

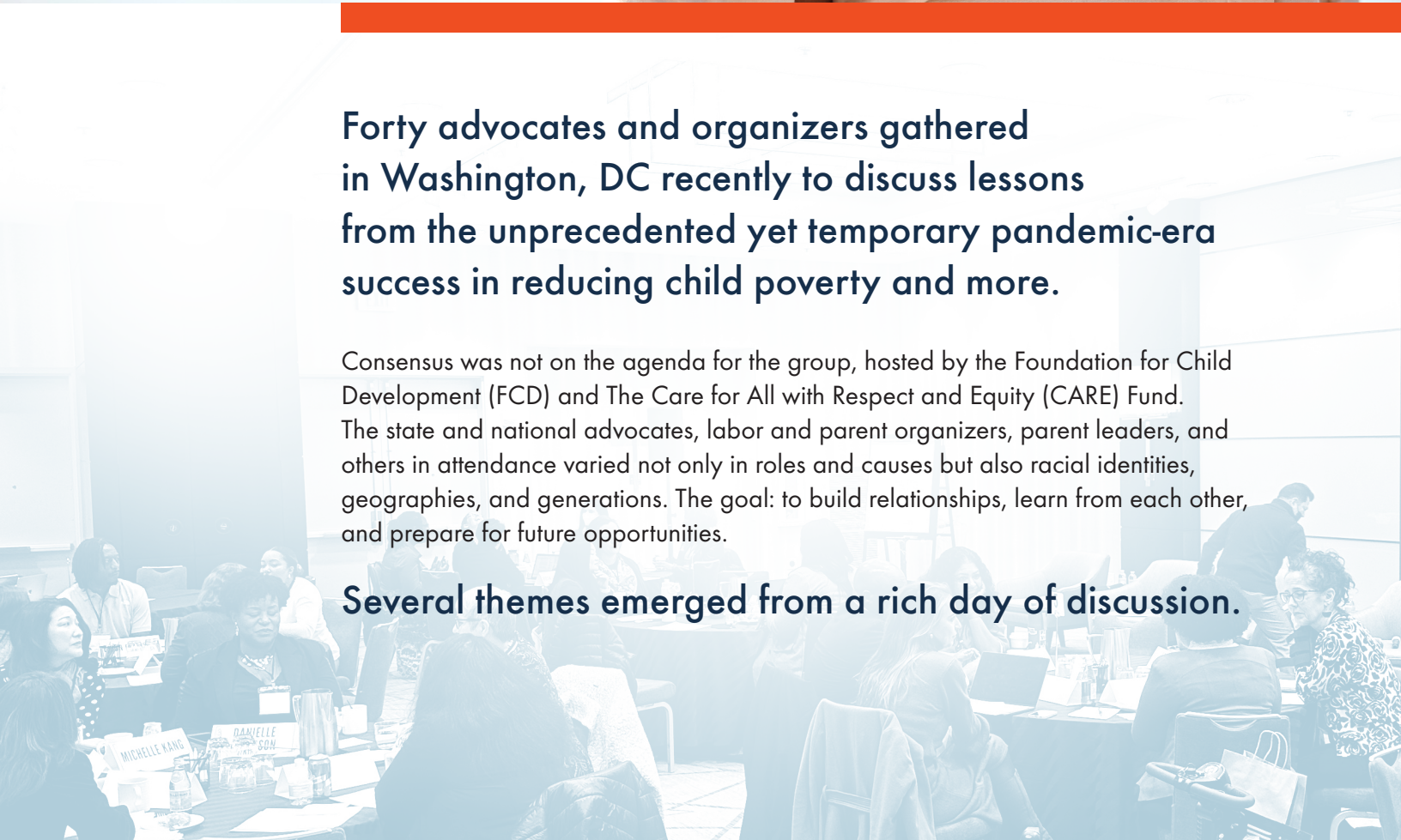
# **5 WAYS TO SUCCESSFULLY ADVOCATE AND ORGANIZE FOR CHILDREN, THEIR FAMILIES, AND CAREGIVERS**



Forty advocates and organizers gathered in Washington, DC recently to discuss lessons from the unprecedented yet temporary pandemic-era success in reducing child poverty and more.

Consensus was not on the agenda for the group, hosted by the Foundation for Child Development (FCD) and The Care for All with Respect and Equity (CARE) Fund. The state and national advocates, labor and parent organizers, parent leaders, and others in attendance varied not only in roles and causes but also racial identities, geographies, and generations. The goal: to build relationships, learn from each other, and prepare for future opportunities.

Several themes emerged from a rich day of discussion.



# 1

## EVERYONE'S EXPERTISE MATTERS

Parent leaders opened the convening by reflecting on their advocacy successes. They attributed success to a combination of their own knowledge about their communities and the expertise and networks offered by their partner organizations. For example, parent leader and organizer BriTanya Brown knew from her conversations with parents and child care providers how angry and disappointed they were after Congress failed to build on the temporary pandemic investment and enact a permanent fix for child care. Brown brainstormed responses with partner organization [Community Change](#), pitching her idea to go bold and close child care centers for “A Day Without Child Care.” It gave parents and providers across the country a way to take action and move forward with renewed motivation.

The theme that everyone's expertise matters resonated throughout the convening. A national organizer described a summit on child care held years ago in Michigan. For most of the day, the possible wins discussed were pretty small: the legislature wasn't very open to change. But late in the day, a policy expert said, “By the way, Michigan is one of the worst states in the country for drawing down our federal match.” The legislature was not budgeting the necessary state money. The organizers said, “What?” They saw a chance for direct action: bringing children to the Speaker's office to create a momentary child care center and telling the TV news cameras, “Our legislators aren't doing their job.” Within two months, they had won \$30 million in additional child care assistance—because policy experts who knew the data connected with organizers who knew how to make things happen.

“We don't all have to do everything,” concluded Meredith Loomis Quinlan, now economic justice campaign manager at Community Change. “We can support each other to be the best we can be.”

# 2

## BUILD POWER—AND BE READY WHEN THE MOMENT COMES

When federal pandemic funding flowed, child care organizers in California were ready. They knew the big win to go after—because they'd already asked parents what they wanted most. Parent Voices California had set its agenda by asking, “If you had a magic wand, how would you change child care to make it work better for your family?” No more family fees was the radical answer. A win seemed unlikely right then, but in a campaign spanning several years, organizers built a groundswell of parent power.

So when the opportunity came, they were able to successfully push the state to eliminate the fee (the co-payments required from families who receive public child-care assistance). And when federal funding disappeared, they persuaded the state to [make the change permanent](#).

Two themes from this story resonated throughout the conversation: the need to seize unpredictable policy moments, and the need to build parent power over time—one way to make your own moments.

## 3

### SHARE SUCCESSES, INCLUDING WHY “LOSING WELL” CAN BE A VICTORY

Great work is happening that’s not widely known. Even within the room, for example, the big California win on family fees wasn’t universally known, nor were other major organizing efforts around the country.

Participants also noted that few in the broader public fully grasp the large-scale national policy successes of the response to COVID, such as the [historic reductions in poverty](#) among all children, including Black children and children in immigrant families. The [multifaceted federal legislation](#) addressed food insecurity, housing stability, health, child care, and family income. Poverty rates plummeted and the economy recovered, said Sharon Parrott, president of the *Center on Budget and Policy Priorities*, “not because of any one policy but all of them together.” Another success, noted by Fatima Goss Graves, president of the National Women’s Law Center: both policymakers and the public acknowledged caregiving as a cornerstone of the economy.

Ours can be frustrating work. Telling the story of the organizing, coalition-building, narrative-shifting, and policy advocacy that led to success—big or small—is crucial to staying the course. So is recognizing that opportunities can come after failure and loss.

Relationship-building is winning. Building our base is winning. And “losing well” can set up victory in the future—as when the [Protecting Immigrant Families](#) (PIF) coalition generated a quarter-million public comments in overwhelming opposition to a [deeply harmful proposal](#). The Trump administration implemented its proposal, but the comments enabled a litigation and persuasion strategy that later helped [reverse the action](#). As PIF coalition leader Indivar Dutta-Gupta put it, “We lost in the best way we possibly could.”

## 4

### TRULY HEARING EACH OTHER IS JOYOUS—AND REQUIRES TIME, INTENTIONALITY, AND SUPPORT

Participants called the day cup-filling, a pleasure, supportive, thoughtful, and a model event for how to engage deeply with others working across the care movement.

Many in the room had contributed suggestions that made it possible to create that atmosphere. Moderator and longtime advocate Olivia Golden pointed to funding support from the co-hosts that allowed her to speak in advance with participants and fine-tune the agenda in response. Additionally, providing for practical needs, like child care, enabled parent leaders to attend.



# 5

## COALITION-BUILDING IS AT THE CENTER OF OUR WORK

Central to the day were participants' insights about creating and sustaining successful coalitions. Dawn Huckelbridge, founding director of Paid Leave for All, emphasized a commitment to shared principles and daily conversations. Maria Town, president of the American Association of People with Disabilities, shared her optimism about potential connections between the disability community and the parent-organizing community, noting that health issues were central to the stories of several parent leaders. Erica Gallegos, co-director of Child Care for Every Family Network, described the role of persistence over time—[more than a dozen years](#)—and of addressing diverse perspectives in enabling the broad-based New Mexico coalition to achieve [unprecedented investment in child care](#).

In the end, the themes of the day came together in the closing comments: strengthening relationships among the extraordinary colleagues who do this work energizes us for the work ahead.

“ Strengthening relationships among the extraordinary colleagues who do this work **energizes us for the work ahead.** ”

