



MAKE A CIRCLE

Advocacy & Organizing Toolkit



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About The Film



A love letter to early educators and **a rallying cry** for a child care system in crisis.

From an award-winning filmmaking team, MAKE A CIRCLE follows a group of child care providers who are determined to change how society values the education of its youngest citizens. With a mix of humor, outrage, and passion, MAKE A CIRCLE captures the unfolding stories of Patricia, a leader of the California child care workers union, as she fights on behalf of a largely immigrant workforce; Charlotte, another union member who tirelessly lifts up the low-income families in her care; and Anne, the director of a large preschool, who finds novel ways to value and support her teachers when jobs at McDonalds are offering higher pay.

Within their stories are interludes that offer a cinematic glimpse into the unique, imaginative world of the young children in their care. The film culminates as thousands of child care union members march on their state capitol demanding better working conditions just as their contract is set to expire. Weaving together the magic they create in the classroom, the struggles they endure at home, and their tireless activism for their profession, MAKE A CIRCLE is a moving portrait of life as an early childhood educator and a promising blueprint for fixing our broken child care system.



An Advocacy Pep Talk

Let's be honest: advocacy can feel intimidating! Here are some common fears when it comes to stepping into an advocacy role, with quotes from those who have taken on the challenge themselves.

Fear: **BUT** my voice doesn't matter!



"We were really struggling. I looked around and thought, 'Well, why not me? You're on the sidelines! Can you get in the game? What would happen if all of us got in the game?'"

- Charlotte Guinn, Family Child Care Provider featured in MAKE A CIRCLE

Fear: **BUT** I've never done it before!



"If you can lead a room full of toddlers, that means you already have amazing communication skills."

- Jen Bradwell, Co-Director of MAKE A CIRCLE

Fear: **BUT** how could I possibly talk to a legislator?!



"At first I was concerned about my English, my accent. But this is me, this is how I talk. And my fears are not going to stop me. My biggest fear is that injustice will continue."

- Patricia Moran, Family Child Care Provider featured in MAKE A CIRCLE

An Advocacy Pep Talk, Continued

Fear: BUT I'm just one person!



"Our profession is very isolated. If we don't help one another, how can our voice be heard? So we need to be connecting with one another, showing up and speaking out...each one needs to reach one."

– Benu Chhabra, Family Child Care Provider and Advocate

Fear: BUT I don't know where to start!



"Find a mentor, ask questions, challenge the system."

– Danielle Caldwell, Family Child Care Provider and Advocate

Fear: BUT I don't know where to start!



"Call your R&R as a place to start. Your mayor, your city council. Celebrations with past, present and future students every year where local officials get invited. Build those relationships."

– Benu Chhabra, Family Child Care Provider and Advocate

“Advocacy is the most effective approach to influencing legislators in making policies and changes that will significantly improve the lives of children and families in our communities. Advocacy not only compels lawmakers to fulfill their responsibilities as public officials, but it also encourages them to welcome well-informed advice from individuals like us.”



– **Aghogho Chinwike**,
Family Child Care Provider
in Pittsburg, CA

“We the educators have ALWAYS been the ones we've been waiting for in this profession! And these days the folks making big decisions know they can't continue any longer without your story - the one you know how to tell better than anyone else - the one that will help early childcare become sustainable for all of us. Our stories will change the world - just as they do in our cosy group times. We're just creating a larger, more inclusive and impactful story time!”



– **Kathy Pomer**,
ECE Consultant and Advocate

Start Here: How To Use This Guide



In MAKE A CIRCLE, everyday people with a stake in the early childhood education issue are activated to become changemakers.

While inspiring to witness, even the strongest advocates can suffer from imposter syndrome, and have to fight against the feeling that they are not right for the task at hand or that change is out of reach. **Entering the advocacy space can be intimidating, but the good news is that the only qualification to be an advocate is a desire to see change.**

This organizing toolkit and companion to the film MAKE A CIRCLE offers individuals and organizations tangible methods of engaging in advocacy work. These methods can be used on their own as a targeted form of advocacy, or combined as part of a larger campaign. In every community there are already people advocating around child care issues. Search locally for other groups to join and learn from. As we see in MAKE A CIRCLE, there is strength in numbers, and every unique voice matters.

While some of the stories in MAKE A CIRCLE involve the formation and wins of the Child Care Providers United union in California, other educators in the film work in a private pay preschool where being a part of a union is not an option. More than half of the US lives in a “right to work” state where unions face challenges in effectively organizing. **There are many ways to get involved in advocacy outside of a union.** In fact, many unionized child care workers also advocate outside of their union.

YOU CAN...

- Connect with parents and early educators in your immediate network
- Meet with your local elected officials and journalists
- Start or join a local professional organization like the [Bay Area Professional Family Child Care Network](#)
- Join a regional Resource & Referral network like [Child Care Aware of West Arkansas](#)
- Join a state-based organization like the [Florida Association for the Education of Young Children](#)
- Join a national organization like [NAEYC](#), [NAFCC](#), [Child Care Changemakers](#), or [Child Care Aware of America](#)

No matter where you live or what your background is, there are other people nearby who care about this issue. Advocacy is about collaborating, connecting and communicating.

Before you dive into the various tools and tactics shared in this guide, it is important to understand your needs and goals. Are you looking to speak to officials about a particular piece of legislation, or a budgetary issue that considers early childhood education? Is there a specific crisis in your community that could benefit from an email or social media campaign aimed at raising awareness? Is there a budget process in your community where it would make a difference to be visible in large numbers?

Begin with a brainstorming process.

Answer the following questions by discussing them aloud with a trusted partner or writing in response to them. There is no need to be perfect or to have all of the answers. This process will provide an anchor in your own thinking, strengths, and opportunities, while determining which approaches you will activate.

1. **What are the issues** affecting my work and community?
2. **What change** do I hope to make?
3. **What are the opportunities** for intervention?
4. **What do I have to say** on the topic?
5. **What strengths** do I bring to my work?
6. **What real life examples** do I have to illustrate my position?





How To Time Your Advocacy

Advocacy efforts can be most impactful when timed around a significant event.

For example, The National **Day Without Child Care**, a day of action that invites a communal exercise in raising awareness about the societal undervaluing of early childhood educators. Annually, in mid-May, early educators partner with the families they serve to shut down for a day, close early, or call out sick. Without access to child care, what would the ripple effects on parents, the community, the economy, the world at large be?

A rallying call across the nation, The National Day Without Child Care demands:

1. An equitable child care system built on racial and gender justice
2. Thriving wages for child care providers
3. Affordable and accessible child care for all families.

Though taking action can happen on any day, and center around local elections and other important events, this day offers a starting point to plan towards an engaged action in tandem with others across the United States.

Here are some other days of advocacy you might consider:

- Week of the Young Child (early April)
- Teacher Appreciation Week (early May)
- May Day / International Workers Day (May 1st)
- Strolling Thunder, Washington D.C. (April/May)

Other events that can be a great organizer of people who care about this issue and making collective action as big as possible:

- A budget process
- A bill being considered
- A primary or an election



Getting Prepared: Talking Points, Facts and Stats

There are many people already joining forces to advocate for change in how early childhood education is valued and supported. The following organizations offer valuable resources for understanding your local landscape and incorporating research, facts, and talking points into your advocacy engagements.

- ✓ **Zero to Three** offers a helpful toolkit that includes:
 - Infant-Toddler Child Care [Fact Sheet](#)
 - Infant-Toddler Child Care [Talking Points](#)
 - Infant-Toddler Child Care [Toolkit Graphics](#)
 - Infant-Toddler Child Care [Sample Op-Ed](#)

- ✓ **National Association for Family Child Care** offers a toolkit for family child care (home-based) providers that includes:
 - One-Pager on the Issue in [English](#) and [Spanish](#)
 - One-Pager Templates for Individual Programs in [English](#) and [Spanish](#)
 - CACFP Fact Sheets in [English](#) and [Spanish](#)
 - CACFP [Federal Advocacy Toolkit](#)
 - NAFCC Social Media Toolkit in [English](#) and [Spanish](#)
 - [A Guide to Hosting a Site Visit](#)

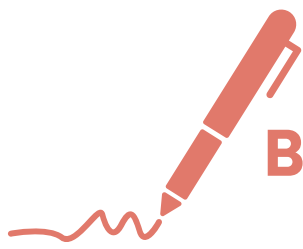
- ✓ **Community Change's Report Card** is a great resource for parents and early educators to see how their congressman and senators stand on child care bills. It then provides an easy take action tool. Community Change produces the aforementioned **annual "Day Without Child Care" action** to demand more support for early educators and families. Check out their [Action Center](#) as well.

- ✓ **The Alliance for Early Success** works on state policies and offers an interactive map that links to helpful information and advocacy organizations within each state in the U.S..

- ✓ **Moms First** is an organization that is transforming our workplaces, our communities, and our culture to enable moms to thrive.

- ✓ **Parent Voices**, through grassroots organizing and leadership development, activates and centers the wisdom of parents to transform child care and ensure all systems that impact our families are just, fair, and inclusive (California-focused).

- ✓ **MomsRising** takes on the most critical issues facing women, mothers, and families by educating the public and mobilizing massive grassroots actions.



Building Your Advocacy Narrative



Sharing personal stories that illustrate a social issue is a powerful method of engagement.

After watching MAKE A CIRCLE, consider how the stories on screen made you feel. What, and who, moved you emotionally? What emotions arose in response to their sharing? What aspect of the stories were you responding to? Were you inspired to want to take action?

The way you felt as a viewer watching the storytelling of the MAKE A CIRCLE documentary mirrors how sharing your own stories can feel to legislators and other decision makers, moving them to action. Everyone holds the power to influence public opinion and policy through the power of personal narrative.

Here is a brief guide to getting in the game by using stories from your own life. Some of this text was adapted from The New Organizing Institute in their [Creating Shared Story: Story of Self](#) guide, which was originally adapted from the works of Marshall Ganz of Harvard University.

1. Why Use Your Narrative To Advocate?

Everyone can be a powerful storyteller that inspires others to action with the right tools. A combination of head (logic, facts) and emotion (heart) propels an audience to take tangible steps towards change making. When sharing on behalf of a cause you believe in, your personal experience and storytelling capability help others to grasp the “why” of your message through an emotional connection.



2. Action Is Inspired By Emotion

Emotions are signals that point us in the direction of our beliefs and create the energy behind our action, or lack of action. Stories rooted in lived experiences have the power to move people past their stuckness and into possibility. Emotion taps into our most human core, beyond the abstraction of facts, and helps us connect to the issue at hand.



3. The Story of Self, Us and Now

Everyone has a compelling story inside of them that has the capacity to express their values and move an audience emotionally. The key to making an effective public narrative that propels advocacy, as framed by the The New Organizing Institute, is to combine your story of self with a story of **us** and a story of **now**.

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN?

A story of SELF invites others to be in relationship with you. Stories of self include characters in our lives that we love (or dislike), situations where we have been faced with a difficult choice, and moments that have shaped our life path through pain, joy, challenges and triumphs. An effective story of self will tap into a key moment on your journey that propelled you to speak up on behalf of your values.

A story of US invites others in your community to join. Stories of us share a specific moment in time with a group of people in a community that illustrates a shared value. In MAKE A CIRCLE, watching Dan's departure from the childcare center is a moving scene because it shows us a community's shared experience of losing a powerful educator due to financial compensation.

A story of NOW invites others to take action. This is where the stakes are amplified. The story of now utilizes a feeling of urgency to bring attention to the importance of acting on the issue at hand.



4. Crafting A Story

Strong advocacy stories share important moments from your life that illustrate why a change is needed. Good stories to use are short and easy to understand, with a clear beginning, middle and end. The New Organizing Institute offers three questions to consider that help shape the story you choose to anchor your advocacy narratives:



- What will I be calling on others to do?
- What values move me to take action and might also inspire others to similar action?
- What stories can I tell from my own life about specific people or events that would show (rather than tell) how I learned or acted on those values?

5. Form and Narrative Structure

Once you've identified the story that will anchor your narrative, The New Organizing Institute offers a three part framework to think about:

Challenge: What was the challenge you were facing, and why did it feel like a challenge to you? Challenges can be both positive and negative, an outside experience you've had to overcome, or a goal you've set to achieve.

Choice: In the face of this challenge, what choice did you make, and why? What helped you feel brave in making a difficult choice (or the opposite!)? What factors informed this decision?

Outcome: What happened as a result of the choice? How did it feel? Why did it feel that way? What did it teach you? What do you want to teach us? How do you want us to feel?

6. A Few Performance Tips

It is likely that you already know how to tell a good story to a friend or family member. If you are a child care educator, you have practiced speaking with groups already—small children! Delivering a strong advocacy narrative is as simple as sharing in your own authentic voice. Practice sharing the story as if talking to a friend. Your personal characteristics, quirks, vocal style and diction are your selling points— they are what make your speech feel like you.



How to Plan a Legislative Visit



Local elected officials play a role in child care policy and funding decisions. Depending on your advocacy goals, consider meeting with your local elected officials: your city councilmember, mayor, county supervisors, state assemblymember, state senator, or Governor's office.

The legislative branch of government is made up of the House and Senate, known collectively as the Congress. Among other powers, the legislative branch makes all laws, declares war, regulates interstate and foreign commerce and controls taxing and spending policies.

Meeting with a legislator can be an impactful way to express how a law or regulation impacts you and your family as an individual, or as a community if you are an organization.

Speaking in person puts a human face and voice to a cause and brings your representative in direct touch with the community they represent. Here are some tips for setting up a successful legislative visit, [adapted from the Institute for Disability Research, Policy and Practice.](#)

1. How To Set Up A Meeting

The first step is to understand who you need to contact. You can find your elected officials by searching via [USA.gov](https://www.usa.gov). The search will bring up a number of names for the state legislators in your district. Legislators are often at their Capitol office while in session, where you can visit them, or you can locate the legislator's office closest to you.

When you call to make an appointment, it is recommended to share that you are a voter in the legislator's district, explain why you want to visit, what you'd like to discuss with your legislator, and ask to schedule an appointment to meet. There is a possibility that you might be offered to meet instead with a staff member if the legislator is unavailable, which can be a powerful opportunity as well, as they directly help to shape policy.

If you are invited to meet with the Senator or a Representative, it may require a written request, which will be shared with you on the phone conversation. To follow up, you will need to send a letter, including who will be a part of the visit (names and affiliations) and, in brief, your reason for wanting to meet with the legislator. Including a personal story can go a long way to open the door.

It is appropriate to address your legislator as "The Honorable (Name)" in addressing the envelope and the letter. In the salutation, write: "Dear Senator," "Dear Congressman," "Dear Congresswoman," or "Dear Representative."

2. How To Prepare

Before meeting with the legislator, research them to have an understanding of who you are talking to and how you might approach them. Read their biography and note their political affiliation, committee and subcommittee membership, and past experience with the topic you will be discussing.

You can ask to visit the legislator simply to meet and educate them on your work in early childhood education and the issues of the field, or you can enter the meeting with a more defined goal and message. If you are visiting with a group, be sure to prepare by determining who will take on what talking point in advance of the meeting.

A message to a legislator should include:

- A definition of the issue at hand
- Why it is important—to you, and to others, with specific examples
- An explanation of how policymakers can help advance a solution



3. During The Visit

When visiting the legislative office, be punctual and polite to the staff. Use your time wisely, stay on message, and present your printed materials as supports to your talking points. It is helpful to come with solutions and a defined ask for how your legislator can be of help in the issue at hand. Legislators have been elected to support the people of their district, and you can help them connect with their community. You are the expert of the conversation, bringing information about a policy's impact on everyday people that the representative may not have any direct experience in. You may need to explain various aspects of the issue, such as relevant organizations, acronyms, funding sources, and key players in the community. Offer next steps for follow up and a way to contact you for more information if needed. If the legislator asks questions that you cannot answer at the moment, be honest and offer to follow up after you have engaged in more research.

4. Follow Up After The Visit

Immediately after your visit, be sure to follow up with the legislator to offer gratitude and recap the meeting with brief, clear notes, including any requested follow up from the meeting. You may choose to cultivate the relationship further as part of an ongoing advocacy effort. This might look like staying in touch by sending follow up articles and reports on the topic, engaging your community in a letter writing campaign (see "How to Write to Elected Officials" in this toolkit), or scheduling follow up visits.



How To Write To Your Elected Officials

Writing to your elected officials follows many of the steps for how to plan a legislative visit in the previous section. Here are some further tips, [sourced from the ACLU](#). To support you in writing your letter, you will find an adaptable template on the following page.

- **KEEP IT BRIEF AND TO THE POINT.**

It is suggested to keep your letter under one page, and limited to one issue at a time. Many letters make it into an official's inbox.

- **BE PRECISE AND UPFRONT.**

State who you are (a constituent), and immediately state the issue about what you are writing. If you are writing about a specific piece of legislation, identify it by its bill number.

- **CHOOSE THREE POINTS.**

Choose three of your strongest points that you feel will be most successful in persuading officials to support your position, and explain your why with care.

- **PERSONALIZE YOUR RELATIONSHIP.**

If you have voted for the official, donated money to their campaign or cause, or have any personal connections to the official, share them.

- **OWN YOUR EXPERTISE.**

The elected official represents you, which means your views are important. Your lived experience may be vastly different from your official's, and they may not know much about the topic you are writing about at all. Write with courtesy, but also confidence.

Write To Your Elected Officials Template

(Month) (Day) (Year)

The Honorable (First name)(Last name)

Address

City, State, Zip Code

RE: (Subject line expressing overview of engagement)

Dear (Representative/Senator/Congressman or Congresswoman) (Last name):

My name is (your first and last name) and I am a (family member /service provider/advocate/community member) who resides in your district. (Describe here what you are concerned about or interested in promoting).

I strongly oppose/support... (State why you support or oppose the bill or other issue here. Choose up to three of the strongest points that support your position and state them clearly.)

(Include a personal story. Tell your representative why the issue is important to you and how it affects you, your family members and your community.)

I appreciate your help and ask that you please send me a response letting me know if you are able to (write the solution you hope to see here).

Sincerely,

SIGN YOUR NAME

Print your name

Street address

City, State, Zip code

How to Build Partnerships and Coalitions



Building partnerships and coalitions of people and organizations that believe in a shared advocacy goal is one of the strongest methods of pushing an agenda forward.

Once you connect with others that want to support your cause, here are some tried and tested strategies, adapted from [Effecting Change](#) and [Community Toolbox](#), for making change through interdependent coalition building.

1. Define Principles and Representation

When building a coalition, you will want to establish the basic principles your group will support. In order to do this, ask the following questions:

- **What are the problems or goals** that bring you together in common purpose?
- **Who is represented in your group?**
- **Who in the group is most affected** by the issue at hand?
- **How is the group poised to make a difference?**
- **Why is the partnership needed?** What can individuals not do on their own?

Review your answers, and draw a few principles that will define and guide your work together. It is best to keep these principles to 1-3 points, giving an easily digestible mission to your work together.

2. Assembling Members



WHO WILL BE A PART OF THE COALITION MOVING FORWARD?

Will you invite individuals, organizations, or both? Make a list of people and orgs that would be a benefit to your coalition. Use your own contacts and search the Internet to find your shared community.



CONSIDER IDENTIFYING CONTRIBUTORS WHO ARE EMERGING LEADERS WITH BOOTS ON THE GROUND.

Sometimes higher level, “big name” asks are far too busy to be involved in the day to day work of coalition building. Strategically identify who could bring awareness to your cause on a more informal level by sharing social media posts or engaging low level asks and who might have time and energy to do deeper, or everyday tasks.



CRAFT A CLEAR EMAIL THAT INVITES YOUR POTENTIAL MEMBERS INTO THE COALITION WITH A CLEAR ASK.

Are you having an informational meeting to share the proposed work of the coalition? Is there already a specific commitment of time or resources that you’d like to ask for, a regular meeting schedule, or other ideas that you have in mind for the coalition’s shape and work?

3. Collectively Shape Your Vision

When you have your core coalition members assembled, use a collective process to shape a vision and mission statement, bringing your original principles to the conversation. A vision/mission statement should be clear and easy to understand and communicate, inspiring and driven by hope, and a reflection of the perspective of the community it represents. Who will benefit from the work of the coalition? What will your coalition do, and why?

Take time to put into writing the anticipated results of your coalition’s actions. What occurs in your community that needs attention or fixing? What will be different in your community when your goals have been reached? How will you know that your goals have been reached? Who is affected by the issue at hand, and to what degree? What will be the impact of achieving your goals?



4. Determine Resource Needs

In order to achieve your goals, what financial or personal resources will be needed? What resources are already available through coalition members? Are there leaders in the community who hold influence that can be helpful in gathering resources? Who else is working on this issue locally or nationally that might have insight, space, financial opportunity, or other resources to offer? These questions may lead you to invite new members to the coalition who can bring resources to the table where there are gaps.



5. Setting Roles and Meeting Structures

Coalitions and partnerships can take multiple formats. How will you work with your partners to most effectively meet your goals?



Regardless of structure, all coalitions benefit from:

- A governing structure for decision making
- Organizational rules that all parties agree to abide by
- A planned distribution of work

Based on the size, scope and purpose of your coalition, choose a structure which best serves your goals, needs and principles. To take a deeper dive into potential structures, and how to determine yours, visit [Community Toolbox's guide](#).



How to Start An Email Campaign

Making change involves reaching people with your message, and inviting them to join the cause.

Email campaigns are fantastic tools to inform, educate and call people into action. Because many people are at the mercy of overflowing inboxes, email campaigns need to be thoughtful and considered in order to make an impact. Here are some best practices for starting an email campaign, culled in part from [VoterVoice](#) and [The Campaign Workshop](#):

1. Define Your Goals

What goals are you hoping to achieve with the support of your community? For example, if you would like to mobilize people to vote on a particular policy, you might use your campaign to introduce the policy and include information on how to vote. If you would benefit from donations in order to take a trip to the Capitol with a group of advocates, you might include a fundraising ask, with a method for readers to contribute financially. Build your list through contacts you already have. Who are your supporters? Add your most obvious relationships, organizational contacts, and friends of the cause to the list.

2. Choose A Subject Line

To stand out in a sea of communications and entice recipients to open the email with curiosity, you will want your email to have a clear, easy to understand subject line. Here are a few tips on crafting an effective subject, picking and choosing from this list:

- **Keep your subject under 40 characters**
- **Add a metric or numbers to the subject – people often respond to the quantification of value**
- **Be direct in your ask – what do you need from those reading?**
- **Include a consequence – what will happen if the stated goal is not met?**
- **Create urgency with a timeline**

Some strong word choices to include in advocacy email subject lines are:

1. Act Now
2. Add your name
3. Add your voice
4. PETITION
5. Please sign
6. SEND THIS MESSAGE
7. Sign now
8. Sign please
9. Sign the petition
10. Sign this
11. Signature needed
12. Take Action

For more examples, visit [ACTION! 61 Words & Phrases for Email Advocacy Campaigns from Nonprofit Marketing Guide](#).



3. Shape A Clear Call to Action

Be clear and upfront about your ask. Do you want recipients to sign a petition? Write a letter? Gather for an event? Make a donation? Do not be shy about your request, state it up front, substantiate it with some evidence as needed—personal stories, facts, the context of the ask—and then repeat the ask at the close of the email.

4. Make It Easy

Ensure that whatever you are asking of your readers is made easy to find and engage. For example, include donation links at the top, middle and bottom of the email. Test your links to make sure they work on both web platforms and mobile devices. If there is a save the date, include a calendar invite link. Make the email easily shareable on social media, or to forward to friends and family. If you are asking readers to directly contact their legislators, consider researching and utilizing a system that allows people to connect directly.

5. Consider Your Design

What colors are you using for your email campaign? What supporting images? Is some of the text bolded and bigger than others? For tips on strong design for email campaigns, [Mailchimp has a fantastic guide.](#)



“If you're thinking about being a leader, you're already a leader. Just do it. You're really standing in the gap for many others.”

– Danielle Caldwell,
Family Child Care Provider and Advocate

