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Mission Statement

Community Voices Heard (CVH) is an organization of low-income people, predominantly women on welfare, working to build power in New York City and State to improve the lives of our families and communities. We are working to accomplish this through a multi-pronged strategy, including public education, grassroots organizing, leadership development, training low-income people about their rights, political education, grassroots-driven research, civic engagement and direct-action issue campaigns. We are currently working on welfare reform, job creation and workforce development, public housing preservation and improvement,

and other economic justice issues that affect low-income people, particularly low-income women of color.

CVH is unique in that we are run, directed and informed by the perspective of poor people, particularly women of color. We have consistently been the organization that brings women's voices and leadership to the forefront of strategizing constructive solutions and organizing from an economic justice perspective.

We fill a crucial gap in that our organization connects public policy with grassroots organizing and leadership development.



Newsletter

Winter / Spring 2008

www.CVHaction.org



CVH Sends Message to Presidential Candidates

By Efrain Ortiz, Member (NYC)

On January 26th, Community Voices Heard marched to demand that the Presidential Candidates address issues concerning low-income communities in their campaign speeches and debates. We also demanded that the Senators do more to move forward Senate Bill 1664 Gulf Coast Recovery Act to prevent further demolitions of public housing in New Orleans.

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CVH Leader Ann Valdez (Current Organizer Trainee) Calls on Presidential Candidates to Stop Demolition of Public Housing

Yonkers Members Brave Cold to Send Message to City Hall

By Sarah Thomason, Westchester Community Organizer

(Yonkers, NY) On Tuesday, February 12th it was cold and snowy, but that didn't stop Community Voices Heard Yonkers members from marching to City Hall to demand that the city include housing and jobs for low-income families when they rebuild Getty Square and commit to not tearing down any more public housing. Members started the march in Chicken Island, the proposed site of a new development of a baseball stadium, retail stores, and luxury apartments. We then marched through Getty Square carrying heart shaped signs that said "don't break our hearts, build low-income housing too!" and chanting "brick by brick, wall by wall, build a city for us all!" Once we reached City Hall, members presented themselves with a giant key to the city and left hundreds of keys along the steps to City Hall to send a message that low-income residents refuse to be locked out; the city belongs to us too!

Members were marching to bring more attention to issues affecting low-income families, and it worked! The march was not only covered by the Westchester Guardian, Home News & Times, Journal News, and

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CVH Members Testify At State Budget Hearings on Housing

By Ann Valdez, Member (NYC) & Sarah Thomason, Westchester Community Organizer

(Albany, NY) On January 29th, Community Voices Heard sent a delegation of leaders to Albany to testify in front of the New York State Legislature's budget hearing on housing issues.

Three CVH members from each of our chapters testified before a panel of State Senators and Assembly Members about how funding for public and low-income housing could impact their lives and their communities. Yusuf Belford, a CVH member from Newburgh, spoke about homelessness and the need for good quality affordable housing for low-income people. Valerie Pearson, a CVH member from Yonkers, talked about redevelopment plans for her neighborhood that are threatening to displace public housing and low-income residents. Ann Valdez, a CVH member from Brooklyn, testified on the need for the state to fund public housing in New York City.

We went on this trip because our testimony is a good way for our state officials to learn what the people of our communities need most. They do not know what our everyday lives are like

and what our lives would be like if they do not fund the programs we need the most, such as New York City public housing. The city only started funding the developments last year, they neglected public housing for 12 years prior. This is negligent on their part and alarming for us, the residents who have to worry day to day about how we will sustain our homes.

After having the chance to express my concerns about this issue, members felt as though the elected officials had a better understanding of the crucial issues at hand and the desperate need to address these issues. At the end of the testimonies, Vito Lopez, an Assemblyman from Brooklyn and the Chair of the Committee on Housing, said that he agrees that the State needs to fund housing for low-income families and even volunteered to hold a pizza party for our Yonkers chapter!

You can read the testimonies and view the video on our website at:

www.CVHaction.org/jan29

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Yonkers Members March to City Hall Through the Snow

Channel 12 News, but also got the attention of Mayor Amicone and the developer building the baseball stadium in Getty Square, Steuver Fidelco Capelli. Representatives from both the mayor's office and the developer called us just before the march, saying they were very upset that we were marching, but that they would be willing to meet with us. Now we are going to hold them to their promise! Yonkers CVH members are inviting the Mayor, City Council members, and the developer to a community forum in early June to demand that the development include low-income families instead of pushing them out.

CVH Meets with CEO's Veronica White to Propose New Initiative to Expand Transitional Jobs Program

By Stephen Bradley, Board Member (NYC)

(New York, NY) On Wednesday, February 13th, 2008, five Community Voices Heard Members and three CVH staff met with Veronica White, the Executive Director of the NYC Center for Economic Opportunity (CEO), and her assistant Hector Salazar-Salame at the CVH Office. The CEO is a new mayoral office in charge of implementing the recommendations of the Commission for Economic Opportunity. CVH was deeply involved in trying to influence the Commission's recommendations and now we have set up a continuous communication with Veronica White, meeting with her every six months. At this meeting we proposed a new initiative meant to bring the transitional jobs program to three populations of New Yorkers who are struggling to find work: welfare recipients, the formerly incarcerated and disconnected youth.

The new initiative came out of research that we conducted into the Transitional Work

Corporation (TWC) in Philadelphia, PA. This program was developed using public and private funds and offers a way to expand the transitional jobs program. Our program would create a non-profit entity to focus on the administration of a transitional jobs program in NYC. We would like to see new monies allocated in the mayor's next executive budget. Mayor Bloomberg has expressed on numerous occasions that his focus will be on making a measurable dent in poverty in NYC. If this is true, then we would like to see him leave office with a legacy of sustainable programs created to raise some of the most disenfranchised New Yorkers out of poverty. This program has been proven effective in Philadelphia and had very high rates of connecting welfare recipients to jobs. The CEO is looking for programs like this one that are effective and innovative.

Ms. White expressed interest in our initiative

and told us that it was consistent with the mission of the Center for Economic Opportunity. She told us that there is not enough money in the 2008 budget to have any new initiatives this year but that it might be possible next year as current programs are evaluated and some get discontinued. She promised to read our proposal more thoroughly and talk to the appropriate people to learn more



NYC CEO's Veronica White at CVH

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CVH Holds First Statewide Leaders Meeting

By Sarah Thomason, Westchester County Organizer



Members and Staff of CVH From All Three Chapters Meet in Yonkers

By 2004, Community Voices Heard members had won some huge victories in New York City. However, CVH realized that if it wanted to win even bigger victories around welfare and jobs issues that are decided at the state level, it would have to build power statewide. In 2006, therefore, CVH formed a chapter in Yonkers, and in 2007 CVH started organizing in Newburgh and Poughkeepsie as well. Since then, CVH has been building a base of members and developing campaigns around economic justice issues in each location.

On March 15th, leaders representing each CVH chapter and campaign met in Yonkers for our first ever statewide leadership meeting. This meeting was a chance for leaders from the different chapters to get to know one another, and also the beginning of members uniting

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we spent the rest of our time in Albany going to the offices of these Assembly members to thank them for signing on to Keith Wright's letter. Even though we were thankful for their sentiments, we asked them to sign on to another letter demanding funding for public housing. Once we had finished visiting the Assembly members we had accomplished our task and headed home.

to work on the issues that affect low-income people across the entire state.

"It is the start of us seeing ourselves as one organization. Coming together gave everyone a sense of who we are as an organization," said Ketny Jean-Francois, CVH board member from NYC.

Leaders talked about the campaigns they were working on locally, discussed issues that were affecting low-income people in all NY communities, and brainstormed the ways we could fight together on the issues we have in common. Participants in the meeting decided to hold a larger statewide meeting that will incorporate more members later in the Spring. Call the office to find out how you can participate!

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about transitional jobs. CVH will continue to work with Veronica White so that she can help us gather support for our new initiative up until the new administration comes into office. We will be pushing to get this new initiative funded during the next budget cycle.

New Dues Paying Members

(January - April, 2008)

- Zoila Almonte
- Agnes Rivera
- Linda Williams
- Adrienne Knight
- James Caldwell
- Pearl Barkley
- Minnie Green
- Blanche Mumford
- Keith Massey
- Matthew Jordan
- Efrain Ortiz
- Hilda Cardoza
- Ray Lopez
- Maimuna DesVignes
- Tyletha Samuels
- Ketny Jean-Francois
- Roxanne Reed
- Euline Williams
- Josephine Mariliano
- Phyllis Harrison
- Stephen Bradley
- Anne Washington
- Yvonne Shields
- Valerie Pearson
- Ann Valdez
- Shari Chea
- Wilbur Green
- Adam Sparks
- Phoebe Massey
- Sandra Killett
- Ann Bragg
- Shenia Rudolph
- Marilyn Bezear
- Dorothy Williams Pereira
- Jacob Fetman
- Tiara Velez
- Louise Forrest
- Annette Arthur
- Phyllis Jackson

Become a Dues Paying Member Today!

Dues are \$60 a year (that is \$10 every 2 months). Send in your first \$10 payment and be included in the list of dues paying members who are supporting CVH.

All checks should be made out to Community Voices Heard and sent to:

Community Voices Heard
115 E 106th St., 3rd Floor
New York, NY 10029
Attn: Mike Selick

Act Now and Double Your Support!

We currently have a donor who will be giving us \$1000 for every 25 members who pay their first \$10. So send in your dues now and your money will go even further.

CVH is all over the Internet!

Website: www.CVHaction.org

Myspace: www.myspace.com/CVHaction

YouTube: www.youtube.com/CVHaction

Facebook: www.CVHaction.org/join-facebook

CVH Delegates Attend Right to the City Convening in Oakland, CA

By Alexa Kasdan, Policy & Research Coordinator

(Oakland, CA) From February 28th through March 2nd, Community Voices Heard leader Anne Washington and Alexa Kasdan, CVH's Policy and Research Coordinator, traveled to Oakland, CA for the Right to the City (RTTC) 2008 National Planning Meeting. Community Voices Heard joined 55 other people, representing 30 organizations from seven



Right to the City Convening

cities/regions around the country. The Right to the City is a national alliance of grassroots, base-building organizations and resource allies that came together to create a movement to combat gentrification and the displacement of low-income communities of color from urban areas. The national alliance formed out of existing regional alliances and was born in January 2007 at a convening of the

participating regions in Los Angeles California. While CVH has been active in the NYC Right to the City since its inception, this was the first national Right to the City meeting that we attended. Because of our campaign to save and preserve public housing, CVH participated in the meeting as a member of the newly formed Right to the City national HUD working group.

The HUD workgroup formed out of relationships built in July 2007, at the USSF in Atlanta, GA when organizations and tenants from around the country shared experiences and strategies in their local campaigns focused on public and subsidized housing. During the 2nd Anniversary of Hurricane Katrina, several organizations in the Right to the City Alliance traveled to New Orleans and witnessed the impact that HUD's disastrous policies were and are having on the city. These representatives also took action, participating, along with New Orleans public housing residents, in a takeover of the Housing Authority of New Orleans (HANO).

In Oakland, 9 organizations from 6 regions met as the HUD working group to discuss the vision, policy priorities, and strategy for building a national movement of public and subsidized housing residents. In the discussion, the group came up with the following priority issues: establishing a moratorium



CVH Board Member Anne Washington

on the loss of public housing (including demolitions, conversions and sales) until comprehensive public housing reform legislation is passed, reforming HOPE VI (a federal program that has led to the demolition and displacement of thousands), improving resident participation and organizing in public and subsidized housing, and fighting for full funding of public and subsidized housing programs. We also determined the long term goals of building more public housing and redefining the "mixed-income" frame that is used in the media to discuss "good" subsidized housing and the crime, deterioration and concentrated poverty frame that is used to discuss "bad" subsidized housing.

Following the meeting in Oakland, the workgroup will continue to plan strategy to build towards a national campaign to save and preserve public and subsidized housing.

Chicago Shows CVH that the Crisis in Public Housing is Real

By Keith Massey, Member (NYC)

(Chicago, IL) On February 29th, a delegation of CVH public housing resident members landed in Chicago, Illinois to take part in a national conference hosted by the National Training Information Center (NTIC). NTIC is a capacity building organization that provides training and information for grassroots organizations around the country. We met to gather information about conditions across the nation and to discuss strategies to stop the dismantling of public housing throughout the US.

CVH representatives were upset to see the clear visualizations of our fears when we were driven around Chicago to view the demolitions of public housing that have been occurring. There were large blocks of empty public housing buildings that were boarded up and

slotted for demolition as well as some empty lots where housing once stood. Conditions throughout the country in cities such as Chicago, New Orleans, Los Angeles, Virginia, Seattle, and more are already much worse than what we are facing here in New York, however, we realize that if we do not keep pushing for funding for NYCHA we will be in the exact same place in the near future.

We identified common themes for all the cities involved. In each case people were worried that they could lose their homes. People have seen their neighborhoods be gentrified and fear that their buildings will become privatized and/or demolished and they will be displaced. Residents from across the country are questioning, "If they destroy our homes, where will we go?"

Through the conference we were able to gather the minds of those involved in these issues to figure out what we should be doing to fight back. We have decided to keep in contact with organizations from the conference through emails, conference calls, and future meetings. We are also planning on putting together a film that will educate the public about the issues of public housing across the country. In April we joined this same group for an action in Washington, DC in April to push HUD to stop the dismantling of public housing throughout the country. Through this trip we were able to get a better picture of how low-income communities and public housing are being affected by changes in our cities. The future may look bleak, but with all of these organizations working together we have the power to change these trends.

Fighting for a Penny per Pound

By Agnes Rivera, Board Member (NYC)



The Crowd at the Rally Outside the Burger King Headquarters in Miami, Florida with the Coalition of Immokalee Workers

(Miami, FL) On November 30th, 2007 people from all over the states converged on Miami to march on the Burger King headquarters in solidarity with the Coalition of Immokalee Workers (CIW) and Community Voices Heard was there to show our support!

CVH was represented by Board Member Agnes Rivera, Leader Ann Valdez, and Staff Mike Selick. The CIW is an organization of tomato farmers, largely immigrant workers, who are fighting for one more penny per pound. They have been working on this campaign for years and can claim major victories in getting both Taco Bell

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This march unified Community Voices Heard by bringing out members from across the City and State. Members came from as far away as Coney Island, Yonkers, Poughkeepsie, and Newburgh. This was the first big march where CVH members from across chapters united for a common cause and truly showed how we will be able to affect change across New York State.

January 26th holds a particular significance because the World Social Forum (a process for bringing progressive groups and individuals together) decided that January 26th, 2008 would be a Global Day of Action where groups from around the globe would organize protests, teach-ins, etc., in order to build our social movement. CVH decided that we would have a New Orleans style funeral march to mourn the death of low-income communities

and to highlight the connection between the demolitions of public housing in New Orleans and the need for funding for public housing here in NY.

The members and leaders of CVH marched to the Senator Clinton's campaign office where we took over the building's lobby demanding to talk to the NY State Campaign manager. We left a few representatives from CVH at the Clinton office to speak with the campaign manager, Ms. Persichilli Keogh, and proceeded on our march. The representatives spoke with her when she arrived to meet them, laid out our interests, and got her to agree to discuss them with the national campaign director.

The rest of the group we marched on to Columbus Circle where a Senator Barack

and McDonalds to agree to pay workers an additional penny per pound for tomatoes.

The action was a nine mile march and it included the workers, children, teens, adults, students, activists, other grassroots organizations, and more. The young and old marched together in the scorching Miami sun and chanted, "One more penny". However, to the people in the street the heat was not the concern, building the movement was.

Not many of us can say we have walked a mile in the migrant workers' shoes. They work as slaves for very minimal pay while their reasonable demands of one more penny per pound are ignored by Burger King executives. We met the CIW members and they informed us that many of them are living in trailers with 15 other people, working 60 hour plus weeks, and making whatever other sacrifices are necessary to make ends meet. They believe that a simple extra penny per pound would alleviate some of their hardships.

As the march passed many Burger King Restaurants they handed out free burgers to their customers as a way to distract them from our issue. How can Burger King hand out free meat which obviously is more expensive then paying the workers more? How can they exploit their workers who are asking for so little? One penny more per pound would mean each burger would cost the company a small fraction of a cent more, but Burger King still refuses to pay.

Obama rally was scheduled to take place. We marched through the Time Warner Mall on the way and were able to bring our issues to some new people. At Columbus Circle we held a press conference right next to the Obama rally. We were chanting and singing and making a lot of noise. We approached Assemblyman Bill Perkins who was coming out to support Obama and asked him to help us get the candidate to address our issues. He promised to meet with us before February 5th (the day of the NY State Primary) and help get our message to Senator Obama. He did not follow through on that promise. Community Voices Heard does not support any particular candidate in the election, but works to make sure that all candidates include our issues in their priorities.

Poughkeepsie Update

By Jenny Loeb, Mid-Hudson Valley Organizer

Here in Poughkeepsie, we are organizing for change! We've had a few big meetings to try to flesh out what issues are affecting the low-income community here. Unfortunately there is more than enough to keep us busy: Social Services is not meeting our needs, there is a lack of good paying jobs and training, and high rents and poor conditions in most of the public and subsidized housing. In the coming months, we will continue to meet and train new CVH members here in Poughkeepsie how to fight for ourselves, our families, and our community! Joining with other members and leaders in the region as well as other CVH chapters in the state, we are building POWER to create real change for low-income families. At the last meeting, members discussed the possibility of moving forward with a meeting with the Dutchess county Department of Social Services Commissioner, Robert Allers.

We've Grown!

Community Voices Heard now has offices in three locations:

PLEASE STOP BY AND VISIT!

New York City (Main Office)
115 East 106th Street, 3rd Floor
New York, NY 10029
Tel: (212) 860-6001
Fax: (212) 996-9481

Yonkers
164 Ashburton Ave., 2nd Floor
Yonkers, NY 10701
Tel: (914) 751-2641
Fax: (914) 751-2642

Mid-Hudson Valley
18 Lander St.
Newburgh, NY 12550
Tel: (845) 562-2020
Fax: (845) 562-2030

WeCARE About REAL Care!

By Tyletha Samuels, Member (NYC)

On October 22nd, 2007, Community Voices Heard members and staff testified at the New York City Council's General Welfare Committee Hearing on the WeCARE program at City Hall. WeCARE is the NYC Human Resources Administration's (HRA) welfare to work program for people with barriers to employment. Community Voices Heard was instrumental in making the hearing happen because of our research report, *Failure to Comply: The Disconnect Between, Design and Implementation in HRA's WeCARE Program*, and organizing efforts to monitor the WeCARE program. The hearing was at a crucial time, right before HRA was to renew the \$200 million dollar three year contracts.

The hearing was held to bring awareness to the City Council about the problems and issues faced by WeCARE participants. CVH members wanted the committee to hear first-hand about how clients were not getting help to apply for SSI, how vendors were not providing the outreach that they were required to provide to clients who had missed WeCARE appointments, and how WeCARE participants feel that they are lumped into job preparation classes with people of all different levels of

work experience and education. These are just a few of the issues that CVH members raised so that the committee could put pressure on HRA to make changes to improve the program.

Three weeks later, on November 14, 2007, CVH members and staff met with Dr. Frank Lipton, Executive Deputy Commissioner/ Medical Director of HRA and the architect of the WeCARE program to let him hear the same issues first-hand and see what he could do to ensure that the WeCARE program is the best that it can be for public assistance recipients with barriers to employment. Dr. Lipton listened to CVH members and provided us with information about how WeCARE vendors were implementing changes based on recommendations made by CVH members.

Because of all of the attention that CVH has brought to the problems of the WeCARE program, the New York City Comptroller's Office has begun an audit to examine the WeCARE program more deeply. Despite all of this action, we still need you, the people who, like myself, are affected by this program to continue to come out to CVH to speak out and create solutions to the problems that are affecting us.

Public Housing Albany Trip

By Anne Washington, Board Member (NYC)



Models of Our View of Public Housing

On December 18th 2007, delegates of Community Voices Heard went to the state capital to further our campaign to fund Public Housing. This was a strategic time for the trip because there was a hearing to allow residents to vouch for what they felt should be in the State budget. We felt that elected officials needed to be reminded of the importance of public housing, so we brought them some holiday cheer by leaving cards and candy canes to remind the elected officials to fund public housing.

Last year the state put \$3.4 million into public housing as a result of our work. This was the first funding the state has provided for public housing in a decade. CVH views the state funding as a huge victory for the campaign; however, we realize that the State will need to put significantly more money into public housing (\$70 million every year) to cover the costs of running the buildings.

The second reason that we went to Albany was to circulate a letter of support for funding for public housing. At a recent forum about public housing held at the New School, Sean Moss, the regional director of the Federal Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), advocated for the sale of some public housing buildings in order to raise money for NYCHA's budget deficit. State Assembly Member Keith Wright circulated a letter which was signed by other Assembly members demanding that Sean Moss be fired for his statements.

After we had finished with the budget hearing,

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Newburgh Members Flex Their Muscles!

By Jenny Loeb, Mid-Hudson Valley Organizer



Newburgh Members Meet with City Planner to Discuss Concerns with Master Plan

(Newburgh, NY) Members of the Newburgh chapter have been talking: there are way too many members paying more than they can afford in rent, living in substandard housing or homeless, and not able to find a decent place to live. Members know that there is money that can be used to create better and more affordable housing in our community, but it is being used to support development for wealthy people.

The City of Newburgh is weeks away from passing its Master Plan, which will guide land use and development for the next 40 years. CVH members came up with 6 demands that we are pushing to get changed in the Plan, including raising the targeted percentage of affordable housing in the City, creating an Inclusionary Zoning Ordinance to include low-income housing in new development, and prioritizing the redevelopment of vacant buildings for low-income residents, and having low-income people sit on housing boards.

On March 20th, members met with City Planner Ian MacDougall and one of his assistants, who edit the Plan and have the power to provide recommended changes to the City Council before they vote on it. CVH members Cleveland Williams, Jennifer Smith, and Cleo McKinney gave great testimony about their struggles living in Newburgh and what policies would make the lives of

community members better. After each “ask” we put the City Planner on the spot and made him give explanations of why the Plan doesn’t support the low-income community. We got him to agree on the spot to two of our demands, and promise to look into the others! He agreed to include low-income residents on any board dealing with housing issues and to defining affordable in the plan according to Newburgh’s median household income which is \$32,000.

The Newburgh chapter’s first target meeting was a success! Members felt POWERFUL and they got results. Members learned more about the people who make decisions for us, and forced them to listen to us, the very people whose lives will be shaped by the decisions they make.

Board Members 2008



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