silently tolerate their husbands' abuse. In contrast, Father Alfonso Guevara makes one of the sources of his dedication to action and education clear in a very different story about his father: "He was not an educated man himself, but he believed in education. When he went to the local Catholic school to enroll my sister, they told him there was no room, not even a desk for her to sit at. He said, 'If I build a desk, will you take her?' They agreed. He built a desk big enough for two students, and they admitted her and another girl."

Sister Judy Donovan has her own story to explain why she devotes her life to organizing. As a young nun, she lived in Brazil, engaged in the liberation theology movement, which used biblical stories of oppression and liberation to raise people's consciousness of the injustice of their situation and the need to take action. Late one night, a man from a nearby village where she and others had preached that message woke her up.

Emboldened by the activist clergy's teaching, the villagers had stood up to the landowner's agents and refused their demand for an even greater share of the income from their work. The agents had burned all the crops and put the villagers in jail. "And I was responsible," Sister Judy says. "That night I became an adult. We stirred people up without giving them the tools to do anything." It took six months for a coalition of churches, lawyers, and other groups to get the villagers out of jail, an effort that taught Sister Judy about the power of groups working together. She determined to become an organizer.

Whenever someone tells his or her story—in a colonia house meeting, at Palmer School, at Nikki Rowe—you feel the power of narrative. The listeners lean toward the speaker, their eyes on her face; their silence deepens, rich with attention and connection. Often, the stories are similar in ways that bind the tellers together and also different, individual, revealing the variety of human experience. Stories build relationships; they knit communities together. And IAF organizers work hard to help people interpret their stories in a wider context, inspiring action.

Developing New Leaders

The heart of the IAF's strength and the core of its work is developing new leaders. Ernie Cortés describes the job of organizers as "holding forty individual meetings each week and teaching leaders to hold these same kinds of meetings." He continues:

> Leaders and organizers are constantly seeking out new leaders that have some energy, the ability to reflect, a sense of humor, some anger and the ability to develop a following. It is only through these types of conversations that a community can develop a collective leadership that is able to claim their birthright through collective action.[19]

The Iron Rule of never doing anything for people that they can do themselves implies, ultimately, the kind of community of leaders that Cortés suggests here, an organization in which everyone's potential is

discovered and nurtured and leadership is genuinely collective. He and others in the IAF emphasize active citizen engagement, as opposed to the idea of citizens as clients or consumers who expect to have things done for them or to them.

The Iron Rule may be unambiguous, but the temptation to step in and "lead" potential leaders when they hesitate or falter is strong. Sister Judy tells the story of a new organizer who proudly reported on a meeting that had resulted in an important commitment from a politician, the agreement clinched by the organizer's own impassioned intervention. Rather than praise him, she dressed him down: "You taught them that they cannot speak for themselves. Now they'll turn to you instead of doing it themselves."

The Nikki Rowe meeting demonstrates how hard it can be for organizers and leaders to remain in the background and let the meeting evolve. Toward the end, when people came together to discuss the issues that the small groups had identified, some students repeatedly brought up the planned dismissal of some favorite teachers. Apparently they had come to the meeting expecting that it would be about that one topic. Organizer Andres Ibarria lost his cool and not only said that their concern was not the subject of the meeting but started berating one of the most forceful students: a mistake, a violation of the principle of respecting individuals and their concerns. He later apologized, but the incident shows how tempting it can be to step in. His passion for action had made him impatient.

A brief evaluation among leaders after the small La Pradera house meeting includes related criticism: instead of letting the residents tell their stories and gradually articulate their concerns, the leaders had lectured them about the power of working together while the residents of the colonia listened in silence. Again, the leaders' own passion had caused them to talk too much and try to move too quickly, as they forgot for the moment that their job was to encourage people to speak and act for themselves.

The Iron Rule and the intensive leadership-development efforts that

support it give the IAF organizations much of their strength and effectiveness. One consequence is that a remarkably small professional staff keeps Valley Interfaith going. That organization of forty-five churches and public schools representing sixty thousand families (with its ability to bring two thousand people to an accountability session and sign up seventy-five thousand voters) is supported by a paid staff of two organizers, a trainee, and a secretary. The organizers cite the biblical story of Moses and Jethro. When Moses is overwhelmed by the task of leading the Israelites in the desert, Jethro warns him that he will wear himself out and advises him to delegate authority to capable men who will share the burden and resolve disputes in groups of "thousands, hundreds, fifties, and tens."

The fact that Valley Interfaith's actions, like those of other IAF organizations, develop from the concerns of its member leaders, rather than a national agenda, gives the organization rootedness and resilience; people fight for what they care most deeply about, for their own causes. Perhaps most important, active participation—genuine engagement in leadership—makes community possible. When someone gives marching orders and others march, you are unlikely to find living relationships and real community. The trust relationships and norms of reciprocity that characterize social capital depend on a reasonable measure of equality and mutuality: "one-sided relationship" is an oxymoron.

A leader, says Ed Chambers, national IAF director, is someone capable of delivering a following.[20] Some of the best ones, Sister Judy Donovan thinks, do not seek leadership positions and may be skeptical about their abilities and about the whole enterprise. Many—especially but not exclusively women—have been quiet all their lives and are surprised at first to discover their hidden ability to speak out and lead. All the leaders show passion and courage, but it comes in different forms.

Though a powerfully effective force in Valley Interfaith for years, Father Alfonso Guevara seems at first glance an unlikely leader. He is short and soft-spoken, and obviously shy. He says that even learning to preach to his own congregation in his own church, Christ the King, was difficult.

His reliability and persistence are legendary, though. He says, "I don't move as fast as some people, but I outstay them, I wear them out." The actions he's been involved in include living-wage work, improvement in the colonias, helping eight hundred people obtain citizenship, and supporting a VIDA program to train six hundred men and women as welders and place them in well-paid jobs. Asked whether some people in the parish object to his and the church's involvement in all this political and social activism, he mildly answers, "People come to the church to be fed, but some people want to be fed baby food." Now, he believes, his most important work is "finding new leaders that find new leaders." One of his finds is Lupita Torres, a retired farmworker and longtime member of Christ the King.

Her power and presence are evident as soon as she speaks, but for a long time she was one of the skeptics. She says, "I expected everything in the U.S. to be perfect, but when I came to live here my barrio had no paved street, no streetlights. An abandoned area in the middle was filled with dead animals and old cars. It was dangerous, and unhealthy for the children." When she spoke to Father Alfonso about the problems, he urged her to meet individually with other concerned parishioners (applying the IAF model of one-on-one conversations). "But I didn't think I could do anything," she says, "and I didn't think the church should be involved in politics. My idea of politics was the politics of Mexico, where the politicians did whatever they wanted."

Ramon Duran, a Valley Interfaith organizer, was attending a neighborhood meeting on the subject of religious education when one of the other women said, "Lupita, are the chairs arranged right?" Alert for a potential new leader—someone that other people turned to—he said, "Who's Lupita?" and immediately asked to meet with her one-on-one. She refused, saying, "If this is about politics, I don't want to talk to you." But she started attending Valley Interfaith house meetings when she learned that people discussed scripture there. She was gradually drawn into Interfaith activities related to her neighborhood. She was part of a group that met with the mayor to discuss the problem of unpaved roads.

The mayor sympathized, but he informed them that there simply wasn't money in the budget to solve the problem. Discouraged, the group fell silent. Then Lupita spoke up: "You don't own the money, you administer it. We're here to make sure you administer it wisely."

Later, the group took the mayor and other officials on a tour, saying, "We're going to introduce you to your city." After the tour and further discussion, money for paving was found after all. The mayor's aide asked Lupita, "When do you want the road paved?"

"June first," she told him.

"What time?" he asked sarcastically, amused or annoyed by her definitive answer.

"Seven A.M.," she said simply.

On May 31, city workers knocked on her door and asked where she wanted them to start. She directed them to the other end of the street, so that people would know she had fought for all of them, not just herself.

Now the barrio has paved roads, street lighting, drainage, and fire hydrants. Lupita sees changes in the people of the neighborhood, too, as a result of their joint efforts: "We got to know each other. There used to be squabbles and jealousy, little groups that gossiped about each other. Now there's more friendship, and we know how to gather people to deal with problems."

Gathering people—and especially finding and developing the leaders who can gather people—is the foundation of IAF work. That was true in San Antonio in the 1970s, when many months of one-on-one conversation and house meetings created a commitment to work together for change among a group of people that was large enough to influence the officials who could allocate funds to neglected neighborhoods and, later, to what became the Alliance Schools. It was true in the late 1990s, when Ernie Cortés went to Los Angeles to invigorate an IAF organization that was not doing well. On his advice, the group ceased its public actions while a team of a dozen organizers led by Cortés did nothing but meet one-on-one with potential leaders in local communities for an entire

year—a total of ten thousand conversations whose aim was to build the relationships that would build more relationships that would finally give the organization the strong community roots it needed to act effectively.[21] In the Valley, too, Valley Interfaith had essentially called a halt to actions in June 2001, to devote itself to developing new leaders.

But no simple dichotomy exists between action and leadership development. Yes, being embroiled in a long, difficult action can divert energy and attention from finding new leaders. The history of the IAF includes instances of organizations that focused too much and too long on action and weakened themselves. But people learn to lead by leading, not just through conversation and training. Their leadership skills are tested and sharpened in practice, and success teaches them that they have the power to motivate people—and what that power can accomplish. Actions can and should be about building the confidence and know-how of inexperienced leaders and identifying new leaders, as well as about winning. Tension necessarily exists between the two aims, and the balance between them must be struck consciously.

At the accountability session on March 3, 2002, in the Valley, winning mattered a lot. Organizers worked hard to get candidates for key political offices to attend the meeting. Both candidates for governor of Texas would be there, as would candidates for the U.S. Congress, candidates for lieutenant governor and attorney general, candidates for the Texas House and Senate, and county candidates. Getting their public commitment to the Texas Industrial Area Foundation's agenda of a living wage, health care, and investment in infrastructure would be essential. That is the point of an accountability session—to demand an unambiguous public commitment from candidates. This is the moment when the social capital of networks and trust painstakingly built in months and years of one-on-ones and house parties is most clearly translated into raw political power.

This empowerment has an individual as well as an organizational dimension. Valley Interfaith organizers and leaders chose to give major roles in the session to relatively inexperienced leaders, using veterans

in minor roles or having them participate only as delegates. Such a session may not run as smoothly or powerfully as it might, but the only way someone can learn to speak to two thousand people (or forcefully tell a candidate for the U.S. Senate that his speaking time is up) is to do it.

The Accountability Session

The afternoon and evening before the March accountability session, Sister Judy Donovan's cell phone rings often. A congressman's aide calls to ask if the meeting is still on, claiming that the congressman has not received any materials about it, though Sister Judy knows the information has been sent more than once. She makes a call, arranging to have it faxed again. Leaders at member churches and schools call to check when buses will leave or to report a misunderstanding with the bus company or to raise last-minute issues about someone's part in the session. She clarifies times, offers reassurance, or tells callers whom to call with their problems. Sister Judy remains calm and even cheerful. "I learned a long time ago that anxiety is contagious," she says. Remarkably, there is little she actually has to do herself, given the logistical demands of readying the hall, transporting two thousand people spread over fifteen thousand square miles of southern Texas to the site of the session in Pharr, and keeping track of the politicians and media representatives who will attend. The grassroots leaders, rather than the organizers, are handling most of the work.

At 9:00 A.M. Sunday, Valley Interfaith members start setting up chairs for the 2:30 P.M. meeting: two thousand folding chairs, forty rows of fifty filling the Pharr International Civic Center—formerly a bingo hall—the second-largest meeting space in the Valley and the largest available.

More than two hours before the meeting, Interfaith leaders are on the stage, practicing a script developed over months of weekly meetings. Half an hour before the start of the meeting, the room begins to fill as busloads of people arrive from member institutions and sit together under signs naming their affiliations, like groups of delegates at political

conventions: Christ the King, Brownsville; Our Lady of Guadalupe, Raymondville; Nikki Rowe High School, St. Joseph the Worker, and Sam Houston Elementary School, all from McAllen; Holy Spirit; and the McAllen Taxi Drivers Association. There are small groups from other organizations in the IAF network: Dallas Area Interfaith, Austin Interfaith, the Border Organization, and the Metropolitan Organization. Ernie Cortés is there. Medium height and roundish, wearing a gray suit, he looks professorial and deceptively mild. He shakes hands with some of the leaders, hugs some he has known for a long time. He has no official role; he is present as a supporter, observer, and mentor. The organizer who supervises IAF projects in Texas and Lousiana, Sister Christine Stephens, sits next to him, also lending her support and evaluating the proceedings but not publicly involved, except as one of the two thousand members holding the politicians to account.

By the time the meeting begins, the hall is jammed; every seat is taken, people are standing at the back. Led by the trumpets and strummed guitars of a mariachi band in white suits, the Valley Interfaith Escort Team guides the politicians down the center aisle to their seats on the stage. This is not just a courtesy but a deliberate tactic to prevent politicians from "working the crowd" and to keep control of the session in the hands of the IAF. In emphatic Spanish and English, Rosalie Tristan and Father Alfonso Guevara of Valley Interfaith declaim the opening focus statement: "We are here to do our work as citizens. . . . One quarter of the colonias still have no water and sewer services." Without naming names, Tristan refers to a couple of candidates who turned down the invitation to attend the session because, she quotes them as saying, "Sunday is a family day." "We have a family-friendly agenda," she says. "Was Governor [Rick] Perry thinking of families when he vetoed the living-wage bill on a Sunday, on Father's Day? We want a living wage so fathers can be with their families and not have to go north to earn enough money."

Leaders present the Valley Interfaith agenda: living wages and job training; education; infrastructure and colonias; health care for all. One

by one, the candidates pledge their support. Carmen Anaya, a small, elderly woman but a powerful presence at the microphone, a legendary leader, says, "We're watching you." The words are backed up by Valley Interfaith's pledge to sign up seventy-five thousand voters committed to the agenda, their contribution to the five hundred thousand committed voters that the Texas IAF network has undertaken to mobilize statewide through its "Sign Up and Take Charge" initiative. Those numbers explain why so many candidates are here, many of them having flown in from other parts of the state to speak for their allotted minute or two. One IAF speaker says, "There are two sources of power, organized money and organized people. We don't have organized money, but we have the people."

The representatives of other IAF organizations in the Texas network, all sitting in the first few rows of the meeting hall, are a visible reminder of just how many organized people stand behind Valley Interfaith. The seventy-five thousand voters Interfaith believes it can sign up to support the agenda is an impressive and influential number, but half a million voters is a force that cannot possibly be brushed aside or fobbed off with half measures. Looking out at the crowd of two thousand filling the hall makes it possible to picture the gathering of ten thousand IAF members who are to meet in Austin in September. The combined power of the organizations in the network has made state and local actions successful. Cortés says, "Valley Interfaith couldn't do what you see it doing without the network. They couldn't have gotten action on the colonias." Most impressive, perhaps, has been the ability of Texas IAF organizations to function effectively as a network while maintaining strong local roots and continuing to develop issues and leaders locally. Asked about tension between local organizations and the network, Cortés says with his characteristic bluntness, "Sure, there's tension. There's always tension, but we recognize it and we deal with it."

After the session, organizers and grassroots leaders crowd into a small upstairs room for a brief meeting, part celebration, part evaluation. Sister Judy goes down the list of objectives. "Turnout? Fantastic. You de-

livered two thousand people. Public business? One hundred percent commitment by the largest gathering of powerful officials in the state in this election. If this were a hunting trip, Sister Maria would get the big-game trophy." When she gets to "tension and drama," Donovan has some criticism: at one point the meeting was running twenty-two minutes late, a real lapse in a session designed to derive some of its power from speed. (Cortés later comments, "I kept waiting for her to intervene. Sometimes you have to break the Iron Rule." Although he himself did not break it to give her that advice during the session, no doubt he had much to say to her in private later. Self-critical evaluation is an IAF key to leadership development.) Sister Judy softens her criticism by noting that half of that time was made up by the end. She concludes, "This is the fruit of the decision nine months ago to stop other action and dig in to develop new leaders." Sister Christine delivers the same message: "We judge an action not just by the candidates but by the number of new leaders." People are talking, for instance, about the forcefulness of Joanna Alvarado, a slight, dark-haired college student and a second-generation Valley Interfaith leader, and the way she looked the politicians in the eye when she asked, "Will you support the Valley Interfaith agenda?" Talking later about the session as leadership development, Sister Judy says, "It's great to have two thousand people here, but we want to know who are the two hundred people who brought those two thousand."

Valley Interfaith and its sister organizations in the Texas Industrial Areas Foundation provide the premier example of grassroots organizing for progressive causes in America. These efforts are not without challenges and difficulties. TIAF has worked hard at transcending cleavages of race and religion, for example, and has had more success than many other civic organizations in America, but it continues to struggle to build bridges among Hispanic Catholics, black Protestants, suburban Jews, and so on. Moreover, sociologist Marshall Ganz has argued, IAF selection of its leaders through "cooptation" by professional organizers, not through election from below, means that its procedures

cannot be said to be entirely democratic. On the other hand, the empowerment that Valley Interfaith has brought to its constituents is hard to match in other impoverished places in America. Valley Interfaith well illustrates that hardnosed political power can come from taking community building seriously.[22]

Conclusion

Making Social Capital Work

As we said at the outset of this voyage across America, virtually no one sets out to "build social capital." Protagonists in our stories set out to raise farm incomes in Mississippi or help poor kids in Philadelphia or build parks in Portland or save souls in Los Angeles. However, they saw that achieving their substantive objectives would be easier (or perhaps would only be possible) if they strengthened and then exploited social networks. Thus, building social capital was an essential part of their strategy. Indeed, what distinguishes our cases from other efforts to organize unions, run large companies, build churches, or improve reading skills is that the protagonists here understand and emphasize the centrality of relationships and interpersonal connections.

The benefits of social capital spill beyond the people immediately involved in the network and can be used for many other purposes. The more neighbors who know one another by name, the fewer crimes a neighborhood as a whole will suffer. A child born in a state whose residents volunteer, vote, and spend time with friends is less likely to be born underweight, less likely to drop out of school, and less likely to kill or be killed than the same child—no richer or poorer—born in another state whose residents do not. Society as a whole benefits enormously from the social ties forged by those who choose connective strategies in pursuit of their particular goals.[1] We know from many studies that social capital can have what economists call "positive externalities." That is,