

This Fifth Year has been a period of continued learning about current social justice concerns, taking stands on important issues, and networking and partnering with other like-minded groups to advocate for change.

It has also been a time of introspection for leaders of the organization as they have engaged in strategic planning for the future of Women's Voices. We must continue to change and grow in order to meet the needs of our members and to be a positive influence in our community. Our strategic planning will carry over into our 2010-11 program year, as we make the transition from our issue-oriented focus groups into broader organizational advocacy efforts.

Education, both for our members and the general public, and advocacy, relating to crucial issues of social justice in our community, will continue to be priorities for the organization. As a result of our strategic planning, we have committed to provide advocacy training for our members, which will strengthen the organization and make our voices more effective.

From a group that began as an idea of four women in the spring of 2005, Women's Voices has grown into a respected St. Louis organization that today numbers 147 dues-paying members. An additional 334 individuals subscribe to our monthly newsletter, "Loud and Clear." We are one of the few social justice organizations in St. Louis that focuses on a variety of issues and is not associated with a religious denomination.

One of our members described us as ***"a group of progressive women who collaborate and network for social justice through consciousness-raising, education and advocacy."***

What We Did in 2009-10 to Strengthen our Organization:

- We surveyed all of our members to determine if we are meeting their needs and to get their ideas about the future of the organization. Ninety-six percent of the respondents indicated they were satisfied or very satisfied with Women's Voices. Many members also indicated they wanted a more specific direction for the group.
- We initiated a strategic planning process, which will enable us to set priorities and guide our efforts in the future.

- Three of our officers participated in a day-long training program sponsored by the Alliance for Justice, which will enable us to be more effective lobbyists for issues that concern us.
- We extended our educational and public relations efforts by securing air time for some of our speakers on “St. Louis On The Air” on our local public radio station.

In 2009-10, in Collaboration with Others, We:

- Marched in the St. Louis Pride Parade for the fifth year.
- Joined with other St. Louisans in the annual Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. parade.
- Marched with other supporters of immigrant, civil and human rights who demonstrated in downtown St. Louis at the quadrennial assembly of the United Methodist Women.
- Supported the Uppity Theater Company’s production of “Becoming Emily,” a play that highlights the importance of a strong pro-choice community.
- Co-sponsored the “Literacy for Social Justice Curriculum Fair” at the University of Missouri-St. Louis.
- Co-sponsored two events with the Community Against Poverty (CAP) organization, a “Green Pathways Out Of Poverty” program that focused on environmental sustainability for low-income communities, and the third annual “Volunteer Fair,” which enables direct service organizations to find needed volunteers.
- Participated in the National Day of Action in October to encourage members of congress to support health care reform.
- Supported the work of the Missouri Health Care For All coalition, participating in numerous rallies, marches, letter-writing and call-in campaigns in the successful effort to get major health reform legislation passed this year.
- Continued our collaboration with the St. Louis chapter of Jobs With Justice and bought a table for that organization’s 10th anniversary dinner.
- Purchased two cows for a project in Uganda sponsored by St. Louis-based Microfinancing Partners in Africa.

We Took a Stand on Local Issues. Members Voted to:

- Endorse a proposition to prohibit smoking in indoor public spaces in St. Louis County.
- Endorse a proposition to levy a one-half-cent sales tax for Metro bus, light rail and Call-a-Ride services in the County.
- Oppose a proposal that would eliminate the Missouri income tax in favor of a mega sales tax.

Many Thanks to Those Who Spoke to Women's Voices this Year:

Bob Holden, former governor of Missouri and founder of the Holden Public Policy Forum at Webster University, who spoke about energy policies and how they affect the midwest.

Will Ross, M.D., associate dean for diversity at Washington University School of Medicine, who discussed disparities in health care and the challenge of providing health insurance for everyone.

Nikki Weinstein, policy and community engagement coordinator for Focus St. Louis, who described that organization's "Bridges" program, which attempts to span the racial divide in St. Louis.

Sister Toni Temporiti, founder of Microfinancing Partners in Africa, who showed us how small low-interest loans can change the lives of people in Kenya and Uganda.

Peter W. Salsich Jr., J.D., from the St. Louis University School of Law, and Sean Thomas, executive director of Old North St. Louis Restoration Group, who described their vision of sustainable urban living and added to our understanding of the situation in North St. Louis.

Henry S. Webber, executive vice chancellor for administration and senior lecturer at Washington University, who discussed the problems of urban education and possible ways to improve public schools.

Nina Balsam, J. D., administrator of the Missouri Restorative Justice Coalition, who outlined the principles of restorative justice and how they relate to victims, offenders and the community.

Richard Patton, director of Vision for Children at Risk, who described the work of his organization and the link between child well-being and community and economic development.

Gwenne Hayes-Stewart, executive director of Gateway Greening, who talked about how sustainable urban gardens and farming can effect positive social change.

All of these speakers were generous with their time and expertise, enhanced our understanding of a variety of social justice issues, and prompted many of us to get involved and speak out.

We Remember Two Very Special Women:

Two women who were important to Women's Voices died in January, 2010.

The Rev. Suzanne Meyer, who was instrumental in the founding of the group, died in Cheyenne, Wyoming, where she was pastor of the First Unitarian Church.

Melanie Shouse, a member of both our environment and health care focus groups, was a tireless and brilliant advocate for health care reform. She died after a four-year battle with both breast cancer and her insurance company.

Leadership of Women's Voices Raised for Social Justice, 2009-10:

Women's Voices Raised for Social Justice is an all-volunteer organization. *We are grateful to our officers and board members this past year:*

President: Barbara L. Finch Vice President: Jeanne Bubb
Secretary: Shelly Lemons Treasurer: Mary Clemons

Board of Directors: Judy Arnold, Judy Evans, Judy Martin-Finch,
Barbara Richter, Ann Ruger, Alice Serrano, Bev White

And to the following for their contributions:

Judy Arnold, newsletter editor Jeanne Bubb, program chair
Ruth Ann Cioci, graphic design Dale Clemons, photography
Elitta DeArmond and Judy Evans, meeting co-hosts
Chery Green, web master Shelly Lemons, survey design
Judy Martin-Finch, public relations and child care coordinator
Barbara Richter, health care advocacy efforts
Ann Ross, "Speak Out" articles Ann Ruger, membership chair
Traci Sachteleben, Facebook coordinator Alice Serrano, MLK parade organizer
Amy Smoucha, strategic planning coordinator Mary Ann Tipton, web site calendar

And to all those members who:

Brought cookies, arranged car pools, made phone calls, served on committees, helped clean up, suggested speakers, sent out e-mails, and in many other ways helped to make Women's Voices a growing, vital organization.

"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed people can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has." **... Margaret Mead**