

We Continue to Flourish

Members of Women's Voices Raised for Social Justice continue to build a strong and vital organization in St. Louis that will fulfill the group's mission: "to identify, research and discuss social justice issues; to mobilize, energize and inspire our members and others, and to work as individuals and in community for social justice." As we conclude our fourth year, we have 134 dues-paying members and another 332 individuals on our friends/subscribers list.

Women's Voices is, first and foremost, an educational organization. We are recognized as a 501 (c) (3) not-for-profit organization by the Internal Revenue Service. In 2008 the Missouri Department of Revenue granted our request for state sales-tax exemption. We educate our members through monthly meetings and focus groups. We educate our friends through our monthly e-newsletter. And we educate the general public through our web site and by speaking out on a variety of social justice issues that concern us all.

Social change is a slow, incremental process that must begin with an awareness of the issues. As we continue to examine some of the most pressing problems of our time — poverty, racism, health care, the environment, criminal justice, and others — we have become better informed advocates. And while this process may not have resulted in visible change in society, we know that change has occurred within ourselves.

During the Past Year (June 2008-May 2009) We Have:

- Attended a performance of "Sarafina," a compelling and energetic play about social justice and the importance of activism, produced by the Black Rep
- Witnessed the graduation of more than 20 students from North St. Louis YouthBuild, a group that we supported with contributions of time, money and media relations
- Enhanced our understanding of the importance of framing issues with a discussion of the book, "Don't Think of an Elephant," by George Lakoff

- Marched in the St. Louis Pride Parade and the annual “Walk As One” event, sponsored by the National Conference on Community and Justice
- Supported the Jeff Smith 3-on-3 basketball tournament in Fairgrounds Park, which sparked our interest in issues of diversity and the problems of North St. Louis
- Joined with Americans United to co-sponsor a forum on Politics and Religion, and with Community Against Poverty to co-sponsor a candidate forum in September
- Participated in a leadership training program sponsored by the St. Louis Chapter of Jobs With Justice and joined with other organizations in an event sponsored by the University of Missouri St. Louis called “Celebrating Women: Reinventing Ourselves After 50”
- Met with several groups interested in bringing early voting to Missouri
- Sponsored a bus tour of three North St. Louis neighborhoods and learned about the Neighbors for Social Justice group
- Co-sponsored a number of events, including: the First Freedom Breakfast in Jefferson City, the Community Against Poverty Volunteer Fair, the annual Freedom of Choice event to mark the anniversary of the Roe v Wade decision, a leadership training program spearheaded by the Incarnate Word Foundation, and a town hall meeting with State Rep. Rick Stream
- Joined with the Women’s Democratic Forum to bring Philip Dine, a former St. Louis Post-Dispatch reporter and author of “State of the Unions,” to St. Louis for a luncheon program
- Turned out in force for a downtown rally, “Stop the Bleeding, Start the Healing,” called by faith leaders to protest planned cuts in health and social services to the Missouri budget
- Supported the efforts of the Midwestern Innocence Project to launch an office in St. Louis by purchasing a table at a dinner featuring author John Grisham

Going Forward:

As we conclude our fourth year of learning and working, Women’s Voices is embarking on a strategic planning process to help us better focus our efforts. We want to be able to meet the needs and expectations of our members as, together, we tackle the problems of our community. The challenges are great, but we remain determined to stand up and speak out.

Since its inception, Women's Voices has been a multi-issue organization, exposing its members to a variety of concerns and encouraging them to work on those that have the most resonance for them. Two issues that have been of primary interest to many of our members are health care and the environment. Those who are passionate about these topics have joined Women's Voices Focus Groups.

Members of the Health Care Focus Group have:

- Taken leadership roles in Missouri Health Care For All (MHCFA), a non-partisan grassroots movement working to secure access to health care for all Missourians
- Gathered endorsements for the principles of MFCFA at a variety of events
- Spoken to church groups and organizations to gain support for MHCFA
- Attended retreats to learn how to become better advocates for social justice
- Sponsored the January program for Women's Voices, which vividly described the needs of uninsured and under-insured patients at a federally-qualified health center, and outlined the progress toward health care reform
- Written letters to the editor and called elected officials about health care issues
- Organized and attended town hall meetings about proposed budget cuts to social services

Members of the Environment Focus Group have:

- Worked to support the Clean air Initiative, which was approved by Missouri voters in November by a 66 per cent majority
- Co-sponsored a candidate forum on environmental issues
- Supported efforts of the 1Sky organization and its attempts to promote "green" jobs
- Learned about water scarcity and privatization; mountaintop removal in coal mining; global warming; renewable energy technologies; how population and consumption affect global warming; invasive plants and the damage they cause; and sustainable, slow food
- Worked against proposed Construction While In Progress (CWIP) legislation
- Attended Conservation Lobby Day in Jefferson City
- Participated in St. Louis Earth Day Festival in Forest Park: Dispensed rewards to those who met the Earth Day Challenge, provided information about the bane of single-use plastic bags and bottled water, and modeled a dress made entirely of plastic bags

The heart of our Women's Voices programming has always been our monthly membership meetings, where excellent speakers have generously shared their time and knowledge with us.

We are Grateful to:

Harper Barnes, Ann Collins and Martha Patterson, who spoke to us about the history of East St. Louis

Repps Hudson, who shared his knowledge of the electoral process

Kate Lovelady, who emphasized the importance of mindful awareness

Abbe Sudvarg, M.D., and Sidney Watson, Ph.D., who brought us up to date on the health care crisis in Missouri

Bob Hansman, who touched us with his efforts to use art to rescue inner city children

Darryl Burton, Jay Swearingen and Tamara Morris, who made us aware of the Midwestern Innocence Project

Rachel Crandell, who took us on a tour of the Children's Eternal Rainforest in Costa Rica

Leadership of Women's Voices Raised for Social Justice, 2008-09

President: Barbara Finch

Vice President: Jeanne Bubb

Secretary: Joanne Kelly

Treasurer: Mary Clemons

Board Members: Judy Evans, Chery Green, Mary Ann Tipton, Bev White (elected)

Judy Arnold, Judy Martin Finch, Shelly Lemons (appointed)

Webmaster: Chery Green

Newsletter Editor: Judy Arnold

Program Chairs: Judy Martin Finch, Shelly Lemons

Membership Chair: Susan Hayman

Health Care Focus Group Chair: Barbara Richter

Environment Focus Group Chair: Alice Serrano

Jobs with Justice Liaison: Marilyn Sue Warren

First Freedom Event Liaison: Julie Healey

Monthly Meeting Hostesses: Mary O'Reilly, Stephanie Sigala

Strategic Planning Coordinator: Amy Smoucha