



## BUILDING FOUNDATIONS BY KNOCKING ON DOORS

by Dinah DeWald

In the dead of winter, our PPF Basebuilding team was focusing on how to create ways of reaching out to people that didn't involve going outside. It was a challenge. So when summer came around, we were really excited to try out some new ways of reaching people. The team decided to try out doorknocking in Philadelphia.

Doorknocking is pretty self-explanatory: going around to each house on a block and knocking to invite people to have a conversation with you one on one. When you think about it, doorknocking can be a very revolutionary and transformational act. In a society where people are pushed away from each other into intense isolation, it's revolutionary to knock on someone's door, as a complete stranger, and seek connection on a very real and authentic level, based on deep listening.

Put People First has done this before: in fact, several members first heard of PPF from someone at their door. This year, we had the new Healthcare Survey to use as a tool to start a conversation with people. In the form of a survey, we ask people deep questions about their life and experience with health, and use that as a jumping-off point to hear their stories and the often deep emotions that come with them.

Lots of people have experienced doorknocking of a different nature: someone comes to your door asking for money, selling a political candidate, or seeking to convert you. These interactions can feel manipulative and transactional: they just want something out of you. But in our interactions at the door, we seek to be transformational. We want to turn this interaction into a relationship based on shared interest in a better world. The experience of doorknocking can transform the people in the conversation by allowing us to see ourselves, the world, and what we want from our world through new eyes.

Let me give an example: the last time I went doorknocking, Jacob (a stellar doorknocker) and I came across a woman walking down the street. Never one to miss an opportunity, Jacob introduced us and asked what her experience with the healthcare system has been like. It turned out she was just walking away from her daughter's house, who she was taking care of after a major surgery, and she herself had just returned from a hospital visit. She told us a story of being misdiagnosed and overlooked by doctors for years, and when in the hospital, had seen nurses and doctors continue to disregard the wishes of the woman in the bed next to her.

Through this woman's eyes, I was seeing the healthcare system in a way I have never experienced myself: repeated neglect, and deliberate disregard for this woman's right to make decisions over her own life. I began to understand her deep mistrust for doctors and the health system, rooted in her own experience.

We would never have met this woman if we hadn't been knocking on doors in her neighborhood. We've met dozens of folks this way throughout our three months of doorknocking this summer. Of course, the hard work only starts there: establishing relationships based on a foundation of trust is long, slow and vital. But stepping outside our comfort zone and outside of the circles of people we're used to is what it's going to take to build a movement for universal healthcare in Pennsylvania.

**"In the long run, the people are our only appeal. The only ones who can free us are ourselves!"**

—Assata Shakur



## CONTENTS

BUILDING FOUNDATIONS BY KNOCKING ON DOORS	1
BASE-BUILDING AT THE MOTHER OF MERCY FREE DENTAL CLINIC	2
LOOKING BACK ON ONE YEAR ORGANIZING WITH PPF	2
QUOTES FROM CONVENING	3
THE MONOPOLY	3
REFLECTIONS FROM THE PPF STATEWIDE TOUR	4
STORY OF SELF AND INTERVIEW WITH KIM J. ATLAND, PPF MEMBER FROM YORK	6
TOGETHER WE WILL DO THIS	6
LEADERSHIP ACROSS DIFFERENCE	7

### SUBMISSIONS

putpeoplefirstpa@gmail.com  
subject: "Newsletter"

### INFO

Printed by Put People First! PA  
(484) 619-2306  
putpeoplefirstpa.org  
Facebook: Put People First - PA  
Twitter: @PPF\_PA  
Tumblr: hchrpa.tumblr.com

### EDITOR

Madeline Taterka

### LAYOUT/DESIGN

Jaamal Benjamin

### NEWSLETTER TEAM

Roger Swartz  
Quinha Faria  
Ebony Taggart

**Universality**  
**Equity**  
**Transparency**  
**Accountability**  
**Participation**



putpeoplefirstpa.org

## BASE-BUILDING AT THE MOTHER OF MERCY FREE DENTAL CLINIC

*by Roger Swartz*

On an very early spring morning – 3am to be exact – ten Put People First members from York, Chambersburg and Philadelphia embarked on a journey to the Mother of Mercy Free Dental Clinic in Harrisburg, to arrive at 5am. Why was PPF there so early?

We were there to meet with people from all over PA who came to Harrisburg to get care from the Mother of Mercy Free Dental Clinic (MOM-n-PA). The MOM-n-PA is a large-scale two-day dental clinic where dental treatment is provided at no cost to individuals who cannot afford dental care. 902 volunteers made of medical professionals and community volunteers helped provide \$875,000 in dentistry to 1,700 patients over the two day clinic.

PPF had to be there early to meet the many people who were waiting early in line for care. We wanted to take advantage of the opportunity to meet with fellow Pennsylvanians and base-build around their personal health-care crises, volunteer at the clinic, and launch our health-care survey.

We met with not only Pennsylvanians, but also with folks from as far south as New Orleans, Louisiana. We also met Veterans whose medical care is covered by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, but not their dental. Many we spoke to agreed that healthcare is a human right and that we need a system in PA that meets our needs.

Healthcare should be a human right; in our current system medical and dental are treated as two totally separate entities when they are both needed for our wellbeing. Free or low cost healthcare, including dental care, should be the norm not the exception. More evidence has linked oral health to several chronic diseases, including diabetes, heart disease, and stroke. Your ability to access dental care differs by gender, education, family income, race and ethnicity, age, disability status, area, health insurance, and marital status. For instance, families with income less than the poverty threshold (\$23,850) only made up 27.0% of dental visits in the U.S. in 2012. MOM-n-PA is a great opportunity for people to get the care they need, but it's only once a year. We need a system is all year, every year, providing the care that people need.

## LOOKING BACK ON ONE YEAR ORGANIZING WITH PPF

*by Eliel Acosta*

The last couple of months I have taken time to reflect on my first year as an organizer with Put People First PA. From having the Mercy Killers play in York, ACA 101 workshops, Nutrition workshops, free health screening clinics, community dinners, door knocking, survey collection at MOM(Mission of Mercy) to a human rights hearing in Gettysburg. These small tactics may seem isolated but they have been instrumental in growing our base, our partners and our own leadership development within our members.

In the years before I joined Put People First PA, I had been organizing for in Maryland around the Maryland Dream Act. Upon returning to my rural hometown of Arendtsville (outside of Gettysburg) I attempted get involved in organizing

around issues I care about. But often, I could only plug in during lobby days at Harrisburg with no concrete or conscious thought about afterwards. This experience made me feel isolated and jaded about organizing in the state of Pennsylvania. Put People First PA has been one of the few organizations - if not the only - that holds onto the importance of organizing across different communities, whether it be through racial, geographic or economic lines.

Healthcare touches the human heart of every community. I believe it's because most people understand the importance of preserving their life and those who they love around them. With a current system that puts corporate profits over people's health, frustration will naturally

*(continued on next page)*

spew from communities. This type of chronic frustration doesn't build overnight but through a lifetime which causes communities to scapegoat one another. This was highlighted for me when the York organizing committee tabled at a festival in Goldsboro, which is fairly close to 3 Mile Island. A mother who carried a heavy heart approached our table. From the very beginning her body language communicated anger and frustration, but I could only see the hurt and pain for her daughter, who she told us has diabetes, through her eyes. As an organizer this experience sat with me for a couple of weeks in reflection. The depth of the emotional and physical pain our communities are experiencing is traumatic. This is the cost of a healthcare system that violates our human rights and does not meet our needs.

Over the last month I have taken time to reflect on the passing of my uncle, Jorge Perez Rico. He had been an organizer and committed himself to his community for his entire life. The memory I

will always look back to is a cool summer afternoon when we came back from an immigration rally in D.C., he said, "You have to let the group decide on what type of tactics they want to do even if it sounds crazy. Transparency, Eliel." Although many times we did not agree on tactics, I always admired his consistency of organizing throughout his whole life. He seemed to have the key to remain unjaded by life and hold to a strong long-term vision. As I continue through life, I want to mirror the example he set for me. To make an organization sustainable we have to make organizing a culture not just in our communities but within our families as well. I truly believe that our common struggles will not be resolved by politicians/lawmakers but only with a long term vision and sustainable organizing in our communities. There is much to change in the world, but remember that you will not change it alone.

## REFLECTING ON THE HCHR NATIONAL CONVENING

In June, the Healthcare is a Human Right national collaborative convened in Philadelphia to continue building our movement. Here are some reflections from people who attended:

*"One thing I will remember most is the camaraderie. As a grassroots group spread over such a large state it is easy to feel your efforts are small. After talking to the members of these other groups I will carry with me the knowledge that we are part of something bigger."*  
- Kim J Altland, York OC Put People First! PA

*"It was nourishing for me to hear folks repeatedly stress the importance of developing leaders through genuine relationship-building. There was clearly a deeply shared sense that transformative organizing under a human rights framework requires slow, intentional work to bring ordinary folks into their individual and collective power."*  
- Cait Vaughan, Southern Maine Workers' Center

*"Reflecting collectively and strategizing with organizers from across the region reminded me of the power and potential of this work, and the need for coordination in order to take on the powerful interests we're up against."*

- Keith Brunner, Vermont Workers' Center

*"Meeting with powerful and thoughtful leaders of the other HCHR campaigns made it palpable that we are part of a much larger movement for the right to health care and for a world in which all of us can live lives of dignity."*

- Ellen Schwartz, Vermont Workers' Center

Thank you to everyone who helped plan, traveled near and far, hosted people and events, and shared in two days of building community and strategy together in Philadelphia for the HCHR campaigns!

**NESRI** NATIONAL ECONOMIC &  
SOCIAL RIGHTS INITIATIVE  
Human Needs | Human Rights

*Thank you, PPF-PA members,  
for your fierce, tireless and beautiful work.*

*It's an honor and a pleasure  
to work with you in this movement.*

## THE MONOPOLY

*"Let's hope nausea, You accept the roll of the dice  
body chills and and return home to rest. The  
aches are not your mailman delivers the bills with  
bedtime companions. The best no jail free card. You make  
that we can ask for is that it phone calls filled with red  
can be handled at home. If it's tape to find what your options  
not so here's how the game are. There's no free parking or  
will go. You will be greeted endless bank in this game. You  
by white coats at the starting were only gifted a whole lot of  
line. You will not collect \$200, debt... Nausea, body chills and  
but they will collect it from aches are what's to thank for  
you. Your insurance should what is now a dreadful end!!!*

*-Javier Cotal*

*Later on you discover that  
to Park Place you won't go.  
According to your insurance  
that only covered a fraction  
on Baltic Avenue you belong.*





## REFLECTIONS FROM THE PPF STATEWIDE TOUR

*by Nijmie Dzurinko*

**A**t 5 am on Monday July 6th, four of us – Sheila, Jacob, Bahjah and myself – piled into my car with our bags in the back and made the six-hour trek to the opposite corner of the state from Philadelphia. The town where I grew up, Monessen, is just 27 miles North of La Belle, the epicenter of the Fayette Health Justice Campaign.

Coal ash is a form of industrial waste, and Pennsylvania produces more of it than any other state. The coal ash dump in La Belle is 360 acres. In 2000, 237 acres of the dump was transferred to the state to build State Correctional Institution Fayette. The dump is owned by Matt Canestrале Contracting. Coal ash contains mercury, cadmium, and arsenic. The ash gets into the air, and the chemicals get into the water.

“They think that they can wipe us off the map,” said Jeremy, a father who lives in La Belle with and who set the tone of the meeting by talking about how this effort is by residents, for residents. “There are no lawyers here,” he said. Word is that national groups and lawyers have come and gone over

the years, making big promises, but ultimately bailing out on the community. Jeremy’s seven year old son had recurring skin rashes that the doctor couldn’t explain. It took coming to a meeting of HOPE for La Belle for him to find out from another resident, a Black woman named Yma, that several other children have experienced the same thing.

HOPE for La Belle stands for Helping Organize to Protect our Environment. It’s a fledgling community group that the residents are trying to make into a force to be reckoned with. It’s supported by the Center for Coalfield Justice and organizer Eva Westheimer.

The Center for Coalfield Justice regularly gives tours that highlight resource extraction and environmental protection issues in the region. Our crew, from Put People First, Media Mobilizing Project and the Kairos Center/Poor People’s Campaign, was probably unlike others they’ve experienced. We were interested in the parts per million of the chemicals leaking into the water, but also in the ways the situation in

La Belle is bringing to the surface relationships between people and the workings of the global economy that are usually obscured.

We spent all day on July 7th driving around mountainous Greene County, with lush green vistas appearing around twists and turns on the winding narrow roads. I joked that it felt like we were on an island, since it rained throughout the day for short periods, but then the skies would clear and the sun would emerge, bright and hot as ever. We caught a rainbow once, and I'm sure that wasn't the only one.

We stood at the foot of the gargantuan Bailey coal processing plant that overlooks a cemetery. The plant displaced the cattle ranch that was there before it, but allowed the cemetery to remain. We learned that people in Appalachia have used burial grounds to stop the encroachment of the coal companies – as Indigenous people have done and continue to do throughout the US and the world.

We stopped for gas and Eva talked to the woman working the pump about what we were doing. You never know how people are going to react – in a place where almost every family has some piece of identity wrapped up in the coal and steel industries – because of jobs. The woman said, “Oh, you're opposing those companies who are raping the land and could care less about the people. Right on!”

We went to the place where they push oxygen down into the mines. The Department of Environmental Protection doesn't control the amount of methane that leaks out of the air shaft. When slavery turned into convict leasing, Black people under control of the state were forced to provide free labor for the mines. And we were the canaries in the coal mines – sent into the shaft as a human test of whether or not the air was safe enough to breathe.

Prisons and rural economies are intertwined. As multinational corporations move production, industry recedes, and small towns die. Modern day trafficking of the poor, with people of color swelling their ranks, takes its place, in the form of new and growing prisons in rural areas.



Bahjah, a new PPF member who got connected with us through the Human Rights Coalition, visited her son Isaiah at SCI Fayette. She hadn't seen him for months before this visit. Her husband helped him figure out how to filter his water – which he wasn't drinking. People at the prison and their families call it “tea water” because it's brown. I first met Bahjah when she came to the “Going on Offense by Putting People First: A Movement Dialogue on Transformative Organizing and Human Rights Campaigns” event we held in Philadelphia on June 24. I got to know her during the Philly General Membership Meeting that happens the first Wednesday of each month, where we talked about mass incarceration as a public health issue. Her voice is powerful, and in the course of this trip I saw her emerging as a leader who is developing her ability to think about our society as a whole. “It's bigger than the prison,” she said. “It's the whole town. We have

to shut down the prison and we have to shut down the coal ash dump.”

It feels like before. Black churches are burning throughout the South. Sitting in the Luzerne fire hall in Fayette County, I think of the Southern Tenant Farmworkers Union. White and Black farmers getting together under cover of darkness. It pains me that in 2015 for us to sit and talk together in a room, families of prisoners, residents, and prison workers – white and black, immigrants and citizens, gay and straight – is revolutionary. But it is.

We impact each other, we affect each other. That's what coming into relationship is. It's our responsibility as organizers to build the container for authentic relationship based on real shared values and principles. It's our goal as leaders to expand our circle of concern and understand how we are connected.

Knowing what we are up against, I stand firmly in opposition to the separation of our people and our “issues”! Isolation of people and issues is not progressive. We live in a globalized economy. It's likely that most folks in Fayette County have never been out of the country, but eighty percent of the coal that is mined here is exported. The people and interests who run the companies that control these resources are not only at the commanding heights of the economy, but they command and control our political system. To be competitive in the global economy, these companies need infrastructure like pipelines, export terminals, and processing plants. But they also need to push and isolate people from each other. When the residents of La Belle, the inmates at SCI Fayette, their families and the prison workers get together with the rest of Pennsylvania, the rest of Appalachia, and the rest of the poor and dispossessed around the country and around the world, we can defy these companies' control. Our future depends on it.

In La Belle, that, at least, is clear.

# STORY OF SELF AND INTERVIEW WITH KIM J. ATLAND, PPF MEMBER FROM YORK

*(Interview edited and condensed by Maddie Taterka)*

I was born in 1968 in York PA, with a host of Congenital Abnormalities. My initial diagnosis was Multiple Congenital Birth Defects, due to a conjoined parasitic twin that failed to develop, also known as Vestigial Twinning. Most of my reconstruction was done at Children's Hospital of Philadelphia, starting in the summer of 1968. I have had over fifty operations during my life to repair a host of conditions. A few years ago, I was laid-off for not making quota, and so I tried to file for disability. After about two years of paperwork and case reviews, I was turned down. The judge believed because I had worked for so long, my medical condition was irrelevant. However, my condition is not getting better, and I'm getting older, making it harder to get around. As a result, my only job is as a member of my township planning council. My only other means of survival are food stamps and Medicaid.

**Read on for an interview with Kim and his work with Put People First!**

**Q: How did you get involved with PPF?**

*A: I was having issues with getting shoes because of my orthopedic condition, and my mother had been to the Mercy Killers play. She heard about*

*the work Put People First were doing, and she suggested I might want to get in touch with them and see if there was something they could do to help.*

**Q: What kind of work has PPF been able to do on your case?**

*A: They've done a lot to try to help! We were able to get help by having people come with me to different appointments, help me talk to local representatives. They were working on a dinner to fund my shoes, but that never came to fruition due to some technical problems. I have to figure out where I can apply pressure to try to help myself or get help. It really is not easy. We've tried talking to some local state representatives, and they tend to say, "well this is a federal thing because the ADA is a federal law." And the federal representative say it's a state thing because the state officers run it. Both sides are trying to pass it off.*

**Q: How are you involved with PPF now?**

*A: I'm working with the York OC, I'm also working with the planning committee for the upcoming membership assembly. I'll just go and try to have fun and learn as much as I can!*

*There are a lot of other things I would like to do. I think one of the biggest things is continuing to work and get the medical care we all need. There are some side issues I have been working on myself, accessibility being one of them. A lot of companies are managing to get by basically actively discriminating. In our area, the way the law reads, if you do a remodel on a building, you can put a handicapped accessible bathroom on the second floor of a building, but you don't have to put in an elevator or ramp. If no one can get in the door, what can you do? There are a lot of companies out there that don't care, or won't comply.*

**Q: We talk a lot about leadership development at PPF - how do you feel like you've grown as a leader?**

*A: Between tabling and facilitating various things at different events, I've definitely learned a lot. One of the things that surprised me and that I didn't realize I could do was getting up and talking in front of large groups of people. Now I've spoken in front of groups back at the base building retreat we had in April in Lancaster, a few other times here in York, and in July at the interstate convening. The more you do it, the better you get at it!*

---

## TOGETHER WE WILL DO THIS

*by Richard Burrill*

**"Money doesn't talk, it swears."**

*- Bob Dylan*

Two years ago I attended a forum sponsored by a group called Healthcare4All at Franklin & Marshall College in Lancaster, PA. When I left that meeting, I was convinced that Single-payer healthcare was the way to go. I had just heard doctors, nurses and an economist speak of how beneficial it would be for our nation to change to this kind of system, and to individuals' financial situations. Last year over 60 percent of bankruptcies in the United States were caused by medical expenses. This is an issue that affects so many people, and yet it can be difficult to imagine change.

I began to speak to others about this, but was somewhat discouraged that most of them couldn't imagine such a thing, since they had always paid so much for insurance and medical care. I found it really challenging to find a way to work with others in advancing this idea.

Early last year, I was invited to attend a meeting in York, PA, by a group concerning healthcare. It turned out that the group was called Put People First PA, and the gentleman speaking, Eliel Acosta, said that PPFPA advocated healthcare for all and wanted to establish a local chapter in York County. Here were people that were established in Philadelphia a couple of

years before and espoused my beliefs, so I decided to join them.

Today, we have a small group in our community organization, but it's a beginning with good possibilities of growth. It is exciting that Put People First PA is going around this state of over 13 million people in an effort to build more local communities. As we grow, we will educate more citizens, gain confidence and power to accomplish our goals. Together we will do this.

**"Activism is my rent for living on the planet." - Alice Walker**





**Education, housing, healthcare, jobs that pay living wages, food, and a healthy environment are human rights.**

**PA Working Families stands by Put People First! PA to fight for human rights.**

[paworkingfamilies.org](http://paworkingfamilies.org)

## LEADERSHIP ACROSS DIFFERENCE

If we're going to have any chance of winning our human right to health care, or any of our rights, we're going to have to be able to unite poor, working people all across the state. We can start today though, and Put People First! PA is taking on a project, which we're calling "Leadership Across Difference," that aims to develop leaders who can bring people together across lines of division. These leaders will be respectful of and sensitive to others' different histories and backgrounds so that we can start to really see and understand each other. They'll also be able to help people see all that we hold in common so that we can fight together for a new and better society.

Below are some questions for us all to think about, on our path to becoming those kinds of leaders:

Have you ever seen or been a part of poor and working people working together across differences? What was that like? What challenges were there? What was good about having people with different backgrounds and histories together? What role did you play?

How do poor and working people learn to fear, hate, look down on and mistrust one another? Where do we learn those

things? Who teaches them to us? When do they get ingrained in us? How much comes from our actual experiences with other people, and how much comes from stories we're told about them by the media, etc.?

Who stands to benefit the most from our disunity and our mistreatment of one another? Who makes money off of that? Who gets to maintain their own power and influence that way?



**CONTACT US!**

(484) 619-2306

putpeoplefirstpa@gmail.com

Get in touch with  
**Put People First!**

**FIND US ONLINE!**

*Web:* putpeoplefirstpa.org

*FB:* Put People First - PA

*TW:* @PPF\_PA

*TMLR:* hchrpa.tumblr.com

SOUTHEAST PA FIELD ORGANIZER

Sheila Quintana

sheila@putpeoplefirstpa.org

CENTRAL PA & STATEWIDE CONTACT

Eliel Acosta

eliel@putpeoplefirstpa.org

