

## Core Members

Anne, Christine Nealon, Dametriss Walker, Glen Taylor, K. Wheeler, Kristen, Linda Adams, Mary Pimble, Molly, Patty Marshall, Roberta A. Farrell, and Virginia Eubanks.

## 2007-08 Projects

- **Community Outreach to Alpha Center, YWCA Troy-Cohoes, SPARC, Whitney M. Young Recovery Center, Unity House, and Albany County Department of Social Services.**
- **Over 500 sets of Welfare Information Cards distributed.**
- **Submitted a grant proposal to *Holding Our Own: A Fund for Women* to support the collect testimony of economic human rights violations from people struggling to meet their basic needs in the Capital Region.**
- **Participated in AIDSWalk 2008**
- **Developed a relationship with the Poor People's Economic Human Rights Campaign (PPEHRC).**

## Myth Buster

It is a common misconception that people on Welfare don't work. In fact, over 75% of welfare recipients are in the labor market, either combining welfare with low wages, working some of the time and receiving welfare between jobs, working limited hours and looking for work, or looking for work the entire time.

Contact us at [OKOP@populartechnology.org](mailto:OKOP@populartechnology.org) or find more information at <http://www.populartechnology.org/OKOP/>

## OKOP

Our Knowledge Our Power

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ISSUE

01

Annual  
Report

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# Our Knowledge Our Power

## Mission Statement

**Our Knowledge, Our Power** draws on values of respect, local expertise, grassroots process and true democracy to make real, meaningful change in the terribly unfair and exploitative system of public assistance in New York State, which keeps people dependent and poor. We try to counteract the alienation and lack of respect that public assistance "beneficiaries" often encounter by sharing information and resources to bridge the gap between public assistance recipients and workers/ politicians/ the general public. We believe we can bridge this gap by drawing on our collective power to:

- Empower people most directly impacted by the social service system;
- Enlighten people about their rights in the system;
- Provide tools for navigating the system; Help with the application process;
- Facilitate knowledge sharing; and Share our needs, challenges and aspirations with other members of the community.



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## Message from OKOP Members

If you stand around the bus stop or local convenience store you will hear people talking about the price of gas, crashing stock markets, and financial hardships. For OKOP members, this is old news. Since many of us have had to go on Welfare to supplement our low wages, lost jobs, or deal with a medical crisis, we have had to struggle to meet our basic needs. We are experts at making our groceries stretch to feed our families. We already know how to take the bus, juggle our bills, and put plastic on our old windows to keep our energy bills low. We share resources with our neighbors. We swap childcare for dinner, rides to the grocery store for milk, and diapers for using the phone. Our lives depend on depending on our community and yet we still struggle to get off Welfare. The purpose of our group is to figure out why getting ahead is so hard and to understand our experiences in a way that creates social change. When we were alone we thought we were failures but coming together made us realize there must be more to the story. When we started to compare our experiences within the group we saw a pattern of violations to our economic human rights. Why in this country, is it common to work more than 40 hours a week and still need food stamps and Medicaid? Is it fair that when you go to apply for help you are treated so poorly you just want to give up?

We took a poll among our friends and families and asked them, "Do you want or like to be on Welfare?" They all answered NO! So how is it that so many people get stuck in the system? OKOP has set out to answer these questions. When we spoke with Albany County Administrators like Elizabeth Berlin and County Executive Michael Breslin, they seemed interested in these questions, too. So are the people giving us testimony about the economic human rights violations they have suffered. We are documenting these abuses to send to the Poor People's Economic Human Rights Campaign, who will then present them to a truth commission. We want to be a part of making a big difference by mobilizing for a decent future. We share a vision where every person has access to jobs that pay a living wage, medical insurance, adequate food, safe environments, and affordable housing. Every person should have the opportunity to experience life filled with fairness and equitable treatment no matter how much they struggle. If you also share this vision please consider learning more about our grass roots initiatives.

**You can support our work financially by writing a check to our financial sponsor, the Women's Building. Donations are fully tax-deductable and can be sent to OKOP, P.O. Box 1613, Troy NY 12181.**



# Join Us!

## You can help end poverty.

Join us in our efforts to reform the welfare system, end poverty, and document human rights abuses of people struggling to meet their basic needs. There are many ways you can support our efforts:

## Share your story.

Have your economic human rights been violated? Do you live in the Capital Region of New York? Document this abuse with one of our volunteers. These stories will be collected and turned into a community report. Then, they will be sent to the Poor People's Economic Human Rights Campaign to support efforts to end poverty nationwide. If you are willing to share your story, please contact us at (518) 892-6697, and we'll come to you.

## Come to a meeting.

*Our Knowledge, Our Power* meets from 12:30 – 3 PM, the second Saturday of every month, at the Women's Building (373 Central Ave.) in Albany, NY. Join us as we fight for the rights of people struggling to meet their basic needs in the Capital Region. Free food and childcare is provided at each meeting.

## Make a donation.

*Our Knowledge, Our Power* is 100% volunteer run, and we operate on a \$4000/year budget. You can support our work financially by writing a check to our financial sponsor, the Women's Building. Donations are fully tax-deductible and can be sent to OKOP, P.O. Box 1613, Troy NY 12181. For more information, contact Virginia at [OKOP@populartechnology.org](mailto:OKOP@populartechnology.org) or call (518) 892-6697.



## OKOP Joins AIDS Walk 2008

On a warm and sunny Sunday afternoon in early October, members of *Our Knowledge Our Power* (OKOP) and their families joined over 30 community organizations fighting to improve the quality of life for those living with or affected by HIV/AIDS. For two hours we shared our mission, talked about our current projects, and invited other walkers to tell their personal stories detailing violations of their economic human rights.

We realized that we shared a lot in common with folks walking to raise awareness about HIV/AIDS. The stigma that is attached to this disease is similar to being on Public Assistance; it makes people feel like they are not citizens, like they have fewer rights, and like they are bad people for getting the disease or asking for help in the first place.

OKOP members Glen and Linda, and two of their children, join the AIDS Walk in Washington Park

OKOP took a stand at the Walk against this kind of treatment of anyone. We believe that every human being deserves the respect and dignity that promotes health and independence.

It was exciting for our group to get out and share our mission and hear others' stories, and we were surprised by the response we got. Even Albany's County Executive Michael Breslin and Albany Mayor Gerry Jennings stopped to check out our table. We look forward to continuing our conversations with them to see how they might be able to learn from our group about the needs of individuals struggling to meet their basic needs.

More than 40 other people from organizations and groups also came to check out our new sign, get candy, and share their ideas and experiences. Overall, it was a great opportunity to reaffirm the importance of the OKOP mission and a great start to collecting testimony to send to the Poor People's Economic Human Rights Campaign.

Kim, mother of six, balances parenting with grassroots organizing for better treatment of individuals struggling to meet their basic needs.



## Emergency Asset Transfer (EAT)

In 2007 OKOP members decided that we needed to allocate resources to an emergency asset transfer fund (EAT). This fund will be used to provide emergency assistance to core group members facing eviction, utility shut off, or lack of food on a one-time basis. After learning about one OKOP member's financial crisis, we realized that there was a common theme among group members struggling to meet their basic needs. For many of us, unexpected medical, transportation, or living expenses can make it impossible to keep up with monthly bills. OKOP lacked short-term solutions for our group members experiencing financial crisis. As a result, people were facing homelessness, hunger, eviction and other life-altering crises.

What often started out as a small shortfall in a family budget snowballed into eviction notices for amounts as small as \$100. Can you imagine being evicted for just \$100? Our group members can. We decided that if we wanted to continue organizing for the economic human rights of all Americans that we first needed to start in our small group. So far we have distributed just under \$300 in EAT funding and have prevented two evictions and a utility shut off. OKOP members decided on the rules of how this money would be allocated, how often and under what circumstances. You can read for your self how group members feel about our democratic process and the positive impact EAT has had on their lives.

## Why We Do The Work We Do...

"OKOP gives people a chance to come together and find that the issues with social services that they are facing are common—and that they are not the result of personal decisions but that of an unjust social services system.

This is a space to vent, act and change those things that seemed unchangeable."

"It's just my daughter and myself. It really helps to have someone to talk to about the problems that welfare takes me through. I will be so glad when I no longer need their help. Welfare helps you get by but the stress is not worth it. You have to really talk yourself into asking for the help you need."

## EAT Grant Recipients Sound Off....

"The EAT grant I received made me feel positive about paying the bill that I had to pay. If EAT was not available I don't know what I would have done. Thank God for EAT!"

"EAT gives me a sense of security because I have had a lot of situations where a few dollars would have saved my livelihood."

## OKOP Financial Statement June 2007- June 2008

Expenses		
	Child Care	\$617.50
	Food	\$508.51
	Participant Stipends	\$1,540.00
	Rent	\$300.00
	Supplies	\$99.53
	Postage	\$45.89
	Publications	\$150.00
	EAT Grants	\$300.00
	<b>Total Expenses</b>	<b>\$3,551.43</b>
Income	EAT Donations	\$225.00
	Grant Funds	\$1,095.00
	Anonymous Donor	\$2,375.00
	<b>Total Income</b>	<b>\$3,695.00</b>