

THE KEYSTONE



A NEWSLETTER BY THE MEMBERS OF PUT PEOPLE FIRST! PENNSYLVANIA



The Put People First! PA family at the 2016 Membership Assembly in Harrisburg

Health and Dignity for All

*On January 26th, 2017, while the Republican leadership was in Philadelphia, Put People First joined thousands in the streets and demanded health care. PPF leader and fundraising team member **Farrah Samuels** gave the following speech.*

We believe that health care is a basic human right; not a privilege. We're fighting for all of you as a statewide organization to promote health and dignity for everybody — not just a few. So I want to tell you my story because I believe in the power of stories.

I just beat cancer — stage four. I had two forms of cancer. On April Fools Day 2015, I went to the doctor. He gave me a cruel joke: He said, "You got two forms of stage-four sarcoma; you've got three months to live." I said, "Doc nah those must be some

alternative facts; you gas lighting me right?" Then I began to fight.

Before that, my family and I were already enduring hardships: death of family members who couldn't afford insurance because they had pre-existing conditions, foreclosure, lack of jobs, a stint of homelessness in which we spent a month in a tent in Amish country. I'd had a big job! I had a bigly huge salary! I went from that to a salary of \$5000 a year as an adjunct professor with a master's degree. That's not enough for three people to survive.

So instead of my energy being focused on my fight, I had to beg for money every day on GoFundMe. Without the vital lifesavers of Medicaid — which threw me a life raft when I didn't have shit — SSPI, the ACA, Obamacare, and the friends and

family and people like you who gave me a dollar here and there so I could survive.

My story's still being written, and fortunately I'm here to tell it. I'm in remission today because I had Obamacare.

The pillars of our safety net that saved my life and so many others are being dismantled by officials who receive premium healthcare, sustainable salaries, pensions. Everyone deserves the right to live with a decent quality of life and the right to healthcare with dignity!

I was watching this movie. They said, "to exist alone is to survive unfair choices." So do I pay for my health insurance as a chronically ill person, or do I put food on my table to feed my *continued on page 2*

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Editor and Layout:
 Maddie Taterka

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info@putpeoplefirstpa.org
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In Loving Memory

Isabella Oliveras • Tiffany Walker



Tiffany



Bella

Bella and Tiff, two members of the Johnstown Healthcare Rights Committee, passed away this winter. Best friends through good times and bad, we remember them both and their determination to fight for their own needs as well as those of their communities, friends and families.

"My friends, we speak your names and we will continue to fight and to resist in your honor." - Farrah Samuels

continued from page 1
 family? It's a choice none of us should have to make but too many do.

Remember healthcare is a right not a privilege. And as Kendrick Lamar said, "We gon' be alright." But only if we stand together in solidarity and resistance of

inhumane governance. We — and you — are the ones we've been waiting for.

And I want to say that a revolution just may not be televised. So we got to make it live, and we got to make it alive. Will you fight for me? I will fight for all of you. Thank you!

Not Just a Number

by Wanda Miller, York

My mother died in January 2016. She spent the last few years of her life confined to a bed in a for-profit nursing home, which had received numerous citations for health and safety violations.

She was not permitted to go outside. Her diet consisted of starchy, highly processed, and canned food. My mother was a diabetic, so this diet was completely inappropriate for her. She was often dirty and unkept. Sponge baths were the norm. Real showers were a rarity.

I'm sure the question on everyone's mind is "if the nursing home was so bad, then why didn't I move her to a better facility?"

Unfortunately, moving my mother wasn't an option. Although I was her daughter, I was restricted from helping her by a court system and government agency with questionable motives. In Pennsylvania, persons sixty and over fall under the jurisdiction of the Older Adult Protective Services Act. The OAPSA gives county Areas on Aging Adult Protective Services representatives the power to forcibly remove older adults from their homes if there is evidence of neglect, abuse, financial exploitation or danger of serious bodily harm or imminent death

Once removed from the home, the older adult is placed under protective services and stripped

of their human and civil rights.

The older adult will be held in a hospital or nursing home, while the Adult Protective Services representative petitions the court for an emergency protective services order. These emergency protective services hearings are often held without due process or proper representation for the older adult. In my mother's case, she was denied her choice of representation. We had an attorney volunteer to represent her pro bono, yet the court would not allow mom to replace the court-appointed attorney.

In 2014, my mother nearly died from congestive heart failure, because the nursing home physician insisted she was suffering from nothing more than the common cold. My mother called me, begging for help. Because, my mother was under guardianship, I had no power to get her the medical care she desperately needed. When I contacted the guardian, I was told that "she (the guardian) trusted the nursing home to make the proper decision about my mother's healthcare."

Unfortunately, by the time the nursing home made the proper decision about my mother's healthcare, she needed to be hospitalized, and very nearly died. After my mother died, I saw the guardian's final report, which stated that between April 2015

and January 2016, the guardian visited my mother a total of 10 times at approximately 15 minutes per visit. That amounts to 2 hours over a period of 10 months. The guardian got paid \$100 per month from Medicaid to "care" for my mom. Considering that my mother was poor and the nursing home was left to oversee her health, the guardian had a pretty sweet gig in "caring" for her.

Guardianship is rampant in Pennsylvania and across the country. There is little to no oversight or accountability for guardians. Families are torn apart. Older adults are stripped of their rights and autonomy, and are warehoused to subsidize courts, attorneys, nursing homes, big pharma and other entities. Many older adults are chemically restrained, and denied basic health care.

My mother died in January of 2016. To the court system, the guardian, the nursing home, and the Poverty Industry, she was just a number. But, she wasn't just a number to me. She was my friend, my light, my reason for existing. She is the reason why I fight. Her story is what drives me. She was not just a number. She was my mother and I will not let her death be in vain.

She was not just a number. Her life had value. She was not just a number and I miss her so much.

PUT PEOPLE FIRST

2017 Campaign Plan at a Glance

Healthcare is a right, not a privilege!



GO ON DEFENSE

Defend the care we have. Share our stories. Support the push back against decision-makers who want to 1) repeal the ACA with no better replacement 2) defund Medicaid through Block Grants 3) turn Medicare into a voucher program.

GO ON OFFENSE

A state-based universal healthcare system is more important than ever to insulate PA from the Feds rolling back our healthcare rights. Now is the time to make sure that healthcare is a right for everyone in our state.



BUILD HEALTHCARE RIGHTS COMMITTEES

Connect with and bring together everyone who wants to see a real solution to the healthcare crisis, including people on Medicaid, Medicare, and those with no access. We can help groups get started & grow.

HOLD POWER-HOLDERS ACCOUNTABLE

Connect with your elected officials at every level. Stay politically independent. Let them know we believe that healthcare is a human right. They need to tell us whether they think healthcare is a right or a privilege. What will they do to ensure that healthcare is a right in Pennsylvania? We'll be asking them to make commitments.



BE CREATIVE AND TAKE ACTION

Take action to show the problem and the solution. Healthcare town halls, direct actions, and people's health clinics are some of what we're planning for 2017.

design by Maya Sariahmed

Member Interview: Julia from Pittsburgh

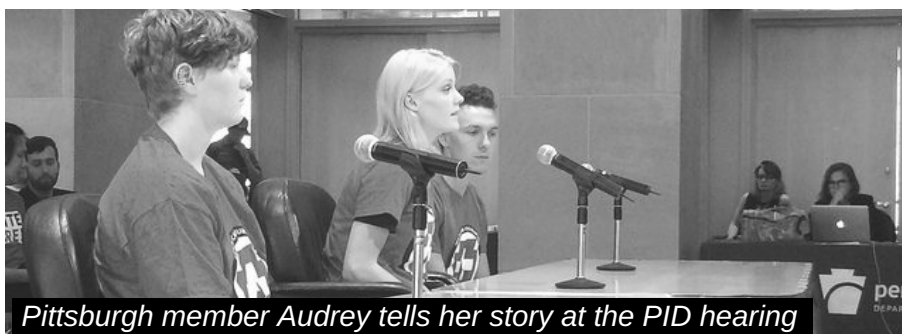
How did you get involved with Put People First in Pittsburgh?

Since I was a young person, I've been active in building community, organizing and activism when I feel strongly about something. I also worked in the service industry since I was young - in hotels, motels, and food service. I started organizing with my co-workers and then ended up doing union organizing for many years, which is how I met my partner Rose.

Rose had been diagnosed with cancer, neuroblastoma, and a year and a half after we met, she relapsed. Her treatment was really harsh and intense chemo, and she was very sick. She was better for a while and then she got a secondary cancer. Again, the treatment was really harsh.

When we got back to Pittsburgh after her treatment in New York, I was diagnosed with Lyme disease. I had been misdiagnosed for years: There was stuff going on with my body and my brain that hadn't been explained for diagnosed correctly. And by the time I got the Lyme diagnosis I was really very ill and wasn't able to do anything basically. And so it gradually shifted from me caring for Rose, to Rose caring for me.

In the meantime, we lost the amazing union health insurance that we had when we were working for a union. So suddenly we went from paying nothing for health insurance



to it becoming far and away our biggest expense. We also had way less income.

Around the time I got my Lyme disease diagnosis, Ben [Fiorillo, the Southwest PA organizer] started working with Put People First! PA. He told me about PPF and I was really interested in it. I wanted to be involved, but I was very sick and I felt like I wasn't able to do much at all. Ben is just a wonderful person and so even though I wasn't really able to follow through on everything I wanted to do at first, he kept coming back. Then he told me about this hearing on the ACA and health insurance premiums. I really felt like I had something to say, even though I didn't know how I would manage to get there.

How has the Pittsburgh Healthcare Rights Committee grown since then?

A number of us participated in this hearing, and then in the Statewide Membership Assembly in October. After that we got our local meetings rolling, and we organized a Town Hall on the human right to healthcare in December. It was a really successful event and more new folks came into the HRC.

The last couple of months have been especially exciting. We've continued our local meetings and have started doing 1-on-1 meetings with each other too, which has set off a lot more chemistry and camaraderie and unity. We had a birthday part for Rose, and everyone from the HRC came to celebrate together even though it snowed like crazy. People cooked food for each other and really built community.

Since then we've started pushing for meetings with our representatives to talk about the human right to healthcare. We want to get our representatives, whether it's national or state, working for us. Our first meeting was with Dom Costa, one of our state reps. It was surprising how on-board he was with our campaign. We've been going to other events with national and state reps, too, to talk to them about supporting a hearing on the future of healthcare in Pennsylvania: In just a couple of weeks we met with 10 of them, Democrats and Republicans. At this point we're realizing that now we have to start planning for how we want this hearing to happen, because the representatives sound like they're starting to run with it!

Un casi-votante de Trump

Abajo está un extracto del ensayo "Un casi-votante de Trump: Como educación y mi activism cambió la opinion de mi esposo." Puede leer el ensayo en todo en putpeoplefirstpa.org/blog

Below is an excerpt from the essay "An Almost Trump Voter: How education and my activism changed my husband's mind." This piece is published in English at Truth-Out.org. Read it here: <http://bit.ly/2oxjj7T>

Sabemos que a menos que creamos un amplio movimiento que incluye todos los que están luchando, no vamos a ganar. Entonces, gente rural y de pueblos chicos se tienen que unir con gente urbana. Personas cisgéneras uniéndose con personas transgéneras.

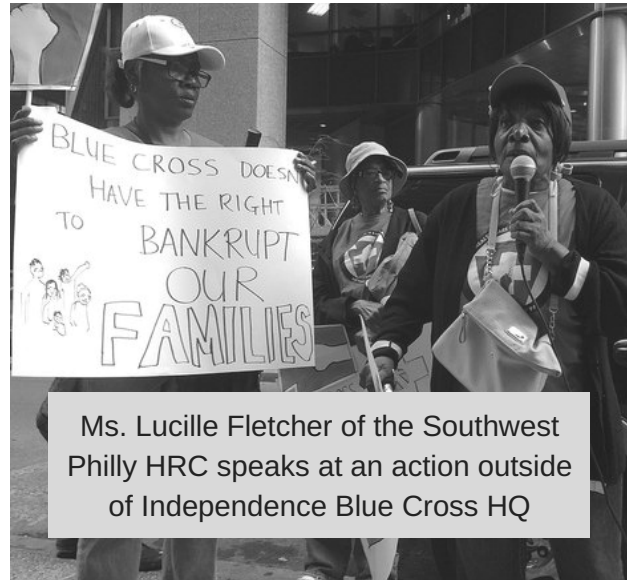
Respetamos la inteligencia de todos, creamos confianza a través de aprender nuestras historias, desarrollamos nuestro liderato, y estudiamos juntos. La gente de clase trabajadora y pobre son tan inteligentes como los demás. Por tener la oportunidad de aprender sobre el capital mundial y el racismo, conectamos nuestras experiencias individuales a la extensión amplia de la historia. Sabemos lo correcto y lo incorrecto, y podemos strategizar sobre cómo cambiarlo.

No somos rojos ni azules. No somos fichas para transacciones políticas, y la fuerza de nuestros vínculos va a resistir la clasificación, no importa si viene de los Republicanos llenos de odio o los Demócratas neoliberales. Resistiendo estas binarias no es solamente posible, si no es la única manera en que nos podemos unir los de abajo con suficiente fuerza para desafiar los de arriba.

Es posible. Y quizás ese es el mensaje de esperanza y cambio que realmente necesitamos.

-Danelle Morrow
(traducción: Anna Cibils)

Put People First PA is growing all over the state!



Ms. Lucille Fletcher of the Southwest Philly HRC speaks at an action outside of Independence Blue Cross HQ



The York HRC is planning a summer full of legislative visits and community outreach.



The Fayette Health Justice Committee unites people across the state affected by coal ash contamination in Labelle, PA, including people incarcerated and formerly incarcerated at SCI Fayette and those who work there.



Poetry Page

God gave us two ears

Their vestibules are exquisite

Their fluid is turbulent, they know exactly how fast you're tumbling through the universe

Their delicate hair cells catch lymphatic fluid the way long prairie grass catches a strong wind,

not quite directing it, just thoroughly feeling it, washing their stems so as to be nourished, to be remembered when the wind dies down

You could sow a few acres with these precious tundra cells, and the truth of the world might appear like people kneeling in prayer, like a song or surah. and the truth is that

A hair cell won't presume to tell you what all that feels like, It would just beep at you in friendly little pulses, the only way it knows how

the truth shatters when you try to hand it to people, force it on each other with harsh prose, and clumsy debates.

the truth isn't found or given, only shared.

when i was little, my parents didn't tell us that many bedtime stories, it wasn't really our thing.

i would lay in my bed saying those surahs which i could remember, the simple ones i thought were for making the sun rise. I used to know how small i am.

One day my mom was sitting on the porch waiting for the sun to set.

I said 'mama, your prayer only counts if you do it slowly, right?' She told me yes, I must have been 7 or 8.

i think, my parents knew we were hair cells.

They know that when the ground shakes, it's best to stand delicately on it to hear what it's telling you.

It's hard to do because so often, it's wrong when it reaches you. There's this lag separating us.

Sometimes I think being alone makes you special, that my frequency is the most ripe for amplifying
Sometimes I think being alone teaches you to listen harder,

Sometimes I think if we stay just perfectly still long enough, we'll know what we mean and we'll finally be together,

We'll finally be the way we were before we got so right, so righteous.

And bouquets of prairie grass will grow bursting from our ears

-Karim Sariahmed, Philadelphia

What it means to be a vibrant woman

To be bold and to stand up for what she believes in.

To dare to speak the truth and show respect where it's due.

To be loved and be appreciated for who she is.

To know right from wrong.

To be a teacher and be a achiever.

To be a caretaker and to be a friend.

She's a fighter, believer, lover and supporter but above all she's a vibrant woman.

-Isabella Oliveras

Johnstown

the resurrection

the part of you
that is dead or dying
or already died

and you are in the process
of reviving
keep it quiet for
we never want

them to know about it
to know about
that to
control it

therefore we must
never speak of it
only use it

*-Nijmie Dzurinko,
Philadelphia*



Contact us!

Web: PutPeopleFirstPA.org

Phone: 484-619-2306

Email: PutPeopleFirstPA@gmail.com

Facebook: Put People First - PA

Twitter: @PPF_PA

Instagram: @ppf_pa

Regional Organizers

Southeast PA: Roger Swartz

roger@putpeoplefirstpa.org

South Central PA: Carla Christopher

carla@putpeoplefirstpa.org

Southwest PA: Ben Fiorillo

ben@putpeoplefirstpa.org

