



ITEMS



COMMISSION ON VOLUNTARY SERVICE & ACTION

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CVSA Gains Special NGO Status to UN Economic and Social Council



Photo: CVSA

CVSA's seat at the September 22, 2013 UN NGO Roundtable discussion on the Post-2015 Sustainable Development Goals.

by Susan Angus, CVSA Executive Director

Commission on Voluntary Service & Action (CVSA) marked its first year of holding Special Non-Government Organization (NGO) Consultative Status to the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations (ECOSOC) this June, a period active with participation in several conferences and functions pertaining to the 2014-15 UN General Assembly's objectives of defining the Post-2015 Sustainable Development Agenda.

"Within weeks of receiving its UN credentials and ever since, CVSA has brought key views into the UN arena, emanating from previously unrepresented voices of CVSA

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Free Health Clinic in Greece Joins CVSA *International Support Sought to Address Public Health Crisis*

Metropolitan Community Clinic (MCCH), located just outside of Athens in the city of Helliniko, joined Commission on Voluntary Service & Action (CVSA) this summer to publicize to an international audience the urgent need for more medical professionals and non-medical personnel to volunteer their services as they respond to a dire public health crisis in Greece. Founded in December 2011 under the motto, "Nobody will be left alone during the crisis," the clinic grew out of life-and-death repercussions of a 25% cut in Greece's public hospital budget that took place between 2009 and 2011. Further cuts have continued since, all part of tough austerity measures imposed by the Greek government to remain in compliance with financial agreements made with the European Union, the European Central Bank and the International Monetary Fund – known among Greeks as the "Troika."

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Photo: Courtesy of Metropolitan Community Clinic

Volunteers at Metropolitan Community Clinic at Helliniko processing hundreds of medical requests to get people the care they need.

Organizations featured in this issue:

East Michigan Environmental Action Council, Detroit, MI
Food & Water Watch, Washington, DC
GoodPlanet Foundation, Paris, France
Metropolitan Community Clinic, Athens, Greece
Michigan Welfare Rights Organizations, Detroit, MI
United Nations Volunteer Programme (UNV), Bonn, DEU

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ITEMS



COMMISSION ON VOLUNTARY SERVICE & ACTION

ITEMS is published quarterly by **Commission on Voluntary Service & Action (CVSA)**, the consultative and coordinating body of more than 200 non-government, voluntary service organizations based in North America that support or place volunteers with projects and programs serving people in the U.S. and internationally. **CVSA** seeks to interpret, extend, promote and support the world of voluntary service and involvement programs, and maintain and expand the ability and right of individuals to donate their time and services to persons, groupings and communities of people in need, free of government restraint.

ITEMS is **CVSA's** newsletter information service for organizational members represented in **INVEST YOURSELF — The Catalogue of Volunteer Opportunities**. **ITEMS** reports and provides analysis of news related to the voluntary service field on a national and international level, as well as political and economic developments relevant to the independent voluntary service sector.

Many volunteers and volunteer organizations learn the hard way: through their own experiences, using trial and error. We find that wasteful and contrary to the basic principle of organization: that an organization is stronger than an individual. Collective experience is therefore also more powerful than that of a single individual, or, for that matter, a single organization.

Your submissions to **ITEMS** of information, news, advice, photographs and graphics depicting your work or simply your comments and concerns are instrumental to the process of growth and advancement of voluntary service as a whole. We always look forward to receiving them.

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ITEMS is free to **CVSA** members. **Subscription** rate for U.S. residents is \$15/year. Canadians and those abroad please add \$10 for additional mailing costs. Send your order and submissions of articles for publication to **CVSA**.

CVSA is a nonprofit 501(c)(3) charitable corporation with an all-volunteer staff; volunteers are always needed and tax-deductible contributions are welcome.

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The Power of a Full-time Volunteer to Break the Popular Sense of Powerlessness

by Yael Alonso, CVSA Volunteer Program Coordinator

As a full-time volunteer organizer, coordinating the Volunteer Program of Commission on Voluntary Service & Action, I sometimes come in contact with people who, unfortunately, have lost the eagerness to become part of an organization that is dedicated to changing social and economic conditions that they themselves recognize as unjust and unsustainable.

Why is this? What can we do to give them the vision that it is not only possible, it is necessary for the future of the whole of humanity that we see beyond the status quo and work together to change it.

It is understandable why so many people may have lost hope. In the history of the United States there have been many social movements and organizations that garnered large participation and appreciation from the population and have gained victories. From time to time, politicians make promises of change and raise hopes. But despite the political promises and successes of people's organizations, a situation persists where systemic problems of poverty and injustice pervade our society.

For instance, poverty is growing in the U.S. at a rate even faster than in the 1960s, when concern and activism against unjust conditions were at their height. Currently, one out of seven people in the U.S. is living in poverty (that's 46.5 million people — the largest number in the 54 years the U.S. census has measured poverty). Almost one out of 16 in the country is living in deep poverty (which is officially defined as having an income 50% below the recognized poverty line — that's 20.4 million people.) And 21.8% of children under 18 — or some 16.1 million American youth — are living below the poverty line.

The U.S. has one in six people unemployed or underemployed — that's 27 million people who don't have adequate work on which to survive. We have 3.5 million people experiencing homelessness annually — and that only accounts for those who use homelessness services.

Over two million people fill our prisons, with the majority being black and Hispanic, (four times as many black males are incarcerated in the U.S. than were imprisoned under apartheid in South Africa.)

In the time since the Vietnam War, which polls in 1973 showed 73% of the U.S. population opposed, the U.S. government has spent over \$11 trillion on further incursions into poor and developing nations, and on weaponry, military bases and live practice drills all over the world.



Photo: Sabbir Ahmed Mashar

CVSA Volunteer Program Coordinator, Yael Alonso, talking to a concerned community member about volunteering.

As for our environment, the fact that more than half of rivers and streams in the U.S. are now unable to support life after decades of pollution, according to a study by the Environmental Protection Agency, tells you enough to know we are in big trouble — despite all the social, environmental and political movements that have been organized.

Just three years ago this fall, a movement raising the call “We are the 99%” caught the imagination of a large portion of the U.S. population, decrying the growing inequality stemming from less than 1% of the population owning and controlling the majority of the finances, natural resources and political power in the country. Lack of sufficient organizational structure resulted in a dissipation of that movement's activity while the inequality quotients have continued to grow. But that expression of energy and interest in working to make change in our society demonstrates there is sufficient desire to make that change — we need to build organization through which that energy can be put to work to achieve lasting and fundamental change.

Young people in particular today are faced with overwhelming social tragedies. They are either going to find ways to try to escape from them, be destroyed by them, or...find ways to solve them.

So, what do we do to provide people with the material hope and vision that we can — and must — change how the country is being run?

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CVSA Gains NGO Consultative Status at UN

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member organizations throughout the U.S. and the world,” stated Joy Cousminer, CVSA Advisory Committee member and founder of We Care for Credit Unions in New York City.

CVSA’s application for Consultative Status stated its goal of bringing the perspectives of volunteer leaders from poor and marginalized communities throughout the United States and the world into the debates and decision-making processes of the bodies and agencies of the UN, particularly in relation to the current deliberations on sustainable development, climate change, inequality and the elimination of poverty.

Sustainable Development Goals

CVSA was invited by the United Nations Non-Governmental Liaison Service (UN-NGLS) and the Post-2015 Development Planning Team of the Executive Office of the Secretary-General to attend “an interactive multi-stakeholder dialogue” on 22 September 2013 titled “Advancing Regional Recommendations on the Post-2015 Development Agenda,” held at UN Headquarters, Trusteeship Council Chamber.

CVSA participated in roundtable discussions with representatives of over 200 other NGOs from every region of the world, along with representatives of governments and UN agencies. The agenda addressed critical regional issues and policy recommendations to be included in the drafting of the Post-2015 Sustainable Development Goals. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) define both quantifiable economic, social and environmental objectives and policies to improve people’s lives and protect the planet for future

generations. The UN is presently engaged in defining the next stage of Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) which were established in 2000 and intended to be achieved by 2015.

The discussion at first focused on the problems developing nations have faced over the last 14 years in striving to achieve the UN’s Millennium Development Goals, which have largely not been achieved in most of the nations of the world.

Bathbile Olive Dlamini, South African Minister for Social Development, served with Joe Costello, Minister for Trade and Development of the Republic of Ireland as moderators of the discussion for the first part of the event. Ms. Dlamini reiterated that the post-2015 development agenda will be constructed through an open and transparent inter-governmental process that must take into account the achievements made in the recent decade on regional levels.

Roberto Bissio of the NGO Social Watch noted that thanks to an active policy of progressive taxation and redistribution, Latin America plus the Caribbean is the only region in the world that reduced inequalities in the last decade, while inequalities are increasing in developing countries and in advanced economies everywhere else. He said that further progress in this area, however, faces obstacles due to obligations imposed by the international trade and investment system that frequently contradict human rights-based policies. Mr. Bissio explained that “Free trade agreements have not delivered on their promise of prosperity, and the Caribbean region, for example, is heavily burdened by debt as a result.” An imbalance of power towards corporations in combination with international financial volatility, “derived from the inability of the advanced economies to properly regulate their financial markets, is negatively affecting the development prospects of the Latin American and Caribbean region and needs to be addressed,” he asserted.

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When the floor was open for questions, CVSA Executive Director Susan Angus stated, “Here in the U.S., one of the largest and richest of the developed countries, poverty is growing and has especially increased at a more rapid speed over the last five to ten years, with the largest gap between the small minority of very rich and the poor and working people ever in the history of the country. There are whole communities in the U.S. living without running water in their homes for lack of ability to pay the cost, and with their electricity turned off due to unaffordable high rates. While the poverty in the U.S. is no comparison to the level of poverty in the developing world, *yet*, it is a trend that one could call ‘reverse-development’ which is going on in this nation for an entire class of people.

“At the same time, there are countries in the world that have made emulative progress in greatly decreasing poverty in their nation. The People’s Republic of China has eliminated all extreme poverty and certain Latin American countries such as Venezuela have reduced poverty significantly.

“Therefore, since elimination of poverty was the top priority of the MDGs and will be the top priority of the SDGs, it seems to us it would be extremely valuable to the world to have an analysis made of the difference between the economic policies in the countries where increased deprivation is occurring and the policies implemented by the nations who have successfully eliminated extreme deprivation. Will such an analysis be made, which UN agency will conduct it, and do you need any assistance with this from volunteers with NGOs in the U.S. who work in the low-income poverty areas and from elsewhere in the world?”

Zhang Weiwei, Director of China Peace and Development Foundation, an NGO based in Beijing, also added from the audience, “We, too, think it is necessary to do some NGO-based research, or partnership case study, based on successes and failures in meeting the objectives of the MDGs over the past ten to 15 years. With all our Chinese modesty, we do think China has gained tremendous experience in fighting poverty. 70%, if not more, of world poverty that has been eradicated has been eradicated in China. China has also succeeded in providing basic health insurance to its 1.3 billion people within less than ten years. Perhaps this experience can be shared with others. Our Foundation is set up to facilitate studies and shared experience. Thank you.”

Alicia Bárcena, Executive Secretary of the UN Economic Commission for Latin America (ECLAC) and Coordinator of the Regional Commissions, moderating this portion of the discussions, said, “We should definitely take



Photo: CVSA

Susan Angus, CVSA Executive Director, (bottom, right) suggesting the UN make an analysis, based on data, of the differences between the economic policies of nations successful in achieving Millennium Development Goals and those which were not and have, instead, rising rates of poverty.

you up on your offer.” However, as of this time, no steps have been taken on this by any UN agency. CVSA intends to pursue this in the coming year.

The September 22, 2013 event also launched a report entitled Advancing Regional Recommendations for the Post-2015 Development Agenda, which was compiled through a series of regional consultations carried out from May through August 2013, conducted by UN Non-Governmental Liaison Service (UN-NGLS) for the UN Secretary-General, the General Assembly and the Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals. Many NGOs who participated in the roundtable discussions of this event and had participated in compiling the report, stated their concern about an emphasis being articulated by many developed countries in the SDG deliberations about the role they want “the private sector” (i.e., private corporations and the business sector) to play in pursuing sustainable development in developing nations. These NGOs stated that the private sector could provide a positive contribution to development only within an overall strategy of reasserting the role of strong public policies, along with assertive democratic oversight. They proposed that all private sector funds must be monitored and strongly regulated by governments, or by independent commissions (comprised of members from different segments of society).

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CVSA Gains NGO Consultative Status at UN

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The primary difference between the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) that were agreed upon by 189 nations of the General Assembly in the year 2000, and the new Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) for 2015 through 2030 are that the developing countries have been adamant about committing to urgently needed and clearly defined structural, systemic and policy changes rather than accepting solely a quantified listing of objectives. Over the course of the past two years, representatives of developing nations have documented in reports and debates that no empirical list of goals towards poverty elimination, health care improvement, education, or reversing climate change, is possible without major changes in international trade, financial and currency policies. They call for a reconstructing based on values of equality, solidarity, respect for their sovereign rights and justice.

Anita Nayar, Chief of UN-NGLS in New York, summed up the findings from consultations held with 120 regional nongovernmental networks and social movements, in all representing over 3,000 national and community-based organizations: “In these regional dialogues, civil society called for the rebalancing of power for justice – in trade and investment rules, in reform of international financial institutions, and through demilitarization; the fulfillment of human rights for all and overcoming exclusion through a rights-based approach; ensuring the equitable distribution and safe use of natural resources, particularly regarding issues of extraction, land and resource grabs and in the context of the escalating realities of climate change; and implementing accountability mechanisms, transparency and ensuring the right to participate in decisions that affect people’s daily lives.”

The Open Working Group of 30 nations that had been commissioned to draft the Post-2015 Sustainable Development Goals for the 66th General Assembly to debate and vote

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Sustainable Development Goals

A committee of 30 countries called the Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals, commissioned at the June 2012 Rio+20 World Conference on Sustainable Development to produce a draft defining the Post-2015 Sustainable Development Goals, completed deliberations on July 19, 2014. The committee projects to submit their draft for final vote by the entire General Assembly in September 2014. Here is a summary of the 17 Target Goals the committee agreed upon after much dispute and debate, with many questions still to be answered as to manner of implementation:

Goal 1. End poverty in all its forms everywhere

Goal 2. End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition, and promote sustainable agriculture

Goal 3. Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages

Goal 4. Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote life-long learning opportunities for all

Goal 5. Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls

Goal 6. Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all

Goal 7. Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable, and modern energy for all

Goal 8. Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable

economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all

Goal 9. Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation

Goal 10. Reduce inequality within and among countries

Goal 11. Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable

Goal 12. Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns

Goal 13. Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts (Acknowledging that the UNFCCC is the primary international, intergovernmental forum for negotiating the global response to climate change.)

Goal 14. Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development

Goal 15. Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss

Goal 16. Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels

Goal 17. Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development



Photo: CVSA

(L to R) Susan Angus, CVSA Executive Director; Jordi Llopart, United Nations Volunteer Programme (UNV) NY Office Chief; Kara Crawford, United Methodist Global Mission Volunteer; Sulma Arzu-Brown, Program Director, Garifuna Coalition, USA, Inc.; Linda Manzione, Program Director, Hour Children; Alex Beauchamp, Eastern Region Organizing Coordinator, Food & Water Watch; and Kimberly Roginski, Development and Volunteer Coordinator of Part OfThe Solution (P.O.T.S.)

International Volunteer Day:

CVSA Links Local Community Service and Activism with Global Solidarity and the Sustainable Development Agenda

“Organizing Our Volunteer Power to Build a Better World: Focus on Youth” was the title of the Roundtable Discussion CVSA organized in recognition of International Volunteer Day on December 5, 2013 in coordination with the United Nations Volunteer Programme (UNV) held at the UN Church Center at 777 UN Plaza. The room was sponsored by the United Methodist Women’s Seminar Program.

Susan Angus, CVSA Executive Director, moderated the panel discussion about how growing youth activism and volunteer involvement is strengthening the voice of low-income and marginalized communities organizing for change in the United States. Her remarks highlighted how best to bring these voices into the global process of the UN’s Post-2015 Sustainable Development Agenda.

Keynote speaker Jordi Llopart, Chief of NY office of UNV, expressed appreciation to CVSA for organizing the event and inviting him as the keynote speaker. Recognizing that the audience consisted primarily of people involved in the volunteer organizations that were represented on the panel, Llopart stated, “It is good to be among friends.”

Based in Bonn, Germany, UNV is active in approximately 130 countries every year. UNV, with Field Units in 86 countries, is represented worldwide through the offices of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). UNV advocates for volunteerism, integrates volunteerism into development planning and directly mobilizes more than 7,700 UN Volunteers every year nationally and internationally, with

80 per cent coming from developing countries, and more than 30 per cent volunteering within their own countries.

Guests on the panel were Linda Manzione, Program Coordinator for Hour Children in Queens, NY, who spoke of the involvement of volunteers in their programs aiding women coming out of prison who have children; Kimberly Roginski, Development and Volunteer Coordinator for Part of the Solution (known as P.O.T.S.) in Bronx, N.Y. a community-based organization that serves people in need seven days a week; Alex Beauchamp, Eastern Region Organizer for Food & Water Watch, a national consumer rights organization that fights to protect our most valuable resources from corporate control and abuse and is currently focused on a large statewide campaign to stop the “fracking” industry in New York State; Sulma Arzu-Brown of the Garifuna Coalition, USA, Inc. in the Bronx, who established a program for youth from the Garifuna community; and Kara Crawford, a full-time volunteer with the United Methodist Global Mission program also working in a Bronx community.

Also participating from the audience were Edward Ryan, NGO Representative for AARP; Ben Solotaire from Fortune Society; and members of Battalion Community Services in Far Rockaway who mobilized hundreds of volunteers in their community when Superstorm Sandy destroyed the area.

Jordi Llopart elucidated that volunteering is “a lot of things that we don’t call volunteering.” He said, “Activism is

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Free Clinic in Greece Seeks International Support

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Christos Sideris, co-founder of the clinic, sent CVSA a description of the clinic's work to be included in the upcoming edition of *INVEST YOURSELF*. He explained that their hope is that publicity through CVSA's catalogue will not only help recruit more volunteers, but also make more people aware of the extremely harsh conditions and need for international pressure to reverse the budget cuts that have caused their public health crisis.

Since its opening three years ago, the clinic has served more than 15,000 patients, free-of-charge. In addition to offering services at its own facilities in Helliniko, clinic staff also work in collaboration with local hospitals that have agreed to open up access to specialty services and other hospital-based procedures, such as with the Cardiology Clinic at Asklipiou Hospital in Voulas, which offers cardiological examinations.

The clinic offers the uninsured and unemployed free checkup examinations, preventative oral examinations (in collaboration with the Dental Organization of Piraeus and the Oral Clinic of Athens University), and medications prescribed by the clinic's doctors.

MCCH non-medical volunteers do advocacy for patients whose water or electricity had been shut off, advocate for expungement of unpayable hospital bills, and negotiate with hospitals that reject insured patients to assist them in getting accepted. Such factors can quickly affect one's health as a person whose electricity has been shut off does

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Konstantine Karakatsanis, CVSA Administrative Assistant and Education Coordinator, speaking to people in the local New York City community about the ad hoc Solidarity Committee for Health Care in Greece.



Volunteers delivering nappies (diapers) to the Metropolitan Community Clinic at Helliniko (MCCH) for the parents who come to MCCH.

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Water denials a growing U.S. trend

Detroit Residents Fight Household Water Shutoffs, Gain UN Attention

Detroit, Michigan, U.S. may be at the epicenter of a startling drop in U.S. living standards: citizens denied residential water service in their own homes as municipal bondholders demand payment. Thousands of families there are daily seeking alternative ways to cook food, bathe their children, wash clothes and flush toilets due to unaffordable water rates and lack of public accountability.

Local organizing efforts including Detroit People's Water Board, Michigan Welfare Rights Organization and East Michigan Environmental Action Council allied with Blue Planet Project, a Canada-based organization, and Food & Water, a member of Commission on Voluntary Service & Action (CVSA), to file a report on June 18 to the UN Special Rapporteur on the Human Right to Safe Drinking Water and Sanitation, Ms. Catarina de Albuquerque.

Ms. de Albuquerque, a Right to Water and Sanitation Expert from the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva, issued the following statement to the Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner about the Detroit situation on June 25: "Disconnection of services for lack of means to pay may constitute a violation to the right of water. ... Disconnection due to non-payment is only permissible if it can be shown that the household is able to pay but is not paying – in other words, that the tariff is affordable. ... The affordability of water and sanitation services is an aspect of human rights, so there is a need to assess whether the reasons for any non-payment is a genuine inability to pay or an unwillingness to pay."



Photo: Courtesy of Michigan Welfare Rights Organization

Members of MWRO and National Nurses United join Detroit residents in a demonstration on July 18 at Detroit's Cobo Convention Center demanding a stop to the water shutoffs.

Despite such recognition, the problem persists in Detroit, and is growing elsewhere in the U.S.

Bondholders Deemed 'Secured Creditors'

Michigan Welfare Rights Organization (MWRO) and East Michigan Environmental Action Council (EMEAC), a member of CVSA, banded together with several other local groups representing low-income and working people of Detroit in voicing a demand for an end to residential water and sewerage service shutoffs. Detroit Water and Sewerage

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Water Shutoffs in Detroit

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Department (DWSD) shut off some 15,000 households in the second quarter of this year alone according to Maureen Taylor, State Chairperson at MWRO.

In July 2013, the City of Detroit filed for Chapter 9 Bankruptcy following a declaration of financial emergency in March 2013. The Governor of Michigan, Rick Snyder, appointed an Emergency Financial Manager, Kevyn Orr, and granted Mr. Orr authority over the city government in all matters of finance, contracts, and laws.

Orr released a plan in March 2014 to relieve the city administration of debt by collecting on the over \$90 million of overdue water bills by shutting off 120,000 customers, 1,500-3,000 a week. Priscilla Dziubeck, Educational Coordinator for East Michigan Environmental Action Council said that when the plan was announced it “was plainspoken, very blatant as if no one would notice.” Orr has said to the press that the shutoffs are “a necessary part of Detroit’s restructuring.”

According to local Detroit news reports, the bondholders of DWSD are considered secured creditors and are protected under bankruptcy law from taking a loss in the bankruptcy process Detroit is going through.

Dziubeck and other local organizers point out that it is residential and small business customers – mostly in the low-income neighborhoods – who are being targeted for shutoffs. The city’s large corporate water customers such as the owners of Joe Louis Arena, home of the Detroit Red Wings, who owed \$82,255 as of April; or Ford Field, where the Detroit Lions play, who owed more than \$55,000; or the city-owned golf courses that owed more than \$400,000 are not being shutoff. This is a case of the city’s budget being balanced on the backs of poor and working people.

The local press in Detroit has been echoing the claims of DWSD that the shutoffs are an effective measure to get low-income people to pay their water bills. Jean Vortkamp, a Detroit resident who attended a court hearing on the city’s bankruptcy case, spoke up against the water shutoffs. She told *Voice of Detroit* on July 16 that, “Many of the children in my neighborhood had their water cut off. Families are taking money from things like rent to pay the bill that they could not afford with our high water rates.”

According to Priscilla Dziubeck, Education Coordinator at EMEAC, the city government has stated that 62% of



Citizens of Detroit gathered at the city's Cobo Convention Center on July 18 protesting the water shutoffs.

customers have paid their bills or entered affordable payment plans within two days of being disconnected and that the city has reconnected customers within 24 hours of these agreements being made. However, Dziubeck reported in August that in fact, most of those customers are still waiting to be reconnected. In addition, if a customer who makes a payment plan misses a payment by one day, their water gets shut off permanently, without notice, until the entire amount is paid in full.

The MWRO and EMEAC received reports from residents that the private company, Homrich, hired by the City of Detroit to carry out disconnections, has been aggressively and unprofessionally shutting off people’s water before the specified date on their DWSD shutoff notices, often between 6:00 and 8:00 a.m.

Charity Hicks, a Detroit water rights activist was recently killed in a hit-and-run accident in front of Penn Station, New York City when she was en route to make a presentation about the situation. She had reported to *Voice of Detroit* on May 28, “There was a contractor on the block shutting off the whole block. They were no-knock, no-notice shutoffs of homes, including those where pregnant women and children live. After they shut mine off, I went two houses over to ask the man if he could wait until the family could gather some water together for their immediate needs – at least to fill their tub. He told me he doesn’t have to give notice to the homes and that he was just doing his job.”

When DWSD announced in March the plan to disconnect service to thousands of households per week if

Photo: Courtesy of Michigan Welfare Rights Organization



customers' bills were not paid up, DWSD also increased water and sewerage rates by another 8.7%, on top of a total of 119% of prior increases over the past decade. The added sewerage service charges caused a jump in the average household water bill of \$70 per month to roughly \$160 per month. According to Ann Rall, volunteer at MWRO, \$160 is about 20% of the monthly incomes of many of the affected households.

Detroit has lost over 400,000 jobs since 2000 and unemployment is officially counted at 17% of the population. As of 2013, 43% of Detroiters are living below the federal poverty line including many elderly and disabled living on low fixed incomes.

During World War II, tens of thousands of workers moved to Detroit from the South in search of factory jobs. A worker there could earn enough to purchase a home. Many that held onto their property despite the sub-prime lending crisis of 2007-2008, now face losing their family homes – not because of unpaid mortgage bills, but due to inability to keep up with property tax bills with added liens for overdue water and sewerage payments.

Typically, households where service was shut off were no more than two months or \$150 behind on a bill. After a private construction company was hired by the DWSD to carry out the disconnections, residents reported to MWRO and EMEAC instances of entire blocks being disconnected at one time. Two-thirds of these shutoffs are occurring in homes with children. MWRO explains that low-income women live in fear of a visit from social services, knowing they could take their children away if it were discovered that the household has no running water.

International Spotlight, Temporary Moratorium

Organizations such as the Council of Canadians of Toronto and Keeper of the Mountains of West Virginia, were

inspired to send caravans of volunteers to Detroit to carry truckloads of donated bottled water that were distributed to affected households on July 30th. Local efforts also called upon churches throughout Detroit to provide no-cost access to clean running water at their church facilities to assist victims of discontinued water service.

In late June, shutoffs were officially halted for 60 days through August 25 after local protests reached the United Nations Human Rights offices.

In the meantime, the city announced on August 7 that they had set up a new fund with United Way of Detroit, a non-profit social service charity, to provide assistance to those that could not afford to pay their bills. Local organizers underscore the reality that this action fails to address the long-term problem of rates being too high and a system of water management that is unsustainable – that is, treating access to water as a privilege of private property rather than a public utility of a natural resource, a public health issue, and human right. They also note that such charity funds will be insufficient to meet the need and shutoffs will, therefore, continue.

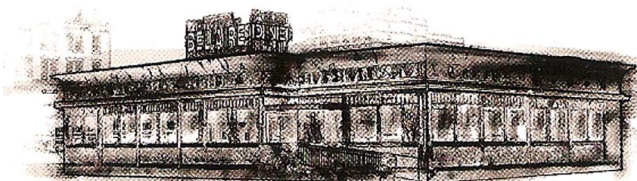
A joint statement issued by Food & Water Watch, Blue Planet Foundation, MWRO, and the Detroit People's Water Board on July 25 said, "These are the sort of conditions you hear about in developing nations, not in the United States. It is abhorrent that in this day and age, people should be faced with these conditions *anywhere*, let alone in one of the wealthiest nations in the world. The UN experts pointed out that it is the state's obligation to provide urgent measures,

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Water Shutoffs in Detroit

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including financial assistance, to ensure access to essential water and sanitation. So why isn't this happening?"

By bringing the matter to the UN, the concerned organizations did gain international media attention which induced national news sources such as *New York Times*, to pick up the story briefly.

It's Not Just Happening in Detroit...

Brandon McDonald, Operations Manager of Western Service Workers Association (WSWA), an association of low-paid service workers in San Diego, California, recently reported to CVSA a situation mirroring that of Detroit. McDonald reported that, according to the City of San Diego's own statistics, some 24,000 to 28,000 people are being shut off from water service each year.

The municipal water department is taking measures to re-establish the credit rating of its bonds, which are in the hands of private investors. Too many delinquent accounts bring their credit ratings down, creating a desperate incentive to shut off the poor.

McDonald, along with teams of WSWA members – all volunteers – are carrying out a campaign to warn their membership of low-paid workers of public health risks associated with an absence of running water in the home. Association volunteers provide advocacy for people who have been or are being threatened with shutoff, teaching how to challenge denial of this basic service.

Finding a dearth of information in mainstream national media coverage, CVSA volunteers began a campaign of calling CVSA members and other volunteer-based organizations across the country to see if the Detroit and San Diego situations are part of a national trend of discontinued water service to low-income people due to an inability to pay bills in full and on time.

CVSA staff phoned organizations in Mobile, Alabama; Tuscon, Arizona; Denver, Colorado; Chester, Pennsylvania; Patterson, New Jersey and elsewhere to gain reports from multiple regions and alerted community leaders to be vigilant of such policies coming to their areas as well. CVSA learned of widespread occurrences of gas and electric utilities shutoffs being experienced in each of these cities by the low-income population, and the advocacy and other attempts by these organizations to lower utility rates.

Demand for Long-term Solutions

The demands of the Detroit community-based organizations are: abandon the plan for further shutoffs; restore service immediately to households that have been shut off; the federal and state governments should work with the city to ensure a sustainable public financing plan and rate structure that would prevent a transfer of the utility's financial burden onto residents who are currently paying exorbitant rates; establish fare rates; and return to a Water Affordability Plan of 2006 (which had been accepted by the City Council, but was cancelled by the current Emergency Manager who is now running the city's financial department while the city prepares for its bankruptcy trial).

Four of the local groups have launched a petition that calls on U.S. President Barack Obama and Michigan Governor Rick Snyder to "stop the water shutoffs and work to make water accessible and affordable for all."

The July 25 joint statement from Blue Planet Foundation, Food & Water Watch and the involved local organizations stated, "This is a major crisis. When 45% of water customers struggle to pay their water bills, it is clear that this is not just a problem with delinquent payment. It's indicative of broader, systemic issues resulting from decades of policies that put profits before people. Because leasing or selling the DWSD will only lead to more problems, Mayor Duggan and Emergency Financial Manager Kevyn Orr should abandon all plans to privatize the DWSD."

As Ms. Dziubeck said to CVSA, "This has hit us hard; we are not conditioned to stand up for our rights."

Susan Angus, CVSA Executive Director, explained at a CVSA staff meeting upon reviewing the findings of CVSA's survey of a sampling of its member organizations about the denial of water service, "The political, economic and social conditions in Detroit can be found in most major U.S. cities. All concerned non-government volunteer organizations across the country need to be vigilant to this situation, become familiar with the policy issues at hand and be prepared to engage with allies at a local, regional, national and international level to demand the human right to water."

Please contact CVSA if your organization has pertinent information to share with other groups embroiled in mounting a demand for affordable water service and to stop shutoffs, or if you would like to request information as to how to go about making an analysis and strategy in your own geographic area.





Full-time Volunteers

Continued from page 3

CVSA has long promoted the idea that volunteering is a fundamental rejection of the notion that things are too big and powerful to change; that it is a self-aware determination that action can and must be applied to advance and achieve progress. How do we build that self-awareness of the ability to make change? For one thing, we know it takes organization.

CVSA's founding principle in 1945 was that volunteer organizations could exemplify policies as they should be enacted, rather than blindly following the status quo. CVSA maintains that without the freedom and flexibility to develop their own strategies for change, volunteer organizations are reduced to mere extensions of the very same failed government policies from which the need for their volunteer assistance arose. This is a profoundly relevant principle to organize around today.

CVSA is an all-volunteer organization comprised of full- and part-time volunteers who are dedicated to the goal of organizing independent, non-government organizations that involve concerned volunteers in their efforts to address the basic needs of people and to organize members of the community to assist and support this work through their voluntary contribution of time and resources. Through CVSA's approach to organizing, leaders and volunteers of member organizations can gain from the experiences of all the other member organizations on matters of method, tactics and strategies that have been successful and can cultivate more strength in their programs. Demonstrating growth and winning fights on behalf of their constituencies begins to replace the sense of powerlessness with which the people of our country are being dragged down, with a belief in the power of organization and the confidence to fight for a better future.

While the types of organizations that join with CVSA and list in *INVEST YOURSELF* vary greatly, one of the characteristics they have in common is that they are run by people who saw hardships or injustice in their communities or constituencies and took action to address these problems in an organized, material way. Whether they are building and repairing homes; advocating for people's right to basic utilities such as water, electricity and heat; preparing, serving, and delivering meals to working people in need; organizing for living wages for all working people; providing free medical care as a right, or fighting to change energy and environmental policies that are destroying our planet, they have

initiated material programs to tackle the results of mismanagement of our natural, human, and financial resources.

As a volunteer organizer with CVSA, you can strengthen our efforts to generate more volunteer participation for these organizations; provide organizing methodology and strategy consultations; expand the base of national and international allies and support for the member organizations; help expand the voice of these organizations we represent through our work in the United Nations as a Non-Government Organization (NGO) with consultative status to represent their interests and struggles to the international community.

CVSA's *INVEST YOURSELF: A Guide to Action* is the most comprehensive guide for full- and part-time volunteer opportunities in the U.S., listing the organizations we represent and explaining how volunteers from across the country and world can get involved with any of these efforts. This catalogue is a powerful tool that can be used to great effect as it is distributed to invite people who care to volunteer their time and make a real difference in community organizations around the U.S. and internationally.

Free-of-charge consultations to all our members serve as an opportunity to help develop and build strong organizations that make up an independent volunteer movement. Together we hold the potential to challenge the status quo and reverse that sense of powerlessness. CVSA has the experience of 60 years of struggles and gains to provide substantial advice to organizations seeking to grow support within and to act as leaders in your community.

Continued on page 17

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Photo: CVSA

Alex Beauchamp, Eastern Region Organizer for Food & Water Watch, explains the grass-roots approach to organizing necessary to effect change in the U.S.

International Volunteer Day: CVSA Links Local with Global

Continued from page 7

volunteering, Occupy Wall Street was volunteering. Issues that have never been associated with the volunteering ethos are actually part of it. Volunteering is a strong part of civic engagement, creating societal cohesion, making a huge impact in societies and contributing to progress measured not just in the GDP, but in this whole notion of ‘well being;’ this whole notion of going beyond the macroeconomic indicators that we have been using.”

Alex Beauchamp spoke about the difficulties in strategizing the fight to turn away from fossil fuels, and how “the stakes couldn’t be higher; humanity is at risk.” Beauchamp pointed out how much excellent, well-documented, in-depth research Food and Water Watch has compiled and presented to legislators, “but being right and having all the facts isn’t what wins change in this system.” He said, “The thing we realized over time is that the environmental movement does not lose these fights because we have the wrong ideas. We lose these fights because we don’t have the political power that the industry has and the only way you change that is by building it, and the only way you can really build it is at the grassroots level. We can’t fight dollar-for-dollar with the industry. We can’t play the same game as the industry does. So we’re not going to win the same way they do by hiring tons of lobbyists, flooding the state houses and funding campaigns and elections. We’ll never be able to win that way. You have to build the other way; you have to build from the ground up and organize from the grassroots level. That’s what we’ve been trying to do on our issues, trying to make the connections with others, like what CVSA is facilitating.”



Photo: CVSA

Susan Angus, CVSA Executive Director, closes the International Volunteer Day discussion, elaborating on the importance of independent volunteer organizations building communication with each other to enhance their work towards common goals.

Kimberly Roginski of P.O.T.S. spoke of the necessity for low-income communities to have a place like P.O.T.S. where they can go for assistance in day-to-day survival and which is their organization. Without such an organization, they have no ability to attend meetings or address issues such as fracking, which directly affects them, but is not as immediate as having no food for dinner, or receiving an immediate eviction notice. She expressed interest in staying connected with the activities of Food & Water Watch to find ways to involve the low-income community of the Bronx in these issues.

Angus pointed out that this is an example of CVSA’s value in bringing together organizations who otherwise would not meet each other and discover ways they can assist each others’ common goals, and how this can be motored entirely by goal-oriented volunteers.

In closing, Mr. Llopart encouraged the participating organizations on the panel and in the audience to get involved in the United Nations’ debates through their membership in CVSA. He said, “We are looking forward to collaborating with colleagues that have NGO accreditation that can open the door for grassroots organizations to be involved in the UN process to get the conversation about development and the needs of people flowing in a much more comprehensive and direct way. The issues of relevant organizations at the local level can be brought to the front, and we can make them visible to the member states of the UN in relation to the issues with which they are faced.”

The 2014 International Volunteer Day event which CVSA is planning now for December 5 will coincide with the launch of the national and international distribution campaign of the new edition of the *INVEST YOURSELF*, CVSA’s catalogue of volunteer opportunities.





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CVSA Gains NGO Consultative Status at UN

Continued from page 6

on in September 2014, concluded their work and issued a draft proposal on July 19 (see side bar on page 6). In their two year-long deliberations, the “Means of Implementation” for the new Sustainable Development Goals have been the most contentious portions of the debates, and are still to be settled.

CVSA was accepted by the Planning Committee of the 65th Annual DPI/NGO Conference to lead a workshop at UN Headquarters in New York City on August 27 to 29, entitled “Organizing Our Volunteer Power: Shared Experiences from Honduras, Guatemala, Philippines, the Bronx on Methods of Grassroots Empowerment to Reverse the Trends of Poverty.” CVSA planned the workshop in conjunction with Dr. Luther Castillo, founder of the First Popular Garifuna Hospital; Caryn Maxim, North America Coordinator with Grupo Cajola; Linda Oalican, Coordinator of Damayan Migrant Workers Association and Joy Cousminer, Founder of Bethex Credit Union and We Care for Credit Unions. The conference planning committee asked CVSA to also collaborate with Association for World Education (AWE), a Denmark-based network of individuals who work with innovative methods of education and cultural exchange around the world.

CVSA member organizations, organizing for change in solidarity with the people of developing and emerging nations, now have an international forum through which their concern to seek policies, at home and abroad, that prioritize the well-being of people and the environment can gain international recognition through good use of CVSA’s NGO status. CVSA welcomes written proposals by member organizations. (M)

Full-time Volunteer

Continued from page 15

CVSA’s NGO Special Consultative status to the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) of the General Assembly of the United Nations provides us the opportunity to represent our member organizations in an international arena and to organize international support behind grassroots demands. Coordination between our members allows us to build relationships of solidarity regionally, nationally and internationally.

Volunteers with CVSA learn to produce the *INVEST YOURSELF* catalogue, communicate with our member organizations, conduct speaking engagements about the problems of our society and the needed solutions, distribute the catalogue, participate in CVSA’s activities at the United Nations and much more.

Volunteering is more than an experience to have and then move on from; it is taking on responsibility to work with others to change the reality of a world where the majority of us currently hold no power.

Becoming a full-time volunteer at CVSA gives you the opportunity to learn as we build an organization providing leadership at the forefront of the independent volunteer movement. You can take part in generating sufficient motion to reverse the unsustainable misuse of resources and human productivity currently benefiting only a few at the expense of the majority, while half-hearted, counter-productive and damaging official policies do nothing to stop the institutionalized violence people are facing every day.

Being a full-time volunteer can be an opportunity to deal with the problems we face hands-on, to dedicate yourself to learning the discipline and practice of building an organization that can benefit a great many people in the long run through successfully changing the power framework and empowering communities by putting needed resources in the hands of the people themselves.

This is the time to dedicate yourself to the goal of building a world where all people can live decent and respectable lives. Who else is going to build this but us?

Through CVSA you can learn how to put your volunteer power towards transforming the conditions that have kept the majority of us powerless for too long. Call us at (718) 482-8724 to learn more about how you can become a full-time volunteer and learn what is needed to make a better world. (M)



Free Clinic in Greece Seeks International Support

Continued from page 8

not have the ability to refrigerate insulin, charge an electric wheelchair, cook food, etc., and further may resort to lighting their home with candles, potentially causing a house fire.

Austerity Measures Cause Public Health Crisis

Economic and related social conditions in Greece have been deteriorating since 2008. Greece is a country where health care is conditional to being employed, enrolled in college, serving in the military, or being on disability benefits. Unemployment is officially 24.3% in Greece; triple what it was in 2008. Unemployment is 50% among the youth. The austerity cuts have left over 3 million people uninsured and unable to get access to medical care or medicines for everything from common illnesses to required ongoing treatment for chronic conditions, according to the National Organization of Health Providers in Greece.

The effect of public health budget cuts and the growing number of uninsured is a general health crisis. Underfunding of mosquito-spraying programs has led to the resurgence of malaria in Greece, a disease eradicated in the country 40 years ago. The Greek National School of Public Health has reported that between 2008 and 2011 there has been a 21% rise in stillbirths and a 43% rise in infant mortality, both directly caused by the reduced access to prenatal care and medicines.

In 2009 there were a reported 15 cases of HIV, and in 2012 that rose to 484 after government programs to distribute syringes and condoms were defunded. Due to economic uncertainty and the general social chaos of the crisis, the suicide rate has also risen 45% between 2007 and 2011.

Further exacerbating the medical situation in Greece is the “brain drain” of thousands of Greek doctors who have left the country to find better-paying work in other countries across Europe and in the US. This has been a longstanding problem of the developing world, in which the developing country pays for the education and training of professionals only to have them enticed by foreign hospitals in developed countries to move and work at a far higher salary than they could receive in their own country. Now this is happening in the developed country of Greece.

It is within this context the doctors and other medical professionals and hundreds of volunteers now working with MCCH have taken on the responsibility to care for a portion

of the Greek population that they can serve with their limited resources.


Currently, Sideris explained, they are in great need of volunteer general medical practitioners, pharmacists, cardiologists, adult and child psychiatrists, pediatricians, gynecologists, rheumatologists, endocrinologists, gastroenterologists/hepatologists, endodontists, speech therapists, and social workers who can volunteer their time and expertise with MCCH's efforts in Greece to care for its people.

Local Queens, New York Solidarity Drive Begun

Konstantine Karakatsanis, CVSA Administrative Assistant and native of Astoria, Queens, New York – an area that is home to a large Greek community and very near to CVSA's headquarters — is working with several members of this New York City neighborhood to launch an ad hoc Solidarity Committee for Health Care in Greece. The committee is calling for volunteers in the New York metropolitan area who will commit to carrying out collections of supplies to fill specific needs requested by the clinic and assist with preparation and shipping of those supplies to the Metropolitan Community Clinic in Helliniko. The ad hoc Committee for Solidarity with Health Care in Greece seeks physicians or other licensed medical professionals that can collect medicines and communicate with counterparts in Greece regarding how to deliver them to authorized medical personnel there. Lay people can collect non-pharmaceutical medical supplies and also baby food, hygiene supplies and other requested items. “We also want to shed a light on the disastrous results of European Union and IMF economic policy on the Greek nation,” said Karakatsanis.

Maria Zapatina, Volunteers Coordinator for MCCH in Greece, said the most urgently needed supplies at MCCH are baby food, baby diapers (nappies), vaccinations (for infants, children, teens, and adults), cancer medications, insulin, radiation protection aprons, supplies for pap tests, and scabies medication, but this is just a partial list.

To join with this campaign and find out how you can help, and to get a list of the specific medication supplies needed, contact Konstantine at CVSA at (718) 482-8724.

Anyone that would like to volunteer in the clinic please contact the clinic directly: Christos Sideris at +30.210.9631.950, at Metropolitan Community Clinic at Helliniko. Address: Inside the old military base at Helliniko, 200m away from the traffic police of the Municipality of Helliniko next to the cultural center in Helliniko, Attiki 16677, Greece. 



Planet Ocean: a Film of Beauty and Urgent Warning

To mark World Environment Day on June 5, Yann Arthus-Bertrand and the GoodPlanet Foundation, founded by Yann Arthus-Bertrand and based in Paris, France, made the film accessible in full version and in 10 languages on YouTube channel "Planet Ocean – the movie." Co-directed by Yann Arthus-Bertrand and Michael Pitiot, originally released in June 2012 in time to be premiered at the Rio+20 Sustainable Development Summit, *Planet Ocean* was made possible through the collaboration with Tara Expeditions and its network of scientific experts, and the sponsorship of OMEGA, the prestigious Swiss watch company.

Planet Ocean, like Arthus-Bertrand's film *Home*, is stunningly beautiful and filled with alarming facts that are a call to action. *Planet Ocean* provides a vivid picture of the dire need to protect and preserve the marine world and the health of the oceans. The oceans cover more than 70% of the surface of the Earth, produce the oxygen we breathe and regulate our climate. It is in the oceans that life began. Seafood products comprise the main source of animal protein for 3 billion people. Yet, governments are not acting quickly enough to stop the pollution, over-exploitation, destruction of habitats, global warming, acidification and coastal development that is causing the oceans to collapse as living systems.


On September 11, 2013 Yann Arthus-Bertrand presented the film *Planet Ocean* to United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki-moon at the UN headquarters in New York along with staff members of the UN Environmental Programme, students



Photo: CVSA

UN Secretary General, Ban Ki-moon introducing Yann Arthus-Bertrand co-director of film, *Planet Ocean* at a special screening of the film at the UN headquarters in New York.

from the Earth Institute of Columbia University and other guests. CVSA Executive Director, Susan Angus and Administrative Assistant Konstantine Karakatsanis attended this special screening and received a copy of the film. CVSA organizers have since presented *Planet Ocean* to audiences in New York and in Boston, with discussions on how people can organize to change the policies and practices that are destroying the oceans and the planet.

If you wish to organize a free screening of the film *Planet Ocean* for your community, please contact the GoodPlanet Foundation: jacqueline@goodplanet.org. CVSA organizers can also be available to introduce and lead discussions with screenings of *Planet Ocean* and *Home*. Call CVSA at 718-482-8724. 



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CVSA needs volunteers for these areas of work:

Membership Organization Communications, Consultations and Training

Volunteers can participate in our site visits, consultations and training workshops with member organizations of CVSA, help maintain and build more arenas of communication with member organizations around the country and collect news for the newsletter.

***INVEST YOURSELF* Publications Production**

On-the-job training is provided in publication work sessions every Wednesday night, Saturday afternoon and all day Fridays. If you have skills in writing, editing, proofreading, desktop publishing or photoshop — you can become one of the trainers!

***INVEST YOURSELF* Distribution and Circulation**

Volunteers maintain ongoing contact with public libraries, colleges, universities, faith-based organizations, schools and professional organizations through phoning, mailings and meetings all year round to expand the distribution and use of *INVEST YOURSELF* to increase the flow of volunteers to vital projects.

Volunteer Outreach Phoning

Volunteers phone people who give their contact information and express an interest in the current volunteer needs and activities of CVSA; a vital part of keeping the movement growing. We do volunteer phone training on Monday and Wednesday evenings, as well as weekdays.

Volunteer Organizer Training & Education

All CVSA volunteers and staff of member organizations are welcome to participate in our organizer training programs which include on-the-job practical training as well as classes in history, strategy and methods of organizing and current world affairs.

Volunteer Community Outreach Events

Volunteers help schedule and participate in information tables and speaking engagements throughout the New York metropolitan area. This is CVSA's most valuable means of connecting with people from all walks of life looking for meaningful and productive volunteer opportunities.

Call CVSA at (718) 482-8724 to schedule an orientation or time to volunteer.