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Fact Sheet on Public Allies' History with Senator Barack and Michelle Obama

Public Allies has received many media inquiries about our history with President-elect and Michelle Obama, and has been featured in many news stories about them. Following are some details and anecdotes about the Obamas' history with Public Allies.

- President-elect Obama was a member of the founding advisory board of Public Allies. Michelle was the founding Executive Director of Public Allies Chicago from Spring, 1993 until Fall, 1996, and served on our national board of directors from 1997 until 2001. President-elect Obama was no longer on the board of Public Allies when Michelle was hired. Before joining Public Allies, she was an attorney at the law firm of Sidley & Austin and Deputy Director of Community Development for the City of Chicago.

- Under Michelle's leadership, Public Allies Chicago pioneered many elements of Public Allies' program model. To identify and develop the next generation of Chicago leaders, she recruited young people from housing projects and youth centers as well colleges and universities. Her emphasis on indigenous leadership and belief that all people have potential to lead became a core value of our leadership philosophy. When she left, Public Allies Chicago had a cash reserve, a committed board, a talented young staff, and a network of diverse, talented young leaders in Chicago who continue to serve the community today. Michelle was also a pioneer in the social entrepreneur movement – leaders who create new approaches and organizations to provide new solutions to social problems.

- At her subsequent jobs at the University of Chicago and University of Chicago Medical Center, Michelle hired more than a dozen Public Allies to work with her. In addition, she has continued to advise, coach, donate to, and champion Public Allies. President-elect Obama has also been an active volunteer and supporter. President-elect Obama has trained several classes of Allies in community organizing, spoken at Public Allies Chicago events, and helped Senator Durbin secure an appropriation from the Department of Justice that successfully helped us better recruit and retain young men of color for our Chicago program and learn practices we are applying nationally.

- Michelle Obama and Public Allies CEO Paul Schmitz were also original faculty members of the Asset-Based Community Development Institute at Northwestern University, led by John McKnight and Jody Kretzmann. John McKnight worked with Barack Obama as an organizer and wrote his Harvard Law School recommendation (see Audacity of Hope, page 360). The Institute has a strategic alliance with Public Allies' consulting group, The Leadership Practice, through which we provide training and consulting services on how to better identify and mobilize local community assets and participation to strengthen communities.

- Quote from Paul Schmitz, CEO of Public Allies, who worked with Michelle:

"Michelle was an amazing leader and role model for all of us. As a very young staff in the early years, we all emulated Michelle's incredible combination of professionalism, compassion, critical thinking and commitment to her community. For all of her immense talents, she was also one of the most down-to-earth, inclusive, and authentic leaders I've ever worked with. She really did believe that everyone could contribute to their communities and that leaders come from all backgrounds and all parts of the community. The Chicago program she pioneered really created the template we all work from today. We are proud of our colleague and wish her well."

Public Allies is a non-partisan organization and does not endorse candidates for elected office. Public Allies has enjoyed support from leaders of both political parties. In 1992, President George H.W. Bush identified Public Allies as a model for national service and funded our pilot program. Under President Clinton, we grew from a pilot to a national program, and under President George W. Bush, we more than doubled in size and were contracted to provide training and technical assistance to other grantees of the Corporation for National and Community Service.

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