



Poor People's United Fund

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Boston's Spare Change Community

Spring 2015

Dear Sisters and Brothers,

We are delighted that the snow is gone and with that came even more good news! The renovations at Old South are nearly complete so we were able to move back into our office!

Last December, as part of their 40th anniversary celebration, Rosie's Place unveiled a mural on their building in the South End. The youth of the Boston Mural project chose to depict Kip and three other inspiring women: Judy Norsigian of Our Bodies Ourselves, Freda Garcia, and Melnea Cass. (see photo)

Other news ---is not so good! Brookings Institute reported that Boston is the third most inequitable city in the nation where the top 5 percent of households earn as much as 15 times what the bottom 20 percent make in a year. It's no wonder fast food workers are demanding a \$15 minimum wage.

And at current wages, fast food workers, even if they work full time, still need over one billion dollars in food stamps to feed their families. Yet there are legislators who are bent on making it more difficult for them and others to receive food stamps. Please read Georgia's article for the details of this relentless assault on poor people. The Children's Health Watch is so disturbed by the medical danger the lack of access to food stamps is having on children that they sent a strongly worded letter to the US Department of Agriculture and Governor Baker. (a copy of the letter is included here)



Today, the rate of household food insecurity is 71% higher than it was a decade ago, with no sign of improvement. The good news is that we have advocates like the women at Mass Law Reform, and PPUF's Georgia who know the issues inside out and monitor what happening 24/7.

Please stay abreast of this issue with us as

Over the last few months we have lost several voices and champions of justice. .. long time ppuf supporter, peace activist Mary Holden, Roxbury feisty and loving youth advocate, Samantha Sadd, right wing watch dog, founder of Political Research Associates and PPUF Ethical Policy Institute member, Jean Hardisty and nationally recognized housing advocate and scholar, Michael Stone. We will miss their unflappable voices for justice. (see more on page 2)

In Struggle and Hope.

Georgia, Margaret and Fran

Mary Holden OBrien- activist- feminist- mother- grandmother- wife.

Her father died on Black Thursday when she was 6 years old and Mary and her mother endured the Great Depression in severe poverty. She met her future husband, Bill, as a teen, waited for him while he was a POW in Germany during the war. Mary was active in many social justice campaigns including the movements for civil rights and to end the war in Vietnam. She traveled to Paris as a delegate to the People's Peace Treaty conference. In the 70s, Mary became active in the effort to bring social justice reform to Central America and traveled to Cuba and to Nicaragua. She was also engaged by the Nuclear Freeze movement. For many years Mary worked in the chaplain's office at Wellesley College where she helped inspire students for volunteer projects. Mary & Bill were early supporters of Rosie's Place and Poor People's United Fund. Upon Mary's death the family requested donations be sent to PPUF. We are honored to have called Mary friend and ally.

Sam Sadd - *Hawthorne Youth & Community Center*

Sam and Kip were like two kindred spirits. They shared a love of mystery books and would often exchange numerous bags of them at meetings. Sam became a community leader highly respected for an unwavering advocacy for youth and families. Starting as a VISTA volunteer over 40 years ago Sam saw HYCC through many challenges, seeing its programs grow by forging collaborations with other resources such as the City of Boston, the Isabella Gardner Museum, Boston College Pulse tutoring program, and many more. Sam and PPUF collaborated on a Food for Free project in order to get fresh healthy food the Sam's Roxbury neighborhood. At any meeting she participated in Sam acted as a moral compass helping to make decisions fair and inclusive.

Jean Hardisty

Poor People's United Fund worked with Jean on many issues. Jean was an active member of PPUF's Ethical Policy Institute. A colleague said of her...her gentle presence and humor were countered most remarkably by ferocity for confronting social injustices. We couldn't have said it better! Gloria Steinem, co-founder of Ms. Magazine said of Jean Hardisty's prescient work on the right wing that "She is a prophet." In Chicago, Jean was inducted into Chicago's Gay and Lesbian Hall of Fame in 1995, and has an extensive list of accomplishments starting during her Chicago days when she co-founded the city's first shelter for battered women and co-founded and was board president for the Crossroads Fund. Here in Massachusetts, Jean founded Political Research Associates, a social justice think tank. PRA holds a unique position in studying the entire spectrum of the U.S. Right-secular, religious, economic, and xenophobic-including its influence both domestically and overseas and PRA's expertise helps journalists, advocates, educators, scholars, and the public to understand and challenge the right-wing.



Michael Stone

Michael Stone, long-time advocate for affordable housing and social justice in the Boston area and nationally, died March 22, 2015, at the age of 72. Though he received his PhD from Princeton in Astrophysics, he soon shifted his focus to social and economic justice. He was one of the founding members of the College of Public and Community Service, U. Mass./Boston and active in shaping its direction over the forty years he taught there. Michael had a deep passion for global justice, apparent in his teaching, in his academic work (numerous books, articles and studies on housing for the urban poor) and in his work for the community. His keen intellect and infectious energy were evident in everything he did. He will be greatly missed





Letter to United States Department of Agriculture and Massachusetts Governor Baker

Dear Secretary Vilsack and Governor Baker,

On behalf of Children's HealthWatch, we are writing to request your help in protecting the Commonwealth's most vulnerable citizens: its children. The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) is a vital nutritional resource for our patients at Boston Medical Center and their families. We are deeply concerned, however, with the changes the Department of Transitional Assistance (DTA) hastily implemented in 2014 that have resulted in erroneous case closures and erroneous application denials of critical federal nutrition benefits.

As pediatricians, we know the negative health and development impacts created by food insecurity undermine the future of our very young patients. We also know that this condition is remediable through participation in effective programs such as SNAP. In many ways, SNAP serves as a vaccine for these children by ensuring that they are protected from the harmful effects of food insecurity.¹

We are alarmed to learn from USDA data that the SNAP caseload has declined by more than 7.7 percent from December of 2013 when the Massachusetts unemployment rate has declined by only 1 percent and there is no evidence that low income households are bounding back as rapidly. Massachusetts is turning away over \$10 million in SNAP benefits every month and failing to provide thousands of families with SNAP who rely on this vital source of food to keep their children healthy.

In the past few months, we have seen this play out on the bodies of our patients. For example, a mother of a toddler diagnosed with Failure to Thrive had her SNAP case closed in October 2014 because of a wage match from 2012 stating that she received wages from a company that she never worked with in 2012. Despite the fact that the mother reported to DTA her current income, and provided DTA with the required proof of current income for her SNAP case, she was cut-off SNAP benefits for failure to provide verification for a job she never held 2 years earlier. The mother had no idea what was expected of her or why this erroneous employment document had any bearing on her current eligibility. The family went without SNAP for 2 months. During that time, the toddler lost weight, putting him at increased risk of negative health effects and developmental delay. The Outreach Worker in the Boston Medical Center Grow Clinic worked with this family for two days, calling the local DTA office only to find clogged phone lines and case workers unwilling to work with the family to reopen the case. Finally, her case was reinstated only after the mother reapplied for SNAP benefits, but only after months of her child missing out on critical growth of their brain and body.

We recently learned of another family who was cut off of SNAP in October 2014 when DTA implemented their Business Process Redesign. This mother was due for a recertification and sent in the necessary paperwork and all required documents. She never heard back about the status of her case so she called her caseworker over and over leaving messages that were never returned. Finally, she received an automated message informing her that the number to the caseworker's desk was no longer in service. She was not made aware of the updates to the phone system and SNAP caseload made during the Business Process Redesign, so she took a day off of work to visit the local DTA office. After waiting for hours and feeling mistreated by the staff in the reception area, she finally left. Her recertification was never processed and she has been without benefits since October 2014. Recently,

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Vicky Negus at Massachusetts Law Reform Institute intervened to resolve the case and learned that the mother had a wage match claiming she was receiving stipends from the company where she currently works, even though she informed the DTA of change in earnings and reported her current income. Even with fulltime wages, this family is still eligible for SNAP, but has not received benefits for months because the case was not updated with the correct information.

We are concerned that families that do not have an outside advocate never get through the DTA system and go weeks or months without benefits, or get discouraged and give up. We are seeing an uptick in requests for emergency food from our food pantries, confirming our worst fears. The families losing SNAP benefits are financially eligible but DTA has created a system that is too difficult for families to navigate and excessive verification demands for information that has no bearing on current eligibility.

The decision to rush into a major modernization redesign in 2014 coupled with what appears to be extreme demands for verifications of out-of-date information, and automated case closures due to unfiltered data matching is extremely troubling. Requiring families to provide documentation for jobs worked in the past are not only excessive and unnecessary, but impact child health by increasing caregiver stress and, after a cut-off, depriving children and parents of the essential nutrients.

We urge the Baker Administration to investigate the thousands of SNAP case closures in Massachusetts, end automatic closures of cases due to data matching, and look to other means tested programs for guidance on successfully enrolling and retaining eligible participants. We bring this information to your attention because we are frustrated with the current system and the lasting impact it will have on the health of our very young patients.

1 Ettinger de Cuba S, Weiss I, Pasquariello J, Schiffmiller A, Frank D, Coleman S...Cook J. SNAP Vaccine. Children's HealthWatch, 2012. Retrieved from http://www.childrenshealthwatch.org/wpcontent/uploads/snapvaccine_report_feb12.pdf



Wendy Liebman ***Share A Laugh Comedy Event***

Thursday, June 11th 7:30 PM
Somerville Theatre Davis Sq

Buy Share A Laugh tickets

**Have a great time while
raising money for PPUF!**

(75% percent of each ticket will go to PPUF!)

**Single tickets \$30 or or share a laugh with a buddy
for \$50**

**To Buy tickets go to [communityworks.givezooks.com/
events/share-a-laugh-2015](http://communityworks.givezooks.com/events/share-a-laugh-2015)**

then choose ppuf from dropdown list at checkout.

**OR send a check to: Community Works, 25 West Street,
Boston MA 02111**



“Homes for Families” is the recipient of this year’s Kip Tiernan endowment award. The organization works with homeless families not only to find them housing but also to train them to participate in policy making on issues that affect themselves and other homeless families. At a Statehouse rally on February 26th to kick off their lobbying campaign to increase funding for more rental vouchers, their graduates spoke eloquently of their lives and how important having a real home was for them. There were cookies baked in the shape of a house for each Representative and Senator. All received cookies and testimonials from their homeless or formerly homeless constituents

“Up to Poverty” Beth Healy who is writing a biography of Kip commented that the news about Walmart raising the hourly rate for their 500,000 low wage workers to \$9/ hour reminded her of the **“UP TO POVERTY”** campaign Kip led in 1988 calling for an increase in Welfare benefits.

In fact \$9 an hour would still leave these workers below the federal poverty line. For a family of three to reach the poverty line of \$21,000 a year the increase would need to be \$12 an hour. Most of Walmart’s low-wage workers receive SNAP/ Food Stamps. A conservative estimate is that the SNAP program is currently paying out \$50 million a month to support these 500,000 low-wage workers. Taxpayers should not be contributing to obscene profits of \$16 billion for Walmart or any other company.

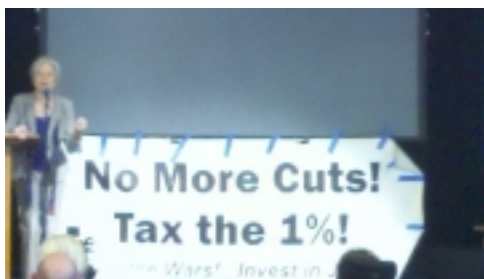


Anti-Hunger Conference

The National Anti-Hunger Policy conference was held in Washington, DC March 1-3. Thirty-three Massachusetts conferees lobbied their representatives in Congress urging them not to support proposed congressional cuts in the SNAP and Child Nutrition programs. We also emphasized the huge SNAP caseload drop because of the catastrophic changes in the program as described in the accompanying article. Our delegation did contact Governor Baker to add pressure to suspend the wage match temporarily. The wage match was causing the greatest number of erroneous case closures.

Tax Day Rally- PPUF recently participated in the Rally at Old South Church by PPUF friend and ally, Paul Shannon of the American Friends Service Committee. The rally featured speakers who outlined why various aspects of the proposed federal budget is good for the 1% and bad for the rest of us!

See <http://www.budget4allmass.org/> for more info.





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Non-Profit Organization
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WAYS YOU CAN HELP PPUF

SPARE CHANGE donations.... take your spare change to any TD bank penny counter and deposit it to our account. (# 8250954845) So far we have collected \$900 dollars in coins!

Put your pen to paper! Do you enjoy the newsletter, but feel it is missing something? If so, we welcome submissions. Additionally, if you would like to submit a letter to the editor on a poverty-related issue, we'd be happy to provide you with support.

Payroll deduction There are many local businesses that include Community Works as a payroll deduction option. You can designate a gift to PPUF through Community Works!
For a list of participating workplaces go to communityworks.com.

Donate! We are grateful for donations of any size.

Attend Share A Laugh and choose PPUF as recipient of your ticket purchase..

Purchase a copy of Urban Meditations as a gift for a special occasion.

And of course, follow us @poorpeoplesunitd and "like us" on Facebook



Basic Income as a Poverty Prevention Strategy: Building A New Movement

by Ann Withorn

Fighting poverty in the present, and for the future, is an important goal for all of us. Historically, the Welfare Rights movement in the US and its successor organizations in Massachusetts and nationally recognized that the best way to end poverty would be to bring meaningful income to people directly, and without all the regulations and conditions imposed by the welfare state. This meant creating a movement and policies to replace all the categories ruling “welfare.” And it also assumed that those most affected by poverty would play leadership roles in that movement. For Martin Luther King and founders the Welfare Rights Movement the fullest way to fight poverty was a Guaranteed Income for all citizens. Martin Luther King wrote in 1967:



Diane Dujon (l) and Ann Withorn

“I am now convinced that the simplest solution to poverty is to abolish it directly by a now widely discussed measure: the guaranteed income....The contemporary tendency in our society is to base our distribution on scarcity, which has vanished, and to compress our abundance into the overfed mouths of the middle and upper classes until they gag with superfluity. If democracy is to have breadth of meaning, it is necessary to adjust this inequity.

Today, there is a movement of people around the world and the US to, again, bring the demand for a Universal Basic Income back to the front of activism and policy.

In February, 2015, North American Basic Income Guarantee (NABIG) held a congress in New York City. The theme was “Building a Movement for Basic Income”. As part of this Diane Dujon and I worked to bring national Welfare Rights veterans to the table, not just as individual speakers but in an effort to make sure that people with lived experience with poverty and anti-poverty organizing would join and help lead the emerging movement. (Local anti-poverty people in Massachusetts helped with funding to get people there). The results were powerful. When speakers like Willie Baptist, Marian Kramer, Diane Dujon and other long time welfare rights activists spoke about the links between Welfare Rights and Basic Income, the audience of mostly white professional advocates and academics took notice. Conversations were lively and practical. The point was less to put forward models for how a universal income grant could be funded and implemented, and more to engage in strategic thinking about how to build a broad based movement that demanded out Basic Income for All.

The result after three days of lively talk and sharing stories from the US, Canada and parts of Europe, was a call to build a movement and to bring the voices of local anti-poverty activists into full engagement with the movement.

A report of the conference can be found on the NABIG website, usbig.net, which also provides an update of latest organizing effort around Basic Income, relevant bibliography.

Currently local and state groups are forming around the country to help bring Basic Income into a range of progressive conversations and strategies.

For our part, the first meeting to discuss what it would mean to have a Massachusetts Basic Income will be held at 6pm, Tuesday May 5 at DSNI in Dorchester. Please join us.

Contact Ann Withorn (withorn.ann@gmail.com) or Diane Dujon (diane.dujon@umb.edu) for more information, or to express your interest even if you cannot attend the May meeting or you receive this notice in time.

Catastrophic Changes Deny SNAP to Thousands

By Georgia Mattison

The Department of Transitional Assistance DTA has created three changes since December 2013 that have denied eligible households their legal right to critically needed food stamps/SNAP. They are the Photo Card requirement, the unfiltered wage match, and the “so-called” modernization of access to benefits. Together, they have resulted in a massive unjust reduction in families receiving benefits. 2014 saw the loss of almost 60,000 households, nearly 12% of the caseload.



The first change was the photo card requirement criticized by the national Urban Institute because the photo requirement directly superseded the legal requirement for all members of a household to be able to use their Electronic Benefits Transfer SNAP EBT card. Since the photo is only of the head of the household, other members of the household may not be allowed by stores to use the card. Diane Sullivan from Homes for Families reported that her son refuses to shop because the grocery clerks say his photo must be on the card. Caseload numbers began to fall after the continuing chaos of this change.

The second change was to take the wage match determination away from a case worker to process and give it to the computer. DTA SNAP has always run the Department of Revenue to see whether there is evidence of unreported income. Starting in September 2014 case workers no longer examine the matches to see, whether the matches are irrelevant to the case or if there is already documentation in the file about new income or the income match is exempt, or whether there is a match that warrants a letter for documentation to the client. Thousands of wage matches have been erroneous or legally exempt income. If the computer sees any wage at all, it automatically sends a letter to the household for an explanation. Documentation must be received in ten days or the household will lose benefits. Many matches to work places where the recipient has never worked force the client to ask a company to write a letter documenting that she never worked there. Other typical erroneous wage matches were focused on income from under 18 household members. Again the head of household must document that this income is never included when determining SNAP eligibility. These terminations then require a re-application, with the household losing benefits in the meantime. After this change the caseload decline accelerated.

The third change was the “so-called” modernization of access to the caseworker. In October 2014, this system set up a state-wide phone queue. All SNAP recipients must call the toll free number for all their SNAP needs. Problems exploded immediately. There were between 6-700 caseworkers for 20,000-25,000 inquires; each client must type in 16 characters to prove identity; caseworkers asked for duplicate verifications even though the verifications had already been sent; minimum wait to reach a caseworker is now fifty minutes; people going to local offices swelled to more than before the modernization due to lack of phone access. The state-wide phone queue was supposed to dramatically reduce walk-ins. This change also exacerbated the wage match disaster as people who needed help with this could not access a caseworker anywhere. After this third change the caseload began to go into freefall , with thousands fewer participants per month.

The Food Stamp Improvement Coalition has worked with many groups grievously affected by these changes to pressure DTA SNAP to stop the error filled wage matches. They agreed to partially stop the wage match on March 23, but only until June 1st!!!

(for more see reprinted letter to US Dept of Agriculture and Governor pages 3 & 4)