



IDENTIFYING & DEVELOPING LEADERS



ORGANIZING NEIGHBORHOODS

BUILDING CAPACITY TO ACHIEVE HEALTHY COMMUNITIES



ORGANIZING UPDATE

FALL 2011



NEIGHBORHOOD CAPACITY

The greatest strength of MVOC's work lies in the development of the residents whom we organize. Our organizers develop leaders through direct involvement in the creation and the implementation of strategies to create the change they wish to see in their community. Since 2009, over 500 leaders have participated in a one-day, two-day or weeklong training – building the capacity necessary to engage leaders and increase involvement. In those three years, the number of active neighborhood groups in Youngstown has doubled from 19 to 45, and Warren's active neighborhood groups have grown from four to 11.



VACANT PROPERTIES AND DISINVESTMENT

The most critical issue facing urban neighborhoods in the Mahoning Valley is vacancy and disinvestment. The MVOC Vacant Properties campaign has involved over 4,000 community members since inception. Together, teams of organizers and residents have completed detailed land surveys, researched legislative options and existing best practices, and staged community meetings to advance neighborhood stabilization strategies.

Last year, MVOC won a major policy victory after playing a key role in advocating for state legislation to establish Countywide Land Reutilization Corporations (CLRCs or land banks) in Ohio, organizing hundreds of leaders to travel to Columbus to meet with legislators. The bill became law, and provides important tools for the fight against neighborhood disinvestment. MVOC is now playing a central role in the implementation of land banks in Trumbull and Mahoning counties, after turning out 1,400 people at two Community Congress events which advocated for the use of these strategies.



Currently in Warren, leaders and organizers are pursuing legislation that would allow approved nonprofit agencies to secure nuisance properties, with incurred costs addressed to the property owner via tax lien. Staff and neighborhood leaders are meeting with city officials to establish a strategic demolition policy in which stable and transitional neighborhoods would be targeted for receipt of the city's limited resources.

The Youngstown leadership team, composed of 40 neighborhood leaders from throughout the city, has been instrumental in the implementation of a Real Property Identification System for Mahoning County; the team is now organizing around a vacant property registration ordinance and code enforcement strategies, and is actively involved in the update of the city's 41-year-old zoning ordinance.



In August, the first Neighborhood Leadership Council was organized in Warren. This "executive committee" for neighborhood groups connects grassroots leaders and develop their potential to influence local and statewide policy. A similar structure for Youngstown is currently being planned for implementation in early 2012.

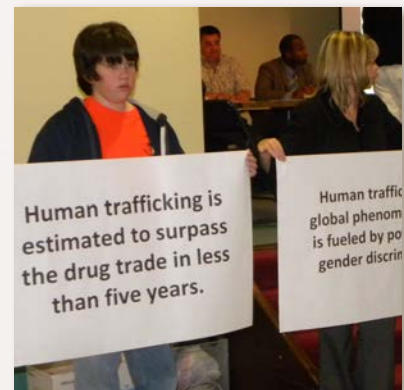
HEALTH EQUITY

From its beginning as a campaign addressing longstanding problems with corner stores on Youngstown's south side, the MVOC Health Equity campaign has evolved to examine serious issues of social justice including urban access to healthy foods, the expansion of urban farming and local food markets. Led by members, campaign research and evaluation was released in the *Promoting Equitable Access to Healthy Foods* report at a press event with Senator Sherrod Brown. The campaign also established a Food Policy Council, composed of 25 representatives from policy, production, distribution and consumption arenas. Together, these diverse stakeholders evaluate the local food system and develop comprehensive food and agriculture recommendations. This year, Youngstown City Council adopted language to support the use of locally grown produce; Warren City Council is currently considering similar legislation.



HUMAN TRAFFICKING

Trumbull County is home to 12 Asian massage parlors: establishments long recognized as fronts for commercial sex operations. In 2011, MVOC launched a campaign aimed at confronting this complex and controversial issue. Recent initiatives include the establishment of a Human Trafficking Commission, a panel of officials who are committed to fighting trafficking; relaunching the Attorney General's Statewide Commission on Human Trafficking with the appointment of a MVOC leader to that commission; and developing legislation to regulate massage parlors - which has passed Niles City Council and is currently being considered in Warren.



VOTER ENGAGEMENT

MVOC has successfully spearheaded three broad, non-partisan GOTV campaigns. The program was expanded in 2010 with the hire of six full-time fellows who partnered with local churches to engage unlikely and underrepresented voters. MVOC utilized 150 volunteers in this program (the largest in Ohio) to make nearly 37,100 voter contacts in the weeks leading to the election, including 18,509 door knocks and 55,791 phone calls. The voter universe was 23,250 voters, and MVOC contacted 9,825 voters between five and nine times - moving 90 percent of those voters to the polls in 2010. MVOC will also running a program in fall 2011.



LEADERSHIP TRAINING

MVOC continues to provide training for local leaders who seek to be more effective organizers in their communities, churches or workplace. This training is offered in one-day, two-day and weeklong intervals, and blends the best of traditional models with new innovations in organizing. In 2011, MVOC hosted several one-day trainings, introducing over 250 community leaders to the fundamental principles and techniques of organizing. This summer, 75 leaders participated in weeklong training; since 2009, over 300 people have completed this training and learned to build capacity and engage communities to create grassroots change.





RETIREMENT SECURITY

Programs that support the most vulnerable Americans, including Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid, have come under serious attack in 2011. Severe modifications to these programs threaten to cast thousands of Ohio seniors into poverty while keeping needed medical attention out of reach for Ohio's neediest children. In partnership with the Center for Community Change, MVOC has hosted several town hall meetings and direct actions with over 300 residents, demanding that our state and federal legislators stand with them in protecting poor and working class families, children and retired Ohioans.



JUSTICE REVIVAL

In May 2011, MVOC hosted a Justice Revival that brought together over 400 community residents and faith leaders from across the state who are committed to protecting Ohio's most vulnerable residents. The event was led by renowned preacher, lecturer, and Sojourners Magazine founder Jim Wallis. Along with several key leaders, Wallis discussed the injustices associated with human trafficking and the broad effects of budget cuts on poor and working class Ohioans. It also served to establish the Ohio Faith-Based Table, which is a diverse group of faith leaders from across the state who are committed to working on issues of social justice in Ohio.



COMMUNITY CONGRESS SERIES

Last year, MVOC began a series Community Congress events that provided the opportunity for over 1,400 residents to address a host of local, state and federal officials and candidates regarding issues impacting them and their neighborhoods. Meetings focused on key neighborhood issues including access to healthy foods, vacant property management, human trafficking, and neighborhood stabilization. MVOC secured key policy victories, including pledges to establish Land Banks in both Mahoning and Trumbull Counties and the commitment of former Ohio Attorney General Cordray to address human trafficking, a commitment which has been continued by current Attorney General Mike DeWine.



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