

Teleconference – "A Conversation with Mary's Pence Grantees"

Mary's Pence held its second teleconference on December 9, 2010, "A Conversation with Mary's Pence Grantees," where our donors were invited to dial in to listen to and participate with three of our recent Ministry grant recipients--- Common Law, Inc., NYC; Hagar's House, New Orleans, LA; and Reflect and Strengthen, Dorchester, MA --- as they spoke about their organizations origins' and mission and how the grant from Mary's Pence has been used to help them in their work.

During the hour long teleconference, founders of the three highlighted groups detailed how their grant supported their efforts, and gave updates about the growth and development of their projects and programs. Attorney Karen Gargamelli, of Common Law, Inc. explained how the funds from Mary's Pence helped relieve the burden of overhead, fees and costs associated with administrative work and court appearances as they work to assist groups like VAMOS Unidos to change an unfair system that provides only 3,000 permits for 20,000 food vendors in NYC. The group, started by undocumented women working to support themselves by selling homemade food on the New York City streets has now grown to have chapters in several boroughs. According to Karen, the groups' growth has been so significant that they may show up in court en masse, 200 or more people, to stand in solidarity and protest against the \$1000 fines for "vending without a permit".

Angela Davis of Hagar's House, in New Orleans, a sanctuary for women and children that provides a safe space to transition into sustainable housing, detailed how the grant from Mary's Pence helped support their holistic Social Justice and Advocacy program, which provides education, skills training and encourages action and involvement in the community. Originally founded to provide housing for families displaced by hurricane Katrina when the levees broke, Hagar's House now offers programs such as Capacity Building and a Resident Savings program. Some members recently attended the "School of the Americas Watch" where they received non-violence training and the opportunity to network with other groups working toward social justice throughout the world. The Hagar's House community also recently hosted peace activist and Nobel Peace Prize nominee Kathy Kelly.

Roselyn Berry, co-founder of Reflect and Strengthen, a grassroots collective of young working class women from the urban neighborhoods near Boston, spoke of how their group takes a holistic approach to organizing to creating personal and social transformation for young women who have been affected by violence, racism, sexism, homophobia and classism. The grant from Mary's Pence has supported those efforts by funding their internal leadership development program, "Sisters Rising," where members can "step up" to lead committees, plan events, and take on internships and be responsible for implementing organizational decisions made by the membership. The group is currently working to provide support for youth and effecting change in the juvenile justice system through their program "Our Sisters Behind the Wall" and partnership with The Massachusetts Juvenile Justice Task Force on Racial Disparities.

Joining on the call as well were founders and staff from several other organizations, who were also eager to participate and network with fellow grant recipients, and each was given a few minutes to briefly share about their organizations' focus. Grantees attending the discussion were:

Casa Guadalupana House of Hospitality – Connie Aligada

Old Lesbians Organizing for Change – Jan Griesinger

LifeWay Network – Sr. Geraldine Kennedy

Tengo Voz – Barbara Santiago

Camarones Cooperative – Laura Randall

The teleconference ended with a brief question and answer session and a few notable comments including that from OLOC's founder Jan Griesinger, who mentioned that she "admired the work being done on social justice issues by each of these groups" and also from Sr. Geraldine Kennedy of LifeWay Network, who noted that she was also "impressed with all of the activity going on." Common Law, Inc.'s Karen Gargamelli made a request for help to organize events where local groups in NYC could meet and network to share resources in 2011. Mary's Pence hopes to act as a conduit to this relationship building by hosting a conversation in upcoming weeks between present and past Mary's Pence grant recipients from the New York area.