

Keystone News

putpeoplefirstpa.org



Winter 2013-2014

"Everybody In, Nobody Out!"

by Mitch Troutman, Staff Field Organizer

We've done the research. When going door to door in any part of the state, you can talk about healthcare. 1.6 million people in PA don't have insurance at all, but most everyone else deals with selective coverage and high premiums. Many (if not most) people believe the current system is wrong, and with a little help can envision a better one worth fighting for.

Now that we've chosen the campaign, what is it, exactly?

We're fighting for PA state legislation in the next 3-5 years that guarantees full healthcare access to all residents. This means eliminating insurance companies as middlemen and paying costs directly thru taxes. When you go to the doctor, you don't have a bill. Taxes will be based on income so that everyone pays what they can, and gets what they need. Taxes for regular people will be much less than the current cost of health insurance.

Everyone will be included, from prisoners and immigrants to the politicians themselves. We don't want tiers. We want everyone to have equal access. And by everyone we mean everyone, no one is left out. Dental, vision, hearing & mental health will all be part of the system, and because there's no contracts between insurance companies and providers, you'll have full choice of where you get your care.

We'll be strong enough to do this, in time, because we're inviting anyone who is affected by the healthcare crisis to join... and that means darn near everyone. How are we going to win? We need to build our membership, our leadership, and push state legislators to sign it into law. Imagine when every politician in the state has constituents pressuring them.

Our stories matter, and we need to use them. You can argue policy and numbers all day, but you can't argue with someone's real story of hardship. That's what are Media Team does - makes our stories more powerful by broadcasting them to a larger audience.

We need to educate others, but to really dig in for the long haul, we need to educate ourselves. It's not enough to carry out part of the plan, you've got to understand the plan. That means that there's going to be ups and downs, and while almost everyone will benefit from this, there are powerful people who want to prevent it. They may have money to pay for lobbyists, but we've got power in numbers: people power.

The Campaign Team has started up and is working hard. They're researching strategy and tactics, and putting it on a time-line. They're working with potential allies like doctor and nurse organizations, advocacy groups, community organizations, unions and religious leaders.

The first phase of the campaign starts now, and is all about strengthening and expanding our membership, so we have the power in numbers to officially launch the campaign. The Campaign Team has



Vermont & Maine healthcare logo

come up with how-to guides for OC's

to do public events and draw people in. This includes fund-raisers for the sick, know-your-rights trainings, letters to the editors, photo petitions and more.

With this campaign, we're picking up the torch from Vermont, where they organized county-by-county and have signed Healthcare is a Human Right into law in their state. We're joining hands with Healthcare is a Human Right campaigns in Maryland and Maine. We're not alone, but Pennsylvania is it's own state with it's own challenges. It's going to take all of us playing a part to make this real, to win something for ourselves and everyone else.

Stay tuned to learn more, and don't be afraid to ask. ♦

Our First Newsletter

Contents

Everybody In, Nobody Out	1
2013 Assembly	2
Report	3
Membership / Dues	4
Wal-mart	5
Base-Building	6
HCHR - Maryland	7
Peg Franzen	8

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Universality
Equity
Transparency
Accountability
Participation

Years back, I worked on something called Pennsylvania from Below. It was a "grassroots newspaper" covering issues that weren't getting attention. All, volunteer, we traveled the state, interviewed, researched and wrote. Some told us that print is dead, all anyone wants is a YouTube video. But we found a need for it, because we distributed 15,000 copies across the state.

Put People First has gotten so big that it's not enough to just talk to everyone else about what's going on. No one person is working on every piece, and there's not even one person that personally knows everyone involved!

That's the kind of success we're after, but it means we need good ways to communicate- something everyone does in different ways.

We've got people who only use Twitter, Facebook or others. Some people use

email everyday, but then we have members that don't even use computers. So this is here to fill the gap.

The newsletter is to keep PPF-PA members informed about all our work and thinking. It's also a place to discuss & debate.

You've got to make it what you want by doing it, though. What do you want to see in it? What's missing? How often should it come out? We'd like to hear your suggestions, but we'd even more like to see you make it happen.

We'll need people to work on writing, layout and distribution. Contact the Media & Communications Team to volunteer.

That said- we've got some important things in here you oughta check out. Give it a read, pass it on, enjoy.

-Mitch Troutman
Staff field organizer

Online Resources



We've built a **members-only Forum** into our website. Use it to get the latest info and converse with other members. Don't miss out.

Sign up at putpeoplefirstpa.org/user

We're collecting **stories on lessons for organizing**. Each is 2-5 minute long. There's some great ones already - help out and record your own!

bit.ly/orgstories

Password: ppf

Learn more about our **sister organizations** in Vermont, Maine and Maryland.

putpeoplefirstpa.org/sister-organizations

Download **flyers and pamphlets**, in English and Spanish

putpeoplefirstpa.org/materials

And of course, find us on Facebook and Twitter



"The sooner begun,
the sooner done."
-PA Dutch proverb



2013 Membership Assembly!

by Alia Trindle, volunteer staff

On Sept. 21, members from five counties gathered in Schuylkill County for our first Membership Assembly. It was a fun, productive and lively gathering where we got to know each other more and made key decisions about the organization's overall strategy and structure for the coming year.

Anne Marie, an Organizing Committee Leader in Pottsville, kicked off the day sharing with us the history and economy of Schuylkill County. In small groups to share personal stories of how our basic needs are not currently being met, and to discuss how organizing our communities can change our situation for the better. In one breakout group, an Organizing Committee Leader talked about some of the challenges and self-doubts she had as a new organizer. Sandy from the Vermont Workers Center — having faced a similar learning curve a few years ago — shared tips and readings to support the new organizer on her way to becoming a powerful leader in her community.

We listened to a presentation by the Research Team on different issues that were investigated to potentially be our first campaign. Those issues included healthcare, education, jobs, housing, transportation, food and the environment. After getting all the facts, we discussed the pros and cons of focusing on one issue over the other, knowing that all of the issues are connected in our lives and often one affects the others.

The questions we asked ourselves were:

- Which issue would unite the most people across the entire state?
- Which issue, if we won, would change what's considered "politically possible"?
- Which issue is winnable, without compromising our five principles?

Finally, we took a vote to decide our first campaign: Healthcare is a Human Right!

Building Our Membership, Building Our Power

Another big discussion on our agenda for the day was membership and dues. We wanted to clarify how we can build the organization so that anyone can be a member. At the same time, we wanted to ensure decisions are made by active members, who have taken on responsibility, and put in the time and energy to make the most informed and grounded decisions about our work.

We discussed having two kinds of membership: "members" for people who want to stay connected but can't commit to being active, and "voting members" for people who are active in an Organizing Committee or Team.

We also talked about creating a dues system to deepen our investment in the work and maximize our power in numbers. The dues we discussed would be a sliding scale, so people pay what they can. Everyone is expected to contribute something, but no one will be turned away if they can not.

(Continued on Page 4)



Membership Assembly, Cont...

(Continued from Page 3)

Overall, the Membership Assembly was a historic occasion. We celebrated the victories of the last year, strategized for the coming year, and strengthened our resolve to Put People First! Looking forward to next year! ♦



Membership and Dues

by Nijmie Dzurinko, volunteer staff

Put People First! PA was started with faith, hope and vision. Faith in the potential of everyday people across the state. Hope that we can overcome and outsmart those who would pit us against each other for their own gain. And the vision of moving from our individual struggles to a “new and unsettling force” that MLK talked about at the end of his life -- able to take collective action and change what is politically possible in Pennsylvania.

One of the things that makes PPF-PA unique is that we are building a clear, competent, committed and connected base. There are almost 13 million people in our state of 67 counties. Anyone who agrees that our basic needs are our human rights, and agrees with our principles is welcome to become a member.

Claiming our basic needs as our human rights is not tinkering around the edges. What we’re doing challenges the “powers that be” on a fundamental level. It has the potential to change the way society works, to be a model beyond PA, and to be the cracks that burst the dam of everyday people’s activity. Yet we can’t be independent if we don’t have some financial sustainability. If all our funding comes from some external source, we need to do what they say, and we’ll always

be in fear of having that funding cut.

That’s why we began a conversation at the membership assembly about membership dues. We need to be able to support a lot of people to be involved at different levels. In order to be “bottom up” instead of “top down” in our structure, we need staff who can focus on making all of our time as effective as possible. We need to equip new members with the materials they need, and to bring people together across the state, we have to pay for a lot of gas and bus tickets. Aside from all that, membership dues are a form of participation, another principle.

Equity is also one of our principles and therefore dues contributions have to be on a sliding scale that is affordable for everyone’s budget. Early in 2014, we will review and pass a final dues structure before moving forward with signing up hundreds of people who’ve been involved with Put People First! PA over the last year as official members! ♦

Membership Details

Dues

\$3 / month
Or more, if able.

Members

- Invited to Members-only events, like trainings & the yearly assembly
- Receive the members’ newsletter
- Access to members-only online content & Forum

Voting Members

- Active in a Team or O.C.
- Can vote in organization-wide decisions

“It’s not about going to a meeting every week, but being out on the street talking to your neighbors about what they’re struggling with”

— Jackie Wilson, former Harrisburg O.C. Leader

For Employees Like My Mom, Wal-Mart is the New Company Store

by Grace Lucas

Lykens, Dauphin County

A line in an old country song goes, "I owe my soul to the company store." When we hear that, our thoughts go back to the old coal mines, or perhaps a scene from the Molly Maguires.

Imagine instead my mother, a slightly-built woman of a certain age with false teeth and graying hair, wearing the trademark blue and tan uniform of the all powerful Wal-Mart. On Thanksgiving, Wal-Mart was open, and my mother worked 12 hours, 10 a.m. to 10 p.m.

Everyone's argument seems to be that if we don't approve of a business's behavior we should simply not shop there. "Use your consumer power," they say.

Exactly how much consumer power do you think a Wal-Mart employee has? The rock-bottom, guaranteed-lower-than-our-competitor's prices drive the less-affluent to shop there. Employees get a 10 percent discount for further incentive. So, of course they're going to shop there.

Wal-Mart provides health insurance for full time employees, which is one of the few reasons my mother still works. She and my father have an expensive list of prescription drugs they need monthly. The catch is, she has to get them at the pharmacy inside Wal-Mart because if she goes elsewhere, her insurance will pay substantially less or nothing toward it.

So in a typical day, my mother prob-

ably hands half of her daily pay back to Wal-Mart in one form or another. Even the handy debit card her check is deposited on is issued by a bank affiliated with Wal-Mart. They'll get the money for her lunch at the hot foods counter, the groceries she picks up at the end of the day, and even the money for her prescriptions.

As much as I would like Wal-Mart to just disappear or at the very least act appropriately, I know neither of these things will happen. They have created a system dependent on itself that breeds greed at the very top and desperate need at the bottom. ♦

Base-Building Update

by Mitch Troutman

Staff Field Organizer

It's been a big year. The Base-Building Team is responsible for connecting to different regions, starting and supporting local Organizing Committees. We've put a lot of miles on the road, met hundreds of people and been to so many counties that I can't count them all. It's taken a lot of teamwork, and we've got a lot of stories.

Holly used to be part of the Vermont Workers' Center, and moved to Scranton a few years ago. She was one of the very first people we met as a group. We explored a lot as we got to know her. We haven't been able to get an O.C. together for her yet, so if you know anyone in Scranton, tell them about PPF!

The first time I met Virgil, we talked PPF for about 20 minutes, and he just started calling friends and coworkers, telling them they need to join. We went to a BBQ, neighbors called neighbors, and not long after, the Mount Carmel O.C. got started.

Not every O.C. that was started is still active, but all have made a huge contribution. We've been able to improve our work

with the help of many members and leaders along the way. It's a major strength of ours that we're disciplined yet adaptable. Confidence but able to be critical and learn.

O.C.'s have gone door knocking, canvassing and have hosted mass meetings. Through it all, it's clear that people of all stripes connect with our message and work. Our basic needs are what matters, and we're not leaving anyone out.

It's been a challenging to keep O.C.'s engaged without a campaign, so we're also eager to kick off Healthcare is a Human Right. The excitement and clarity of a campaign will get way more people involved and give O.C.'s tactics and activities to use.

What's to come with Base-Building? More people are getting in touch with us each week, so expect more O.C.'s to form. Because of great support by the Fundraising Team, we'll be able to stipend new field organizers this Winter in Philly and the Lehigh Valley, providing a lot more capacity and support.

Always feel free ask the Base-Building Team what's going on. We're happy to share. ♦

Get Active

Put People First! PA is all about building power from the bottom up. To do that, we need you. Now is a great time to get involved.

Start a local Organizing Committee

Set up an orientation today. Start by talking to friends, neighbors, family and co-workers and see who's interested. Set a time and place, and contact a field organizer. You'll be surprised how many people want to fight for something better, but just haven't had a way to do it until now.

Join a Team

If you have 5 hours a week, have computer access and are good at working as part of a group, let us know. We need more people involved in Campaign, Base-Building, Fundraising and Media. Team members live all across the state and coordinate their work with biweekly meetings.

Call us. (570) 483-8813

Respect is the Foundation for Organizing

In most workplaces, workers aren't respected. Most of us don't get paid well enough, or get a real voice on the job. Additionally, the American value system is very distorted at this moment in history--celebrity seems to be valued over integrity, wealth is more important than talent, and power is its own justification. All of this means that regular working people and our occupations are given little respect by the media or politicians, and certainly not by the corporate class.

What we as workers can do--whether we have a union or not--is to show respect for one another and ourselves. This is the foundation for powerful organizing. When you have self-respect, it means you won't put up with bullying, intimidation, or exploitation. When you respect your co-workers, it means you value their experience and know they have something important to add to the plan for solving problems at work.

This is not always easy to do. We get frustrated, impatient, or agitated about differences over religion, morality, political views, or personal habits. But you, as an organizer, can work hard to get past those feelings and find a basis of shared respect simply as workers. It is important to encourage open and honest talk about issues, without personal judgment or criticism. This will make people want to organize at your side.

What is a Leader?

Leaders help others see and make change. Leaders look at problems and suggest solutions that make sense to people. They motivate and energize others. Good leaders have vision, listen to others and stay open to alternatives.

The future of our movement depends on increasing the number of leaders with vision.

Developing leaders is a long-term project. The benefits may not be clear in one year or even two. You don't know who is going to emerge, who will take the skills and put them into practice.

In the News

National

Oxford researchers say that **45 percent of America's occupations will be automated within the next 20 years**. They say logistics, production & administrative work, services and sales are at risk, followed by engineering, science and management once technology is available.

If **congress passes the Trans-Pacific Partnership, 90 of the U.S. population will see a wage cut**, according to a study from the Center for Economic and Policy Research. That's everyone making less than \$87,000 a year. The secret trade policy is looking less likely, however, after Wikileaks revealed plans to raise prescription drug prices and allow tobacco companies to sue governments.

"Paying more than 30 percent of your income on rent is what experts call unaffordable. Yet the number of people who fall into that group has reached record numbers, according to a new report from the Joint Center for Housing Studies of Harvard University. While high unemployment levels are a factor, **there has also been a steep rise in the number of people who are working and still struggling to pay rent**."

When healthcare.gov insurance policies begin in the new year, they will come with **high deductibles and co-pays**. Will this be another nation-wide shock over Obamacare?

A grassroots movement has started in the South. The faith-based "**Moral Mondays**" is **bringing people together all across urban & rural North Carolina** to fight for voting rights, healthcare, social services, racial justice and public education. As one leader, Rev. Barber puts it, "It is not about right or left; it's about right or wrong." The protests are characterized by peacefully entering the state legislature building and then being peacefully arrested.

State

Many Western PA boroughs have empty seats, as no candidates are running for office. This was noted **in Somerset County, where 17 or 25 Boroughs will have vacant seats**, but is true for much of the state's rural townships and boroughs.

A judge is calling an end to the four-year battle between UPMC & Highmark, the "nonprofit" health giants fighting for monopoly control of Western PA. The real losers in this fight have been the 4.8 million people whose insurance isn't accepted at local hospitals. Highmark alone made a profit of over \$15 billion in 2012.

Governor Corbett's "Healthy PA" program is designed to subsidize insurance companies with Medicaid dollars, rather than using it outright to insure people. By doing this, he's **turned down federal Medicaid funding that would have covered 600,000 people starting January 1st**. His program currently has no time-line, and may be illegal under federal law.

Healthcare is a Human Right - Maryland

Hi. I'm Stephen Wallace. I'm an organizer for HCHR in Huntingtown, Calvert County, Maryland.

How did you get started?

For Calvert County, we got involved after meeting Margaret Flowers at Occupy. She was in contact with Sergio (field organizer). We had our first meeting a few weeks after meeting him. He came and met a group of us, and from there we started gathering surveys.

The surveying is part of the statewide campaign. We're gathering statistics on what people actually think about this. It's a simple questionnaire, asking about people's healthcare, and if they believe healthcare is a human right. We ask about individual problems.

The benefit is actually getting to talk to people, on a very personal level. You don't have to shove any 'left' or 'right' ideas down anyone's throat. You just pull on what people are thinking. You get a sense things are wrong, and something needs to be done about it.

What's your county like?

What's a polite way to put this? Calvert County is pretty quiet, and very rural. There's not that much that goes on... a lot of supermarkets and churches. A very religious community. The only real community center is the farmer's market in the summer. This county feels very passive, although there's activists working on issues from a religious perspective. Not every church is fundamentalist, though that is around.

How do the Chapters work together?

Right now, I'm on the Leadership Council, and there's two members from each chapter. We talk by phone once a month. Those coordinating meetings are really refreshing. We also do simple things like Human Rights Dinners. Social networking. We meet up in person at least every three months.

Has your chapter done public events?

We just had a Healthcare Justice march. We marched through the streets of Baltimore, and even had a marching

band. People came outside to see what was going on. There were people on the rooftops watching. The local news came. We raised some awareness, and had people from all across the state involved in it. Including people I hadn't seen from my own county! It's had only a positive effect.

What's next for the Campaign?

It's just organizing for what we can. I think the Leadership Council is going to help policy, getting the message out, collecting data. We need those statistics, and we have to do that ourselves. Everything that's involved in research. There's a lot to do, but that's the point of having a movement of people. This kind of organic, multi-talented, multi-faceted group of people that is able to accomplish all of these things. ♦



Healthcare Justice March, Baltimore. Photo courtesy of HCHR-MD

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Honoring the Late Peg Franzen

by Alia Trindle
Volunteer staff

On International Human Rights Day, December 10th, a few members of Put People First! PA attended an event in New York City to honor Peg Franzen, a community leader who made a huge contribution to growing the movement for health care as a human right in Vermont. At the event - hosted by the National Economic and Social Rights Initiative and the Poverty Initiative - over a hundred of us gathered to pay tribute to Peg's legacy and to discuss the road ahead.

Although we lost Peg Franzen to cancer on November 9th of this year, we were able to hear her inspiring words via video, as she explained how the healthcare victory in Vermont was driven by a campaign grounded in values and principles, such as universality and equity, rather than a focus on technical policy fixes. Peg is a shining example of the strong grassroots leadership Put People First! PA is building across the state: leaders who have a deep love and care for their communities, and the tenacity to take on legislators in the struggle for human rights.

After looking back at Peg's life, we did what she would have wanted: we continued to build the movement for health care as a human right. Nijmie Dzurinko joined other organizers from the Healthcare is a Human Right Campaigns in Vermont, Maine, and Maryland in a lively panel discussion. Each organizer spoke

to their commitment to human rights values and vision, and to putting people at the center of the struggle. We had so much in common. Connecting around our shared struggles, we left with a renewed belief that the work of organizing can and must transform us. ♦

“Organizing is about building relationships, building trust, and believing in what you’re doing.”

-Peg Franzen



Peg, former president of the Vermont Workers Center.