



THE KEYSTONE

A BIENNIAL NEWSLETTER
PUT PEOPLE FIRST! PENNSYLVANIA

SPRING/SUMMER 2023

MEDICAID

On April 1st Pennsylvania began Medicaid cut-offs for 1.2 million people. Every Monday, Medicaid recipients or those unfairly excluded from Medicaid are responding by posting on social media to share their story about why Medicaid is important to them, to oppose cuts, and to call for Medicaid to be expanded to all PA residents. Learn more about #MedicaidMondays and Put People First! PA's Medicaid Cut-Offs Organizing Drive inside on page three.

MONDAYS

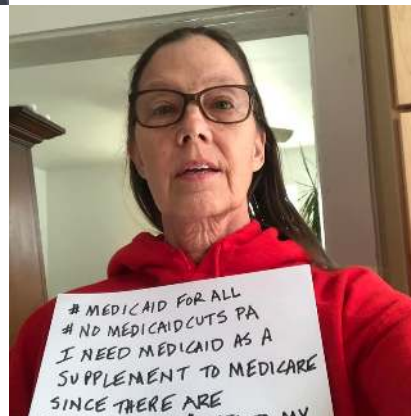
2023



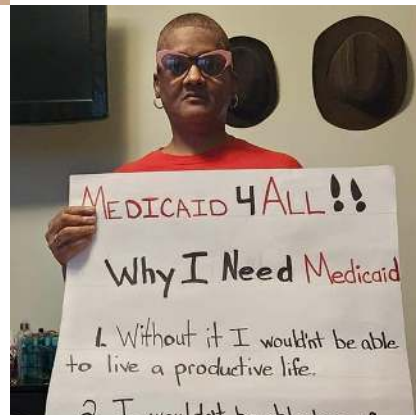
"Medicaid matters to me because without it I wouldn't be able to afford my prescription medications nor see my specialist doctors for my chronic pain."



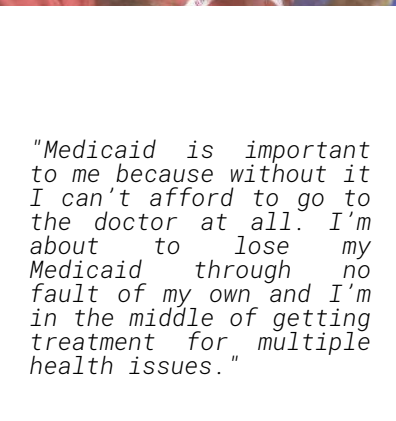
"Without Medicaid, I would not have been able to afford gender confirmation surgery. We need to expand #Medicaid4All - not cut millions of children and adults off from access to healthcare."



"Medicaid gives me hope that I can manage my health as a young adult without going into further debt or going uninsured with multiple present and looming conditions like depression, anxiety, and a family history of diabetes, heart disease, and cancer."



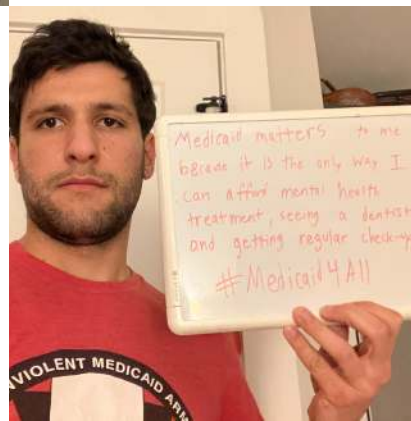
"Without it I wouldn't be able to live a productive life and I wouldn't be able to pay for medical equipment or medication"



"Medicaid is important to me because without it I can't afford to go to the doctor at all. I'm about to lose my Medicaid through no fault of my own and I'm in the middle of getting treatment for multiple health issues."



"Medicaid matters to me because it is the only way I can afford mental health treatment, seeing a dentist and getting regular check-ups."





Welcome to the PPF-PA family!

Giovanni Ugo Scarsella was born February 26th, 2023.
Congratulations to his parents Madeline, Frank and Kiki!

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WHO ARE WE?



Put People First! PA gives voice to everyday people who are struggling to meet our basic needs. We define our basic needs as things we need to live healthy and fulfilling lives—things like education, housing, health care, jobs with living wages, food, and a healthy environment.

We're a membership organization made up mostly of people who know from our life experience that poor and working people need to unite and have a voice.

We're building, county by county, all across Pennsylvania. We're urban and rural. We're multiracial. We're politically independent. Until we unite, we don't have the power to change things.



SAY NO! TO MEDICAID CUT-OFFS

Join the Put People First! PA Medicaid Cut-Offs Organizing Drive!

Do you get your healthcare through Medicaid? Do you work with or provide services to people who do?

Pennsylvania intends to cut up to **1.2 million people** from Medicaid starting on April 1, 2023.

Both parties in Congress agreed in December 2022 to begin cutting 18 million people off Medicaid across the country before the official ending of the Public Health Emergency. This plan was included in the Omnibus appropriations bill and signed into law by President Biden.

The state says this is “going back to normal,” but we reject a normal where fewer people, one third of whom are children, have life sustaining and life saving medical care.

OUR DEMANDS

- ☐ **No cuts** – no one should lose their healthcare
- ☐ Expand Medicaid to **all PA residents**
- ☐ Restore adult dental benefit
- ☐ Expand the length of time to file for an appeal to 60 days
- ☐ Release information about how much money was saved during the continuous coverage period by not cutting people off
- ☐ Release information about how many eligibility appeals are submitted and approved

Tell Gov. Shapiro NO Medicaid Cutoffs!

Share your story on social media

Use our Organizing Drive Toolkit

Go to: **www.putpeoplefirstpa.org/nomedicaidcutoffs** to take action!

2023 Organizing Drive

How We're Fighting the Medicaid Cutoffs in Pennsylvania



The Nonviolent Medicaid Army (NVMA), or the national formation spanning 12 states across the country that Put People First! PA launched and helps coordinate, has been following and tracking the Public Health Emergency and pending Medicaid Cut-offs since February 2022.

The Public Health Emergency (PHE) began in January 2020 and mandated certain protections including continuous coverage under Medicaid, meaning that people enrolled in Medicaid could not be dropped from the rolls as long as the PHE is in effect. At the end of 2022, federal congressional leaders from both the Republican and Democratic Parties unveiled a spending bill that, beginning April 1, would strip Medicaid coverage from millions of people across the country - including 1.2 million here in PA.

Put People First! PA and the NVMA have been laying the groundwork and developing our leaders to meet this crisis as an opportunity to fight back and grow our ranks with the people who will be affected by this crisis. This has culminated in the 2023 Medicaid Cutoffs Organizing Drive, where we are dedicating our organizing efforts to identify, develop, and unite the emerging leaders among the 1.2 million people who stand to be cut off of Medicaid in Pennsylvania.

The Goals of our Organizing Drive are to:

- Make the Invisible Visible and Change the Narrative
- Grow our Political Independence
- Hold all Power Holders Accountable
- Grow our Healthcare Rights Committees
- Continue to become Political Centers of Gravity in our Regions
- Increase our Online basebuilding

Within Put People First! PA, leaders of the Basebuilding Team, Campaign/Legislative Team, Media & Communications team, and Root Coordinators have been meeting since November as an ad hoc Team to draft plans for the organizing drive for PA. We officially launched the organizing drive in January and since then have successfully planned and carried out the following:

- We've trained ourselves in filing Medicaid eligibility appeals and educated our base about how everyone who gets cut from Medicaid has the right to file an appeal. We've already begun helping people who want to take action to file appeals and request in person court hearings.
- We hosted two Know Your Rights Trainings in March, where we grounded participants in the crisis around cutoffs, oriented them to the Medicaid Cutoffs Toolkit which covered communications tactics, the appeals process, and other resources, and invited them to join our fight!
- Coordinated Spokespersons Trainings to develop our leaders as communicators prepared to make this crisis visible by sharing our stories in the media.
- Had dozens of press hits between articles, Letters to the Editor and Op-Eds in PA and nationally. Go to our blog to read press coverage:
<https://www.putpeoplefirstpa.org/blog/>
- Ramped up our online basebuilding as several leaders are more intentionally engaging with folks through our social media channels and we've boosted our content to connect with more folks affected by the crisis

Across our Healthcare Rights Committees, we are beginning to engage in a season of basebuilding. Through our People's Clinics, Door Knocking Drives, and other basebuilding activities, we will ensure that our base knows we are here to break their isolation and to fight back together to demand that our needs are met!

Take action with us! Visit our [website](#) to:

- Tell Gov. Shapiro NO Medicaid Cutoffs!
- Share Your Story on Social Media
- Get the Organizing Drive Toolkit

2023 Organizing Drive

Excerpts from recent media featuring PPF-PA



The Philadelphia Inquirer

Medicaid checks “On April 1, our state resumed Medicaid eligibility checks, potentially cutting off more than a million Pennsylvanians from their Medicaid. [...] As a Medicaid recipient, I am terrified. If I lose my health care, I will not be able to afford mental health treatment. I rely on Medicaid and now must go back to proving over and over that I need it. We know the state has enough to provide everyone with health care. Cutting Medicaid will create a public health crisis that will exacerbate the crisis of hospital closures in Southeast Pennsylvania over the past year. If you’re a Medicaid recipient, concerned you may lose your coverage, and wish to get involved in fighting for your right to health care and that of others, please reach out to your representatives.”

Harrison Farina, Philadelphia (Southeast PA Healthcare Rights Committee Coordinator, *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, April 23, 2023)

Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

Medicaid disaster “I’ve been on Medicaid and ACA, and Medicaid was better. The ACA made me poor. I am now on Medicare. I’m excluded from Medicaid as my Medicare supplement, because my income is slightly too high. I spend most of what I saved for retirement on “out of pocket” medical costs, so I’m shopping for groceries at the food bank, and glad it’s there! But the medical system has impoverished me. It always demands more money from us.

Please understand that we’re in poverty not due to individual mistakes or laziness. Poverty is a systemic problem in this country. The kinds of policy decisions in December that will cause people to lose their healthcare. Poverty will now increase in our state & nationwide.”

Barbara White, East Hills (Southwest PA Healthcare Rights Committee Coordinator, *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, April 9, 2023)



Shutterstock

A HEALTH CARE CLIFF IS COMING

I’m one of 18 million Americans who could soon lose Medicaid access. Here’s how to keep people from falling over the edge — and how to fight back.

By **LT Talarico** | February 22, 2023

A Health Care Cliff Is Coming “I’m one of the 84 million Americans who get our health care through Medicaid. And I’m one of the 18 million who might lose it starting this spring unless our policymakers take action.

I went to college, got a degree, and planned on being self-sufficient. But in my early 20s, I was struck by an autoimmune condition that caused painful, chronic flare ups that affected my ability to stand or walk.

I worked some desk jobs, but the health coverage was inadequate. I struggled financially, relied on thrift store wheelchairs, and lived with pain for 10 years before I got Medicaid. It changed my life—I was finally able to get a diagnosis and treatment. Today, I work as a dental hygienist.

But Medicaid is full of holes and paperwork. You have to reapply frequently. And small increases in income can throw you off the program, even if you don’t make enough to buy insurance on your own.

For a while, Medicaid was improved during the pandemic. In exchange for increased federal matching funds, states agreed not to kick anyone off the program until the end of the federal Public Health Emergency. We didn't have to keep applying—we could focus on staying healthy, taking care of our families, and doing our jobs. That enhanced coverage will end on March 31.

My modest pay is just high enough that I will likely lose coverage." [...]

LT Talarico, Philadelphia (Southeast PA Healthcare Rights Committee, *OtherWords*, February 22, 2023)

ABOUT ARCHIVE SYNDICATE **OTHERWORDS** SUBMIT DONATE SUBSCRIBE



MEDICAID CUTOFFS: AN AMERICAN HORROR STORY

Some 15 million Americans on Medicaid are now being thrown off the program. No elected official should stand for this.

By Nijmie Dzurinko | April 12, 2023

Medicaid Cutoffs: An American Horror Story
"The biggest threat to Americans today isn't from a foreign power. It's from a long-running war on the poor by out of touch politicians and their Wall Street backers.

The latest attack on working Americans even has a name: 'The Unwinding.' If that sounds like the title of a horror movie to you, you're not far off. Starting this April, state governments and welfare offices began cutting off Medicaid coverage from some 15 million people." [...]

Nijmie Dzurinko, Clearfield (Central Appalachia PA Healthcare Rights Committee Coordinator, *OtherWords*, April 12, 2023)

SPOTLIGHT PA



HEALTH

Shapiro admin can do more as rollbacks to food and health benefits loom in Pa., experts say

by Katie Meyer of Spotlight PA | Feb. 24, 2023



Shapiro admin can do more as rollbacks to food and health benefits loom in Pa., experts say "The federal government will soon end a 'continuous enrollment' policy that has kept states from kicking people off Medicaid for three years and stop sending extra monthly payments from the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, or SNAP.

It's a double whammy for people who rely on both programs. Cassie Hill is one of them. Her pay is inconsistent, so she's not sure if, in the past three years, she edged above the income range that qualifies her for Medicaid. She also doesn't know how she'll make her grocery budget work when she's getting less money from SNAP. [...]

Nijmie Dzurinko who, like Hill, is an organizer with Put People First! Pennsylvania, said her group thinks the likely loss of health care benefits will be similarly significant. Her group views the situation 'as a crisis,' she said. [...] 'It shouldn't just be kind of swept under the rug as 'going back to normal,' said Dzurinko. 'It's not actually a good normal that we had before.'"

Featuring **Cassaundra Hill**, Philadelphia (Southeast PA Healthcare Rights Committee, *Spotlight PA*, April 23, 2023)

Legislative Lessons

Our Politically Independent Fight for a Public Healthcare Advocate



Since 2018, the Campaign/Legislative team has learned many legislative lessons from our politically independent fight for a public healthcare advocate. So let's collectivize this rich knowledge!

Just what is a Public Healthcare Advocate (PHA)? PPF-PA envisions a new state office housed within the Office of the Attorney General, led by an appointed Public Healthcare Advocate who, with the support of their staff, would defend the healthcare rights of Pennsylvania residents—whether they are being cut off from Medicaid, have claims that are being denied by their insurance companies, are having their health affected by environmental devastation or toxic prison conditions, etc.—across all lines of division.

What do we mean by "political independence"? First let's clearly say what it is not: We are not trying to flip PA to be either red or blue. Instead, we stake out our political independence by basebuilding with members of our class—no matter which party or candidates for election they support.

The ruling class wants us to believe that doing politics is voting twice a year and arguing over team blue or red on the other days of the year. We cannot allow such a divisive calculus. We demonstrate our independence as an unpaid, member-led organization when we don't let the D or the R after an elected official's name stop us from talking to them about the struggles and suffering of their constituents. We boldly tell them how the Medicaid cutoffs are hurting people and that a PHA is necessary to fight for residents' healthcare rights and hold lawmakers, governmental agencies and the industries they regulate accountable.

What are some goals we have in our campaign-legislative work?

- Call out the Governor, the Secretary of the Department of Human Services, and the Legislature for Medicaid cut-offs—demanding that no one lose their healthcare
- Increase every Healthcare Rights Committee's (HRC) fluency and willingness to meet with key elected officials
- Advance support for the PHA in the Senate by building relationships with lawmakers who represent districts where hospitals are closing, are owned by private equity firms, or where other contradictions of profiteering are breaking through
- Continue the fight to expand dental care in Medicaid

What are the lessons we've learned about the PA General Assembly?

- We can use our political independence to make the power structure say "yes" when it really wants to say "no."
- Although legislative caucus and committee leadership is supposed to represent all the people in the state, many don't take that approach.
- Legislators don't know more than we do. They rely on leadership and their committee chairs to tell them what to do.
- Power holders like to give the appearance that they are doing something without actually changing anything. They introduce bills with no strategy, simply in order to have a press conference and get into the media.
- The struggle to win a PHA is much more than just winning a policy. It's about using the struggle to base build; identify, develop and unite leaders; and unite different sections of our class.
- The healthcare crisis is a real potential weak point for the ruling class and a point of unity for our class.
- Our process of preparation, training and research before we meet with elected officials really works. We always set our own agenda.

What's next? Collectively we will use our lessons to instill confidence among our member-leaders, build power by basebuilding the Nonviolent Medicaid Army (with those that have the most to gain and the least to lose from a real transformation of society), and then wield that power to hold all power holders accountable to our demands by increasing the frequency and proficiency of our relationships with legislators and legislative leadership. We will ensure that there is a legislative component to all statewide and local struggles (fights against hospital closures, etc.), and our organizing will prioritize confronting legislators with the healthcare crisis impacting their constituents.



Member reflections

Understanding the Need for a Public Healthcare Advocate

*Southwest PA Healthcare Rights Committee co-coordinator **Barbara White** interviewed Put People First! PA member **Rica Phillips**, after her recent stay in the hospital.*

Barbara: Rica, what happened in your recent hospital stay?

Rica: They violated my human rights. They didn't check my chart and could have killed me! I told them to read the list of my allergies. They gave me medication that I shouldn't have and then I had a seizure. At the end of the day, they said my seizure was my fault instead of their mistake. Now they try to diagnose me as epileptic when I have no history of that. They tried to take away my driver's license, my freedom to drive. It's always important to have an advocate with you at the hospital, otherwise they'll do whatever they want.

Barbara: How does this relate to a Public Healthcare Advocate?

Rica: The hospital held me hostage. When I tried to leave, they told me I could leave Against Medical Advice, but it would be in my record and I would be seen as a troublemaker, not compliant, too outspoken. The lesson learned is to always have someone who knows your history and how to advocate. If we had a Public Healthcare Advocate, I could file a complaint with them and they could investigate.



*Northeast PA Healthcare Rights Committee member **Elizabeth Glunt** shares her healthcare story as it relates to the need for a Public Healthcare Advocate:*

I work in behavioral healthcare and every day see my community, my neighbors, reaching out for help. With the rise of mental health awareness, we often see commercials or ads saying, "If you are struggling, just pick up the phone and call."

What we don't see is, when that person calls, one of the first questions that they're asked is "What type of insurance do you have?" In Pennsylvania, if someone has either no insurance, or a PA Medicaid plan, we have nowhere to go if we need more than an outpatient treatment or less than an acute inpatient hospitalization. And our Mental Health Inpatients are closing one by one. In northeast PA, we've seen Berwick Hospital, First Hospital, and Tyler Memorial Hospital all close, leaving us with few options. Million dollar hospital systems move out of our community when it's no longer profitable for them, being careless with the community they were treating and those that were employed there.

It's not just important for everyone to have health insurance. It's equally as important for our healthcare companies to actually cover the services we need. Too often, I see insurance companies denying life saving care. There is a lot that goes into determining what level of care someone needs for eating disorder treatment. We have masters level clinicians where I work that will complete an assessment and based on things like behaviors, frequency, urges, medical

history, vitals and many other things will determine what level of care is recommended.

One of our facilities is residential and we have individuals calling us seeking a residential level of care, ready to try and get started in recovery. They want to come to residential treatment, be able to maintain some autonomy, rather than an inpatient unit. And if they are "medically stable" enough to avoid inpatient, and their assessment met criteria, they come to us. But then the insurance company steps in and too many times, they go back and forth with our doctors and will refuse treatment. They will say "no". They don't want to cover people's treatment. They don't want to spend money on those that need and deserve care. We are still just numbers cutting into the profiteer's bottom line. This past week, I saw three of my clients being denied by their insurance companies.

This is one of the reasons I feel having a healthcare advocate would be so beneficial. Without Medicaid for all, many of us are paying for our insurance. And it's expensive! But then when we go to use it, the insurance companies don't want to pay. We deserve to have our basic needs met! Healthcare is a human right!

Basebuilding

Our Basebuilding Activities Across PA



Basebuilding is kicking into full gear as Put People First! PA heads into the summer months. Here are updates from Healthcare Rights Committees across Pennsylvania—and nationally!

Southeast PA

On April 23rd, the Southeast PA Healthcare Rights Committee (SEPA HRC) hosted a People's Clinic in Upper Darby (Delaware County) where we did blood pressure screenings, benefits sign ups, informed people about the upcoming medicaid cutoffs and had organizing conversations with people about PPF-PA's mission and upcoming events. We set up our Clinic out front of 69th St.

Transportation Center, so we could catch people as they went through the busy transit center for Southeast PA. We're planning on returning to Delaware County and Chester County throughout the summer for more People's Clinics and doorknocking.

—Sefi & LT

"SEPA's first People's Clinic of the Spring really exemplified our Community Agreement: "Nobody knows everything, together we know a lot!" We had a lot of people and some who were pretty new to a People's Clinic or new to an organizing conversation. We paired up newer with more developed leaders to learn from and teach one another. We had a debrief after the Clinic to share lessons learned. That was useful for me!"

—Stacey



Members of the Southeast PA Healthcare Rights Committee gather in Upper Darby to hold a People's Clinic Project of Survival in April.



Southwest PA

In the Southwest PA Healthcare Rights Committee (SWPA HRC), we have recommitted to digging into our Landscape Assessment so we can make basebuilding decisions which also help us advance our legislative strategy. Last year, we made inroads in organizing People's Clinics and Door Knocking in Butler County and we look forward to continuing deepening our connections across our region. Our leaders have also done some exploration around the Welfare Office in Downtown Pittsburgh, where we know our base will be going to sign up and appeal for benefits. Starting in May, we're planning to set up a table and connect with folks who are moving in and out of the office.

Our region has also witnessed the merger of two health systems: Butler Health System and Excelsa, so we're scoping out the sites in Westmoreland County, affected by the merger and looking for opportunities to do door knocking, which we plan to take up later in May. No matter where we begin, we have ample opportunities to connect with our base and identify, develop, and unite leaders of our class!

— Briann



South Central PA

This year in the South Central Healthcare Rights Committee we'll be teaming up with Family First, which is an entity that provides free and low cost medical services to our base. We will be attending their clinics throughout the summer. Organizing conversations with our base should be prime! Leading to of course the NVMA Week of action! We will also be doing a large amount of door knocking and outreach calls.

— Matt

Central Appalachia PA

Once again interesting developments have happened in regard to base building in the Central Appalachia Healthcare Rights Committee (CAPA HRC). Over this winter and spring the city of Johnstown has had a systemic attack on poor people, with particular malice towards black and brown residents, in their access to housing. The city, within months of one another, closed down a hotel as well as an entire low income housing project, Prospect, saying neither were fit for habitation. In both cases none of the residents would tell you either location was in very good condition, but many people called these places home. In the case of the hotel, residents were given a 2-week notice to vacate, while the residents of Prospect were given 30 days. All that is to say the city has created a problem for housing the most vulnerable, we intend to launch a door knocking campaign in one of Johnstown's low income neighborhoods to connect the link between housing and healthcare. The Healthcare Rights Committee will also be using this as an opportunity to continue to raise awareness about the medicaid cut-offs, and how to fight back. This is an opportunity for us to use the political center of gravity that we have created and continue to permanently organize our communities!

— Ron



WY Organizing Exchange

This year PPF-PA members will be traveling to Nonviolent Medicaid Army (NVMA) states Georgia, Wyoming and Texas to participate in organizing exchanges. PPF-PA members Julia Willis and Erro Lynd, who moved to Wyoming from Pennsylvania, are excited to host the first exchange on Mother's Day weekend. We plan to ground ourselves in the local terrain, door knock to connect with our base and invite them to a Pop-Up Clinic and a Mother's Day meal that will celebrate caregivers while analyzing how the ruling class relies on their unpaid labor of love to prop up the for-profit healthcare system.

— Erro



Northeast PA HRC

On April 16th, the Northeast PA Healthcare Rights Committee (NEPA HRC) kicked off our Basebuilding season with a doorknocking in Berwick. We chose Berwick because their rural hospital closed in October of last year, stranding residents without access to healthcare and 40 minute wait times for ambulances to arrive. Since that time, we've been building relationships with community leaders who want to fight back. When they told us about an upcoming Community Meeting, we offered to help spread the word.

Six of us assembled to carry out the doorknocking, a small but mighty team of veteran basebuilders. We had many promising conversations and several people committed to attend the Community Meeting. Folks were not only interested in the issue of their local hospital closure, but were also galvanized by the news we brought them of the upcoming Medicaid cutoffs. It was a great opportunity to look over the mail folks had received and get them connected to the Medicaid Cutoffs Organizing Drive.

Jess and Esther were also able to attend the Community Meeting on Wednesday, April 19th. They helped one of our new contacts with transportation, strengthening our connection with him. Mainstream media was in attendance and quoted Jess in their article, "We just wanted to come to this meeting to let y'all know that what's happening here in Berwick is happening across Pennsylvania. There are communities across Pennsylvania that are having hospitals shut down. What we're looking at is, why is this happening? Why has Berwick been abandoned?"

Jess summarized her experience for our HRC: "There were about 100 people there and we had a really positive response to the message we shared. We got a couple new contacts to follow-up with but I'd say the most important outcome was to keep getting our name and narrative out there. When Bette Grey announced us, she shared that we had come from across the region to doorknock in their town to get people involved in this fight and we (NEPA HRC) received a round of applause for that and folks were very appreciative. There was a TON of traction on connecting with legislators and they basically organized a mass calling campaign to all their legislators this week. We talked about the Public Healthcare Advocate (PHA) bill as well as the bills Senator Kearney is working on and emphasized the importance of connecting legislators in Berwick with those in Delaware County and Johnstown, etc. This is how we become political centers of gravity!"

Esther also shared her reflection, "I feel Doorknocking was a huge success! Met a few people who didn't know what was happening right in their backyard! But Thanks to the Medicaid Army for going in and getting word out! Great News: me and Jessica went to the community meeting and we were so WELCOMED! Looking forward to Projects of Survival and the possibility of having them in different communities! There's cries that are being unheard! But together we can hear them and help them get some answers! FORWARD TOGETHER AND NOT ONE STEP BACK!"

— Rebecca

Personal Reflection

When We Fight, We Win!



*In February 2023, Put People First! PA organized a call-in day for Central Appalachia HRC member **Lauren Michaels**.*

The summer of 2022 was shaping up to be one of the best of my life! I had recently won a PA State Golden Gloves title in boxing and qualified for the National Finals. I was ready to start my career as a professional boxer—until I started to have strange flashes in my right eye. Soon I was diagnosed with a detached retina; I could not have been more devastated as the doctor told me that urgent surgery was needed or else I would likely be completely blind in that eye. The next day, my partner and I drove to Bethesda, MD for surgery. Before we left, I got a call that I had to pay \$1200 out of pocket or my surgery was going to be rescheduled, as I had not yet reached my deductible. I was lucky enough to be able to drain my savings account to make the payment. In the end I received three surgeries, two in Maryland and one later, in March at UPMC Altoona, to remove a cataract. My recovery has been successful, and against all odds I have been able to return to boxing; I will be fighting in my first professional bout this summer!

Fast forward to January 31, 2023. I am checking my emails and see a message from the hospital in Maryland. Imagine my surprise that because I was underinsured, I owed over \$6000 for my vitrectomy! Soon after, I noticed ANOTHER \$6000+ denied claim on my UPMC account for my cataract surgery in October! I had never received any notice that my claim was denied. My anxiety skyrocketed. Here I am, finally at a place in life where I have health insurance, and somehow I am over \$12,000 in debt?! My partner and I are already living paycheck to paycheck, with any extra money we had going to medical bills and the gas needed to drive over two hours round trip for each follow-up appointment.



Lauren Michaels (soon to be Lauren Haight), is a member of Put People First! PA as well as a titleholding boxer.

I shared this devastating news with one of my PPF-PA Healthcare Rights Committee Coordinators, who talked to me about possibly doing a call-in day to UPMC to try and erase these charges, so I agreed to give it a shot. When the call-in day arrived on March 23rd, I was shocked by how many Put People First! PA members called in and fought for me! We had a running group chat where people reported back with tips on how to get ahold of supervisors, or requested information to push ahead. As the day went on, I received a call from UPMC. It turns out that there was a “billing error” that resulted in my claim for cataract surgery being denied. UPMC corrected the error and my \$6000 bill was wiped—I owed them nothing! Without PPF-PA, I would have never known how to handle this situation and likely would have ended up struggling to make payments on this bill for years.

After the success of our call-in day, I am even more motivated to fight for a Public Healthcare Advocate in Pennsylvania. It is sickening how insurance companies can get away with billing errors, or just outright refusing to cover people for necessary medical procedures. We NEED to have someone who can help fight for ALL Pennsylvanians who are seen merely as dollar signs to these healthcare profiteers. A Public Healthcare Advocate would know the ins and outs of this industry and would be able to assist people in getting their claims handled correctly. I fully believe in the collective power of Put People First! PA and of the working class in general. I know that together we are stronger than any healthcare profiteer and that we will ultimately win this war against corporate greed at the expense of our lives!

Joshua Rinaman | CAPA

Personal Reflection

Wanting to Be Better



"Behold the brave battalion, who stands side by side. Too few in number, and too proud to hide. Then say to the others who did not follow through, you're still our brother, and we will fight for you."

Newsies, 1992

When I was diagnosed with Type 1 diabetes when I was 11, I was scared, confused, and insured through the CHIP program. Type 1 diabetes means I'm insulin dependent, I have to give myself daily injections because my pancreas produces little to no insulin; and my immune system finds the pancreas-produced insulin foreign, thus killing the insulin before it can absorb the sugars in my bloodstream after eating.

I've needed to be on Medical Assistance for the majority of my life; paying out of pocket for life sustaining medications isn't ideal. When I went to college in 2007, I was covered by my father's health insurance up until enrollment. When I picked up my prescriptions, it cost me nearly \$750 for a one-month supply. I was mortified, disgusted, and embarrassed, I had just enough left from my school loan for life sustaining insulin. I was a first-generation college student who was so terribly lost and alone about navigating health insurance. I tried to apply for Medicaid. As a college student, I didn't have an address they could use that was considered permanent for Cambria County. What was I going to do?

I struggled for months until I was told of the Conemaugh Free Clinic. They asked what my previous doctor had me on, and gave me my insulin, but there was no request for bloodwork, or real guidance on what I should be doing or how to get insurance. This is a nightmare, and I kept thinking "Why me?" But I never gave up. I had a great caseworker assigned to me who helped me with the language used in the application, and exactly which documents were needed.

My fight with this system is truly something personal, but that's all of our stories. So, I joined Put People First! PA's Nonviolent Medicaid Army to make it better for all. We all have something we're dealing with, and you are not alone in this fight. We all can be better when we come together to fight for those unsung voices.

Julia W. & Erro L.
Wyoming NVMA

NVMA

2023 Nonviolent Medicaid Army (NVMA) Retreat



*The **Nonviolent Medicaid Army** of the poor is a growing militant force of the poor and dispossessed, united across identities, regions, races and issues, modeled after Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s 'nonviolent army of the poor' from the first Poor People's Campaign of 1968. We are on or unfairly excluded from Medicaid and represent the diversity of the entire working class and are impacted by every single front of struggle.*

Members of the Nonviolent Medicaid Army, who span 12 states (PA, MD, IN, WY, NY, GA, VT, WI, KS, AL, IL, TX), came together in March for an organizing retreat. The day was filled with political education, relationship building, and base building strategy and planning for the Medicaid Cut-Offs Organizing Drive.

The day opened with grounding in political analysis: "'Return to normal' is war on the poor." The mainstream narrative—that cutting 18 million people, including 1.2 million Pennsylvanians, off of Medicaid is simply an "unwinding" of pandemic era policies that were put in place to stabilize our broken healthcare system—ignores the reality that the pre-pandemic "normal" in American healthcare was killing us. Continuous coverage through Medicaid saved lives and bolstered our financially unstable rural hospitals. The "return to normal" is a declaration that our class is superfluous and our pain is irrelevant. That's why the NVMA is fighting back to demand No Cuts to Medicaid and for our human right to healthcare.



A panel discussion of lessons from organizing for healthcare rights in non-Medicaid expansion states and a workshop sharing tactics and experience from the Medicaid Cut-Offs Organizing Drive collectivized lessons and created inspiration for the campaign moving forward. Medicaid Army leader Patty Saling was inspired to return home to Indiana to reconnect with their National Union of the Homeless organizing base. Patty's takeaway lessons from the day were many: "I was curious about how we begin—we can start with who, and know that it must be those not yet organizing (or most systematically disorganized)—what do we put at the front when we are organizing? Not money. Not ideas. We must start with vulnerability: sharing our experiences and being curious of others' experiences. We must dream of a better world together. We must be curious about what we hold in common. And we must commit to a closeness that allows us to hold, and grow, and develop, and duplicate together."

This was the second NVMA retreat. For Wyoming, last year's inaugural retreat helped

us form a new organization of the poor organizing the poor. We were members of Put People First! PA when we lived in Pittsburgh and reconnected with PPF-PA over zoom after we moved to Wyoming. We invited a few people to join us virtually at the 2021 PPF-PA Membership Assembly, then to the Vermont Workers' Center (PPF-PA's sibling organization and member of the NVMA) Fall Study. But it wasn't until the 2022 NVMA retreat that 5 of us came together to build something new in Wyoming. The retreat gave us the tools and the focus we needed to work to create a landscape assessment for our state. We began meeting weekly to expand this landscape assessment and used that research to plan base building actions during the Medicaid Week of action last fall. This year's retreat helped us build on that work by moving forward the organizing exchange we will host in May to base build in another part of our state (as well as other states). We can't wait to see how much our NVMA network will grow by the time next year's retreat comes around!

Read more about the NVMA at:
nonviolentmedicaidarmy.org

Winter Study

The People's History of PA



After the explosion of the musical Hamilton, the lauded founding father has taken on new heights of nationalistic lore.

*Alexander Hamilton is an iconoclast.
An all American rags-to-riches icon.
A beacon of American Democracy.*

In truth, Alexander Hamilton was cadre of the emerging financier ruling class of the colonies. He helped develop US capitalism as we know it today. Through study, we know that there is a different cast of characters that fought to advance the interests and power of the working class during the formation of the US; people like Herman Husband and William Parker.

But it's not just individuals who are written out of history. Class exploitation and class struggle were crucial parts of the origin story of the US; struggles like the Regulators in North Carolina, Shay's Rebellion, the Whiskey Rebellion, and the roles of the Philadelphia Militia and the PA radical legislature.

We study our history—in part—because in order to build a mass movement of the poor, we must combat our class's mental fortresses. These fortresses, established by the ruling class over centuries, only serve to defend an economic system that acts in the interests of the wealthy few. By understanding the historically constructed mental terrain we stand on, we begin to dismantle these fortresses. This past winter we embarked on a collective study to do just this.

The study focused on The People's History of Pennsylvania.

Over the course of six weeks we looked at key moments in Pennsylvania history, including early Indigenous people's history, the US Revolutionary War era, the abolitionist movement, early 20th Century organizing drives in the anthracite coal and steel industries, and the original National Union of the Homeless of the late 1980s and early 1990s.

The goals of this study were to equip leaders to carry out the Nonviolent Medicaid Army (NVMA) 2023 Medicaid Cutoffs Organizing Drive by deepening our ideological commitment (drawing inspiration from our ideological ancestors), elevating our understanding of the mental terrain, and advancing our political clarity and competency. We also sought to build up our discipline for self-study and fortify collectivity across the NVMA.

While the histories we study drew from the rich history of Pennsylvania (which looms large in the history of this country), we invited members of the Nonviolent Medicaid Army across the country to participate in the study and begin to dig into the people's histories of their respective states. This People's History of PA course has the potential to serve as a model for future regional studies across the country.

With each of our twice a year seasonal studies, we develop as leaders. We also develop our pedagogical practices, and deepen our commitment to utilizing the classroom as a key area of our work.

Below are some reflections from course participants:

Knowing *real* history made me understand why I typically find history boring and annoying—because it's almost all ruling class lies. It feels really liberating to understand more how things actually are, and I have shared it a bit with other people not in the NVMA currently because it's been so fascinating. Wyoming history was really interesting to dip a toe into; I'd like to learn a lot more about that. I was already interested in indigenous history, but now I want to learn more about indigenous resistance and indigenous history of Wyoming. I also want to learn more about Husband and Parker in particular.

—**Maya Gilmore**, NVMA, Wyoming

The founding and revolutionary war period stuff continues to blow my mind. We studied this for years in public school and none of it in this way. That means we all have deep mental fortresses that we can barely pinpoint they're so far in there related to the US founding and our whole history. That takes a lot of conscious work to unlearn.

—**Jamie Blair**, PPF-PA, SEPA HRC

I've learned so so much from this study, so these are just a few highlights: I learned a lot in terms of the long-game of revolutionary work and gained a deeper appreciation for the birth pains and very long timelines of successful movements. So that gives me a better, more realistic grasp of where we're at currently with our Healthcare Rights Committee (HRC) and gives me courage, fortitude, and hope for the work. I also really grasped the importance of being the narrator of our own stories and feel like I'm starting to internalize this lesson. It's stirring a lot for me around HRC work and allowing the lesson of reclaiming the narrator to color everything we do. I feel like that's how we really get to becoming political centers of gravity; we gain control of the narrative here in NEPA.

—**Jessica Boyles**, PPF-PA, NEPA HRC

Matt & Tammy Rosing
SCPA

Freedom Church of the Poor

On Becoming Movement Ministers



*Three members of PPF-PA recently took part in the inaugural minister training of the Freedom Church of the Poor, on their way to becoming ordained faith leaders. Below are reflections from **Matt** and **Tammy Rosing**.*

I was blessed to recently be invited to take part in the inaugural minister training of the Freedom Church of the Poor alongside other leaders within Put People First! PA.

To understand what this means to me and how this came to be you'd have to know my story growing up experiencing religious trauma because of the Distorted Moral Narrative of White Christian Nationalism that engulfed me and how joining the organizing work of the Poor People's Campaign: a National Call for Moral Revival has helped me in my healing journey that led me to this blessing.

I grew up in Lancaster County, PA which is said to be the "Bible Belt" of Pennsylvania, in a household that held the Distorted view as well as the churches we attended. I grew up believing I was born damned.

Working with the Kairos Center via Freedom Church of the Poor has been a huge positive experience for me and has helped me heal from the religious trauma I experienced as well as understand the true meaning of the teachings of Jesus Christ, his story being born a poor homeless child and how he grew to be a powerful revolutionary of his time. Essentially Jesus was organizing a Poor People's Campaign in his time and the Bible is filled with stories that show the history of the poor people's Plight, Fight and Insight.

As a graduate and soon to be ordained faith leader of the Freedom Church of the Poor we are tasked with organizing a "Freedom Church of the Poor Community" in our prospective communities and I have a vision of what I'd like to see in Pennsylvania.

As a new Tri-Chair of the Pennsylvania Poor People's Campaign: a National Call for Moral Revival in connection to my leadership in Put People First! PA and the Pennsylvania and National Union of the Homeless, I can visualize the potential of all of these coming together to create a Freedom Church of the Poor Community in Pennsylvania.

The PA Poor People's Campaign has already been engaging and organizing with faith leaders and different houses of worship throughout the state. Creating a Freedom Church of the Poor could be a great way to organize the already existing faith community alongside leaders amongst the poor and dispossessed by turning the faith communities' charity and mutual aid programs into Projects of Survival!

Creating Projects of Survival across the state of Pennsylvania and gathering together at least once a month virtually in a public online session similar to the Sundays Freedom Church of the Poor through Kairos Center gatherings would be a powerful way to grow the movement, develop leaders, and shift the intense Distorted Moral Narrative of White Christian Nationalism in our state.

—Tammy Rosing

The Freedom Church of the Poor ministry class was a life goal fulfilled for me. I always dreamed of connecting to a church that truly embraced the way I feel about the divine. We all have an innate divine quality. We are beautiful creatures that transcend space and time. We have value beyond what we can produce. We have grace and dignity because we are. And that is what the Freedom Church of the Poor classes affirmed for me. That I am not alone in my feelings and beliefs. We learned about arts and cultures' role in our movement, we learned how to fight back against the distorted narrative of white Christian Nationalism. We came to gather with one voice to denounce the religion of empire and show you can't worship a homeless revolutionary on Sunday and step over one on Monday. My love for my class has grown through faith and love.

—Matt Rosing



Matt and Tammy Rosing are on their way to becoming ordained faith leaders within the Freedom Church of the Poor.

Rebecca Reitenbach | NEPA

Personal Reflection Winter Steering Committee Retreat



Every year, PPF-PA's coordinating members (collectively known as the Steering Committee) gather at a retreat to reflect on the previous year, strategize for the future, and ratify our Campaign Plan.

This year, I was honored to be invited to the Winter Steering Committee Retreat for the first time. The Winter Steering Committee Retreat is a four day gathering where all Put People First! PA Coordinators of Healthcare Rights Committees and Teams, as well as a few additional leaders taking on serious organizational responsibility, come together to learn, prepare for the year ahead and deepen our relationships. What do I say about one of the most empowering experiences of my life? How do I encapsulate a weekend that left me with so much love and appreciation for MY CLASS and my fellow leaders? Where can I find the words to summarize how it felt to study the ruling class, pinpoint their weaknesses, and collectively strategize how we will win?

I arrived early and helped decorate which was such a joy. We have some incredible artwork, banners, quilts, and signs which trickled into our space as more and more leaders arrived, gathering from all over the state. And the Inn? Nestled in the PA wilds, overlooking a lake, it was breathtaking. It forced me to confront some of my own mental fortresses that someone of my class could not possibly deserve this. The food was catered and exquisite and filling. Once everyone arrived and was settled, we spent the evening making music and magic. It felt like an extended *mística*, a time of fellowship and solidarity, singing union songs, protest songs, singing for revolution and the better world we longed for.

Friday was our first full day and I had to do most of my Militant Work. I love to co-create a space. I did Timekeeping, Community Care, and was part of the Morale Team. Being involved in the behind-the-scenes tasks gave me such a great appreciation for the collective effort that goes into everything we do as an organization.

For our last workshop of the day, I saw democracy in action when we ratified our 2023 Campaign Plan that EVERY MEMBER of Put People First! PA has contributed to, starting at our Membership Assembly in October, continuing in meetings throughout the winter and culminating in a UNANIMOUS vote to accept it. True democracy is a blending of love and discipline. It is the most beautiful thing I've ever seen in my life.

After dinner we watched a movie called *Pride* (2014) about the LGBT community in London who decided to support unionized Welsh miners who had been striking for months and were struggling. It was a heartwarming movie that showcased two unlikely groups struggling to form connections and practice leadership across difference. I loved it and it was even more wonderful to enjoy it with other PPF-PA leaders.

Saturday the workshops were focused on leadership development and what it really means to be a coordinator.



Photos from the **Winter Steering Committee Retreat (WSCR)** held in Central PA (from top to bottom): an altar created collectively served as part of the *mística* for the weekend; (left) long-time organizer **Willie Baptist** joined members of PPF-PA at the retreat; **Jacob Butterly** and **Jamie Blair** coordinated a presentation on working class internationalism; steering committee members were encouraged to share their goals for the weekend with the group.

My favorite workshop was by the Community Care Team about how to sustain ourselves and other leaders for the fight we face to win our human rights. Movement leader Willie Baptist was with us that day and he spoke, sharing with us all the wisdom that comes from a lifetime of waging the struggle to end poverty.

I think the most important workshop of the day was Leadership Across Difference. We looked at challenging situations that had come up during our Membership Assembly and analyzed how those situations could have been prevented and what action should be taken going forward. Once again, I was blown away by the way things are handled in PPF-PA spaces. The world has taught me to fear mistakes, to expect blame and shame. At PPF-PA, we practice the Struggle Is A School.

Mistakes become learning experiences and opportunities. It was a healing experience for me.

We closed Saturday with Art and Culture Night. It was every bit as fire as you would expect. Our class is talented and creative and incredible. Zevi stole the show with their spoof of a rap from Hamilton, retold from a working class perspective.

Sunday was only half a day, so that folks would have time to travel home. The workshop on working class internationalism has stuck with me though. None of us are free until all of us are free! A better future is possible, if we raise up more leaders to join us. I hope to see many new faces at the next Winter Steering Committee Retreat.

Zevi K. | SEPA

Spirit of the Struggle

A Preliminary Study of *Mística*



Mística is a concept Put People First! PA (PPF-PA) and our broader network has adapted from Brazil's Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra (MST), or the Landless Workers' Movement. The MST is the largest organization of our class in the Western hemisphere, with upwards of 1.5 million members—and *mística* is a key aspect to their success. This past winter, myself, Jacob B, and Phil studied *mística* and brought our preliminary lessons to the PPF-PA's leadership body, the Steering Committee, to help coordinators understand the roots of *mística*, the process the MST have taken, and how we in our work here in Pennsylvania organizing the 140 million can better adopt our own *mística*.

In our context, we often say that *mística* is the spirit of the struggle. *Mística* has its historical roots in popular churches and liberation theology, which were prominent in rural areas

in Brazil and a key way of organizing poor and working people during the country's military dictatorship in the 1960s-80s. *Mística* also draws on the principles of Paulo Freire's pedagogy of the oppressed, which emphasizes active and participatory education, tapping into people's emotions and experiences to help them understand the roots of their oppression.

The MST's work centers around land occupation, where they mobilize hundreds of rural people to occupy a piece of unused land. The aim is to force the government to grant them land rights under Brazilian law, which states that farmland must be productive. The process of occupying and winning land rights takes many years, demanding an incredible amount of commitment and unity from the people involved.

Mística serves as a powerful tool to ensure the people stay and stick together during the long and challenging struggle for rights. It fosters collective identity and a deep sense of commitment to the cause, providing ideological and spiritual energy that keeps people going. The practice of *mística* draws on Christian mysticism's spiritual dimensions, tapping into a deeper, divine world that helps people transcend their everyday lives and connect with something more significant. The MST made the practice more secular, not directly tied to Christianity, although some members

acknowledge this may have been a misstep as the Battle for the Bible is waged in Brazil.

In one sense, *mística* is a practice that begins a meeting, within the MST's land occupations and other gatherings such as international schools. *mística* incorporates various cultural forms, such as music, art, dance, theater, and colors, to evoke emotions and tell simple stories that help people understand and feel the struggle's significance, and motivates them to revolutionary action. But *mística* is also something much broader. It is the spirit that permeates everything the MST does, from making meals to decorating spaces, and how people relate to each other. It infuses the movement with a sense of purpose and energy, providing the drive to achieve the long-term goal of getting land in the hands of people and winning power for the working class.

In order to develop our own practice of *mística*, we need both a deep study of the history of *mística* in its own context as well as our own experiences and conditions in the US. We can draw from cultural forms that we already use in our work together. It is about leaning into our own purpose and practice today, connecting more deeply with one another, our resolve, and the love of our class, while stretching our creativity - a necessary trait for us in the work we are doing. *Mística* should be meaningful, connected, and prepared collectively, not just the work of people who think of themselves as artists. Everyone in the struggle has an important contribution to make to *mística*.

We must also study the ruling class's articulation of *mística*. The ruling class evokes their own version of *mística* in all kinds of ways, from advertisements to the pledge of allegiance, but theirs leads to disorganization and obedience, promoting a spirit of counterrevolution. In contrast, ours must be revolutionary and counter-hegemonic.

As we develop our understanding of *mística* and incorporate it into our organizing work, we must continue to study the history of the MST and their use of *mística*, as well as the *mística* of the US working class and our movements. By doing so, we can deepen our connection to our past, present, and future struggles and create a *mística* that reflects our revolutionary aspirations.

Rachel I.

Working Class Internationalism

Reflections on Cuban *Mística*



Rachel traveled to Cuba on a brigade in November 2022, alongside other PPF-PA members.

We are in the practice of memorializing our past. Alongside highways, in town centers, and outside government buildings – crafted in marble, bronze and metal – these structures honor our history. But these monuments all too frequently tell a certain side of the story; the side that preserves the status quo; that maintains that the US is great and was built on greatness by great people. But we know the bloodied past of the founding fathers; we know that our siblings fought false enemies in war.

As we dig deeper into our revolutionary histories and uphold the names of our ideological ancestors, we ask: why is it not the faces of William Parker, Mother Jones, Nat Turner, and Johnnie Tillmon that scale mountains? And what must we do to see this reality?

The days, weeks, and months following my brigade trip to Cuba in November 2022, I've been reflecting on the role of history and *mística* in our ideological struggle. In Cuba I saw a deep reverence and love for historical moments and for historical figures who moved the revolution. I saw this expressed not just through monuments, but also through film, dance, and music.

At a celebration honoring Fidel Castro six years to the day after his death, we witnessed a panoply of *mística* honoring the work Fidel did, and the legacy he left behind. Lil Maria, one of our Cuban hosts, sat next to me during the celebration and whispered translations of the songs and speeches into my ear. These weren't just blanket nationalistic words. They spoke to the challenges of the revolution, they spoke to successes, too, like the quick action Cuba took to protect people at the onset of the COVID pandemic. It seemed like everyone in the crowd knew each word to the songs; a beautiful revolutionary chorus.

What I saw in Cuba was a deep intention to preserve history—not for history’s sake, but as an integral part of the scaffolding of their revolutionary process. I saw people honoring moments and people who helped build society. These shared histories bind the people together, and solidify their conviction.

As General Gordon Baker said, “History is the rock we stand on, and if you are not on the rock, you’re on sand that will get swept right out from under you.” There are many lessons we can extrapolate from our brigades to Cuba and other countries further in their revolutionary process than us, but one that I will continue to study is the importance of culture and history in our struggle to enforce our ideological conviction to this fight, and provide a ceaseless stream of inspiration.

Arts & Culture



A Love Letter to Myself and My Comrades Jessica Boyles

I’ve felt a lot like occupied territory throughout my life.

White Christian nationalism, the Protestant work ethic, the bootstrap and stiff upper lip doctrines—all occupied my mind, emotions and spirit. A neighbor occupied my body and has held captive my mind and emotions ever since.

When you’ve been occupied so thoroughly for so long, it’ll affect your identity. Mine had been hijacked pretty early and the one that developed in its place became based on two things: avoiding sin and earning external approval.

I’ve always been a firecracker. My momma says I came out of the womb kicking and shook my crib apart before I was one. I was a fierce little bundle of energy and passion and my family decided I needed containing. My church decided I needed containing. My school decided I needed containing.

When they couldn’t contain me, they sent me to special programs, punished me, medicated me, censored me, or committed me. They wore me down and broke me. And I was just deciding that I’d try to get back up again when y’all found me.

Many months later, when PPF-PA leader Nijmie asked if I was willing to step up as Northeast PA Healthcare Rights Committee coordinator, I told her that I was worried about emotional stability and that if I made it 6 months being consistent, that it’d be a miracle. It’s been about 2 years now and I’m still standing and I am fiercer than I’ve ever been.

But, now, it’s not mostly misplaced anger and protective bravado. Now it comes from beginning to understand parts of my own story better, beginning to understand why I don’t need to be my own worst sort of enemy and why I can accept an invitation to try loving myself.

I am reclaiming that original fierce spirit I was gifted in the beginning, and I’m doing it through the love and care and purposeful direction of this community. I am indebted to you and through this time I’ve come to understand how we are indebted to each other.

I’m starting to see that I am unstoppable. I am a powerhouse. I am getting clearer and clearer and with my new vision, I’ve got an upgrade. I’ve got a scope that I’m learning to dial in on my real enemies. And I’ve got comrades standing with me, shoulder to shoulder, dialed in as well.

We are coming to take our lives back, we are coming for our livelihoods and our housing and our healthcare. What do we want? Everything! When do we want it? Now!



Healthcare worker poem Zevi K.

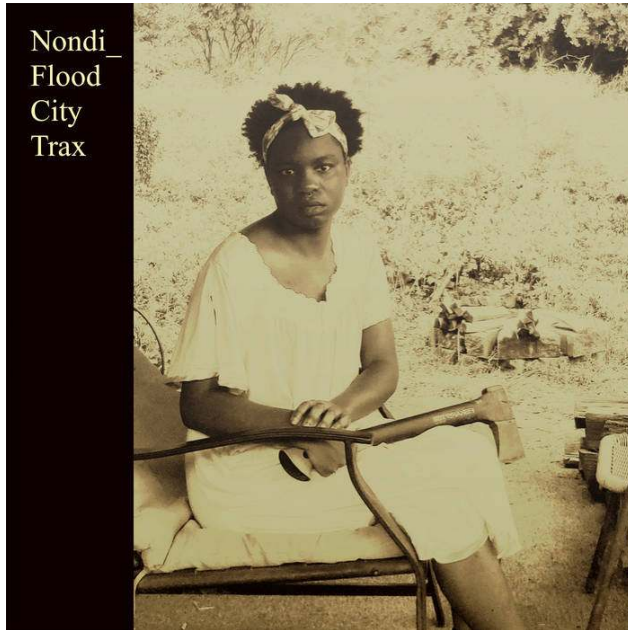
i thought this was caring for people
but you’re just a natural resource
i’m working so hard ‘cuz i love you
but that’s not what they pay me for

the notes that i write are the product
i make on the factory floor
my heart is the engine they drive till it breaks
your pain is the iron ore

Arts & Culture (cont.)



Flood City Trax (2023) Kiki Triplin



Central Appalachia Healthcare Rights Committee Member Kiki recently released her latest album, *Flood City Trax* (2023), under the alias Nondi to much critical acclaim. Kiki performed her music at past Annual Membership Assemblies, and the members of PPF-PA are impressed and inspired by the music Kiki continues to create.

In an interview with Kiki on bandcamp, the author writes: "Largely recorded in 2020, *Flood City Trax* is a loosely conceptual album about Triplin's native Johnstown, Pennsylvania, which was ravaged by catastrophic floods in 1889 and 1977. Far removed from traditional club culture, the record is shaped by her own experiences scouring the internet for obscure dance music and the reality of living in one of America's fastest-shrinking cities."

Kiki explains: "*Flood City Trax* is an album I wrote about Johnstown and my experiences in it. Recently, the neighborhood I lived most my life in, created the majority of my music in, and shaped me into the person I am for better and worse, had every person living in it evicted. After decades of neglect, the ceilings started collapsing in, and the housing department told the entire neighborhood of probably around 40 or so families to relocate, giving people no more than \$100. The community that had been there for decades is now gone and the neighborhood, Prospect, is completely empty.

All of this is a reflection of a government that does not care about housing as a human right. Local power holders care very little about the consequences of uprooting an entire community, some of them even seeing it as some sort of victory as they simply look down on a community unfairly portrayed as criminal just because the people living there were poor and black. I'm not sure what the future of Prospect will be, but *Flood City Trax* was created to honor the memory of the community that inspired me to make music, and being in PPF-PA gives me hope that we can organize to protect other communities from the same fate as Prospect."

To read more of the interview go to "[DJ Girl and Nondi are Planet Mu's Next Generation](#)" | [Bandcamp Daily](#). To listen to Kiki's track and support her work, visit: [Flood City Trax](#) | [Nondi](#)





In Memoriam **James Shearer**

From Tammy Rojas, South Central PA Healthcare Rights Committee:

"It is with a heavy heart that I share with you all the passing of James Shearer. He was a leader in the National Union Of The Homeless (NUH), and the Poor People's Campaign a National Call for Moral Revival and one of the co-founders of *Spare Change*, a newspaper that was established 30 years ago by and for the unhoused.

Many of you may know James or at least have met him. He joined South Central for the Organizing Exchange coordinated by PPF-PA & PEP in 2019 and was with us in solidarity over

the closure of St. Joseph's hospital. He also joined Lancaster for our 2019 Medicaid March on Penn Medicine Lancaster General Hospital along with several other NUH leaders.

He attended the 2019 PPF-PA Membership Assembly where the PPF-PA M&C Team had our first MA workshop and also where we initially founded the Media & Communications cross state/organization cohort that gathered together for a time to learn from one another and expand our M&C work.

I was also blessed to attend the media conference hosted by The People's Forum with him late 2019 where we were both on a panel together... I've learned so much from him. To say I'm going to miss him is an understatement. He was a powerful leader in our movement to end poverty...

Rest in Power my dear friend James!"

—Tammy Rojas



Stay in touch!

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