



Poor People's United Fund

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Boston's Spare Change Community

Easter/Passover 2013

*"All sources of help are hurting- not as much as people who are starving, but enough so that once again, we have to ask: Where the hell is the moral compass by which we used to be guided?
Why are there so many more "Have nots?" (Kip Tiernan)*

Dear Sisters and Brothers,

While driving home one night I nearly drove off the road listening to a pair of radio talk show hosts debating whether or not the President should accept 'the Donald's (Trump) offer to pay for White House tours which had been cut from the budget due to the sequester.

Here we have LIHEAP (Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program) totally out of money to help people get some oil for heat. We have people forced to live in "places unfit for human habitation" in order to become eligible for emergency shelter. We have cuts to WIC (women, infants & children) causing children to lose food benefits. We have seniors losing meals on wheels. And radio show hosts take 2 precious hours of air time to talk about losing White House tours. It was just one more example of the absence of any substantive discussions about the growing numbers of people who are falling off of a different kind of cliff while the stock market soars.

At the same time, it has become very popular to bash poverty programs. Politicians and talk show hosts have found it easy to portray themselves as protectors of the public good by portraying poor people as bad, poverty programs as wasteful and fraud as rampant in those systems.

The fall-out from this manipulation of public sentiment is, of course, that more children will starve, more people will be cold, more and more people will be homeless. In her article about food stamps Georgia reveals how grossly deceptive the public discussion has become.

Kip and I used to complain about how programs to help poor people become industries that manage the problem rather than change it. In 1988, Kip predicted if we didn't do something about hunger, homelessness and poverty, soon that taxpayers would become custodians of this growing disenfranchised segment of our society. Her prediction has come true. And it seems clear from the public debate that people have tired of their custodial role. People have tired of providing even the most basic of human needs.

Since we have a new pope it seems appropriate that we cite some Catholic Social Teaching that calls us to a different standard. Our old economist friend Sr. Amata Miller, IHM wrote summarizing John Paul II's goals: "According to Vatican II, the best way to make political life really human is to develop consciences rooted in justice, a sense of co-responsibility for the common good....The needs of those who are poor take priority over the desires of the non-poor, the rights of the workers over the maximization of profits, and production for social needs over that for military purposes." We shall see if Francis truly sees things this way.

Here at PPUF we continue to believe we can do better. So we keep at it....providing what we can by way of help with food and other vital needs when we can. We continue to speak up about injustice in any forum we can find.

Things would be a lot worse were it not for you... who with us believe as Jesus and the prophets before him did... that we must love one another -we are our brother's and sister's keepers. We must believe that things can change-that's the spirit of Passover and Easter. We have faith. Thank you for hanging in there with us.

In Struggle and Hope,

Georgia, Margaret, Lauren and Fran

An Undesirable Result, But At Least Deeper Understanding

By Lauren Glaser (Kip Tiernan Outrage & Action Intern)

Many of us may have heard of the current Emergency Assistance shelter crisis, but owing to our good fortune, it is beyond the scope of our direct experience. Admittedly, this is just as true for some of us who work in social services. We may read more statistic-laden reports, and attend more hearings and conferences on the issue than the typical member of the public, but we too are often removed from the reality of the crises we try to solve.

In the case of the current Emergency Assistance (shelter) crisis, I was able to witness its impact first-hand during my year as an AmeriCorps member at the East Boston Neighborhood Health Center. My title was “Patient Care Coordinator” (which is similar to a Case Manager). One of my main responsibilities was to follow up on referrals from nurses and doctors for community resource assistance for their patients.

These referrals (often for essential needs like food, housing, school enrollment, Social Security benefits) would sometimes come in the form of impersonal electronic messages, though more frequently I would find myself answering my office phone, a doctor or nurse on the other line asking, “Hi Lauren, got a second? I’ve got a man in my office who can’t get his diabetes meds because he’s being told they cost \$112, can you help him figure out what’s going on with his insurance?” or, “There’s a mother here who has to leave her apartment in a week and doesn’t know where to go. Do you think you could come here and talk to her?” The needs seemed so pressing that I cannot recall ever saying no. (If I had, I feared the patient would be lost in a sea of referrals, bouncing around from agency to agency.)

In the following paragraphs, I would like to recount one particularly difficult experience I had trying to help a young patient access Emergency Assistance (emergency housing) at the local Department of Transitional Assistance for herself and her young son. The 24-year-old mother was desperate enough for safe shelter that she sought the help of her son’s doctor, who called me for assistance.

The mother and her asthmatic son lived in the unventilated attic of a boarding house, and as it was a hot summer, David was frequently seen at the clinic for respiratory exacerbation, at which visits his doctor would also document cockroach and other bites on the boy’s body. Perhaps even more deplorable was that the mother and child were prohibited from using the kitchen and common spaces of “their home” in the daytime, when the other boarders, primarily night-workers, slumbered and were susceptible to the noises that children have been known to make. Forced to spend all of their days outside of the house, and with no money, and no car, and rarely spare change for the bus, both mother and son were sunburned.

After the doctor called me to ask for my assistance with Sonia, I called her. She showed up at my office a few hours later. When she told me her story and of the inhumane conditions she and David were living in, my heartbeat increased; we made a plan to seek Emergency Assistance shelter early the following week.

In the meantime, I investigated the new regulations. The family definitely met one of the main qualifications: they were living in “housing not fit for human habitation,” which the doctor detailed in a lengthy letter. It was also clear that the pair met the asset limit of \$2,500. Also, because one out of the two household members was a citizen, the whole household met the legal status requirement. I thought their Massachusetts residency would be a cinch to demonstrate, as they had both been patients of the clinic for at least a few months and had been apartment hopping throughout the city, staying wherever they could find a room for less than \$400 a month, about how much the mother received in welfare benefits for her son.

We met and took the bus to the Department of Housing and Community Development. After waiting about an hour, we were called to meet with the EA representative. When explained what we were looking for (safe shelter!), the representative responded, “It is important that you brought that letter from the doctor, but you must also prove Massachusetts residence; do you have a Mass ID or a utility bill?”

“No, I have no Mass ID,” Sonia said; only documented persons can get a Mass ID, though talk of a new Massa-

Food Stamp Update 2013: State and National

Georgia Mattison

Nationally, in 2012, 46 million people received Food Stamps, twice that from 2007. In nearly twenty percent of the households Food Stamps were the only income.

The number of households served by the Massachusetts Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program SNAP, historically known as Food Stamps, grew from 318,280 in 2009 to 490,000 in 2012 due primarily to the recession/depression. That's the good news: more people get much needed food. The bad news is that since 2005 the SNAP caseload has grown from 500 to over 1000 per caseworker making it more difficult to complete the application process. For years, PPUF and many other groups have pleaded with the governor and the legislature to add more money to the budget to hire caseworkers. Kip at age 83 even conducted a public fast in 2009 to protest the lack of caseworkers, saying: "if they (Food Stamp Applicants) can't eat then I can't eat."

Since 2005 the SNAP caseload has grown from 500 to over 1000 per case-worker

Inevitably the doubling of the caseload has had two results. First, because of the doubling of caseloads it is more difficult than ever for applicants to access the program even with an advocate working the system for them. Second, due to the inadequate number of caseworkers, record keeping has had errors which have inaccurately been labeled as recipient fraud. The Inspector General asked to investigate by the 2012 Electronic Benefits Commission, indeed found technical deficiencies in the Department of Transitional Assistance recordkeeping. For example, when applying for Food Stamps an applicant needs to provide a document that proves how much they pay for rent and receive for income verifications. This and other verifications should move to the applicant's file folder. In some cases the verifications were received, were reviewed by the caseworker and approved but not moved into the folder. There was no fraud on the part of the recipients, just verification papers that didn't make it into the paper file at the Department of Transitional Assistance. And these irregularities constitute only 1.3% of the total SNAP benefits received by eligible SNAP recipients. However with the media frenzy incorrectly crying fraud due to the Inspector General's report, it will be particularly important to convince the legislators to add caseworkers. The governor in his budget proposal for 2014 has not asked for an increase in the number of caseworkers.

Massachusetts receives \$1.3 billion in Food Stamp benefits from the federal government. Administrative costs for the program are fifty percent reimbursed by the federal government. And while there are still many people eligible for Food SNAP in the commonwealth who don't receive it, this situation may become even worse due to national changes.



The American Relief and Recovery Act (ARRA) known as the Stimulus added a 13.6 percent increase for Food Stamp benefits. That is expected to expire on November 1 of this year unless Congress votes to extend it. That would mean up to \$80 would be cut from Food Stamp households. In meeting with our congressional delegation at the recent National Anti-Hunger Policy Conference in Washington, DC, they held out very little hope that this extension would happen.

The Senate Farm Bill from last year includes a fifteen billion dollar cut in the SNAP program. In a meeting with Massachusetts interim Senator Cowan who is on the Senate Agriculture committee, he said that there was pressure to increase the cuts in SNAP in this year's version of the Farm Bill. The House Farm Bill also puts the SNAP program into a state block grant, which would leave it open to cuts by states including Massachusetts.

Environmental Justice Denied: Why the BU Bio-Terror Lab Must Be Stopped

Klare X Allen and Vicky Steinitz

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) defines environmental justice as “the fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people regardless of race, color, national origin, or income with respect to the development, implementation, and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations, and policies.” Fair treatment means “*no group of people should have to deal with an unequal share of the harmful environmental effects that happen because of policies or operations run by businesses or government.*” Meaningful involvement means that “*potentially affected community residents have an appropriate opportunity to participate in decisions*”.

In Massachusetts, the Environmental Justice Policy of the Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs (EOEEA) aims to remedy “the disproportionate share of environmental burdens experienced by lower-income people and communities of color who, at the same time, often lack environmental assets in their neighborhoods. The policy is designed to help ensure their protection from environmental pollution as well as promote community involvement in planning and environmental decision-making to maintain and/or enhance the environmental quality of their neighborhoods.”

Noble words, indeed! But how do we reconcile them with the National Institutes of Health’s decision to approve Boston University’s application to **build The National Emerging Infectious Diseases Laboratory (NEIDL) adjacent to low income**, densely populated, Roxbury/ South End communities? Funded in the aftermath of 9/11, this lab proposes to research the **most deadly, infectious, incurable pathogens known to man** such as Ebola, Marburg virus, and the plague, all of which are agents that can be used in bioterrorism and biowarfare.

According to the terms of the grant, the lab’s work for the first 20 years of operation must be devoted to biodefense research focused on these deadly pathogens. Yet rather than distancing such work from the city’s most vulnerable citizens, the lab, located on Albany Street, overshadows the community’s most at-risk groups, including guests of Rosie’s Place, children enrolled in Orchard Park Elementary School, and residents of the Cathedral housing development. In light of these facts, how can we understand the Commonwealth’s decision in 2004 to approve permits for the lab despite **BU’s refusal to meet with Roxbury residents** and despite the potential dangers to the neighboring communities?

The Roxbury Safety Net and the Stop the BU Bio-Terror Lab Coalition have organized and fought for more than ten years to keep Boston University and the National Institutes of Health first from building and then, since 2009, from operating this bio lab. At the beginning, no one except perhaps Klare X. Allen, the Lead Community Organizer, thought we would succeed in stopping the lab. After all, the whole political establishment supported BU’s application and NIH had awarded 28 million dollars to BU to build the NEIDL.

Early in the process we found scientists, medical personnel, and **first responder experts who stood with us** to challenge NIH’s and BU’s claims that the lab’s work would pose “little to no” or “negligible” risks to our communities. In growing coalition with health care providers, peace activists, faith groups, students, and concerned citizens, we continue to counter these claims. We have also been able to retain pro bono legal assistance to present our arguments in court.

In 2007, **our case was brought before the MA Supreme Judicial Court** whose judges ruled that the Risk Assessment (RA) in BU’s Final Environmental Impact Report was arbitrary and capricious. We devised an alternative “USE” for the NEIDL and continue to argue that instead of introducing deadly, incurable diseases to our city, the NEIDL needs to research public health threats to the community such as asthma, AIDS, and other communicable diseases.

It took NIH and BU more than five years to redo the Risk Assessment. Both NIH and EOEEA recently approved the latest submission; however, we remain unconvinced of its integrity and will be back in court to appeal these decisions.

We cannot fathom the RA’s conclusion that the densely populated urban NEIDL site is no more risky than alternative suburban and rural sites. The report stresses BU’s efforts to create a “culture of safety” in the lab, but

their past record of negligence and failure to acknowledge accidents does not engender confidence: we cannot feel assured that a culture of safety will be created or that it will be sustained over time.

The analysis of the risks from malevolent actors is equally troublesome. “Malevolent acts were not considered. . . because the potential number of scenarios is limitless and the likelihood of attack is unknowable,” reads the risk assessment. We are told that a security analysis was done, but it is classified and cannot be made public. Why should we trust this security analysis and why should we believe that we will be told about security concerns or breaches when they arise?

Essentially, we are being asked to have faith when our questions have not been answered and nothing in the history of this project gives us grounds for trust. This is a lab conceived as part of the war on terror, but the collateral damage from this war will occur in our community. It must be stopped in 2013!

(Klare X Allen is the Lead Community Organizer of the Roxbury Safety Net. Vicky Steinitz is the Coordinator of the Greater Boston Committee of the Stop the BU Bioterror Lab Coalition.)

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Lauren Glaser Undesireable Result ...continued from page 2

chusetts policy that would allow undocumented immigrants to get a driver’s license is currently in the works. “I have no utility bill in my name because I cannot afford an apartment!”

“Can you get an affidavit from the landlord saying you’ve been living there?” Sonia responded that she did not think she would be able to convince the landlady to sign anything official, since what she was doing (renting such a decrepit room) was not something to reveal publicly.

“Sorry,” the representative said, “the rules were tightened two months ago. I know from your previous interactions at the DTA that your son was born in New York and that you moved to Massachusetts fairly recently. That makes it difficult to prove your Commonwealth residency. However, if you can somehow pull together one of the proofs I mentioned earlier, come back and we’ll see what we can do.”

I tried to argue that Sonia should immediately receive Emergency Assistance based on her self-reported information and then be given time to produce the verifications, but the DHCD employee would not budge. I wonder, had I been a more experienced advocate at the time, what I could have said to make the lady do the right thing. Despite the injustice, Sonia thanked the lady, and we left the office.

I think I felt worse about the denial of shelter than Sonia did, perhaps because I truly believed that “the system” would never let people (never mind a citizen!) live in doctor-documented inhumane conditions, while she never had such high expectations.

I saw the mother and child a couple of weeks later, and helped the mom access nutritional supplements for her under-nourished son. She had good news: she was able to secure a childcare voucher, a very valuable benefit in Massachusetts, where according to a 2011 report by Child Care Aware of America, the average cost of full-time child care for an infant was nearly \$15,000 per year. She felt hopeful she would have a better chance of finding a job, since she would not have to watch her son all day. She thanked me for “all of my help,” and gave me a small piece of artesanía, a traditional Colombian handicraft, as a parting gift.

I don’t know exactly what has happened to Sonia and her son since I left the health center, but owing to her positive attitude and open heart, I would bet anything that she has already made progress in building a better life for her family.

By witnessing Sonia’s failed attempt to access Emergency Assistance, my conviction that the new regulations are unjust, and therefore must be changed, has without a doubt been fortified. Unfortunately, not all people who are denied EA are as strong and resilient as Sonia. We need to fight for those people, the ones who aren’t as strong as she is, and their right to decent, humane living conditions.



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Wendy Liebman

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