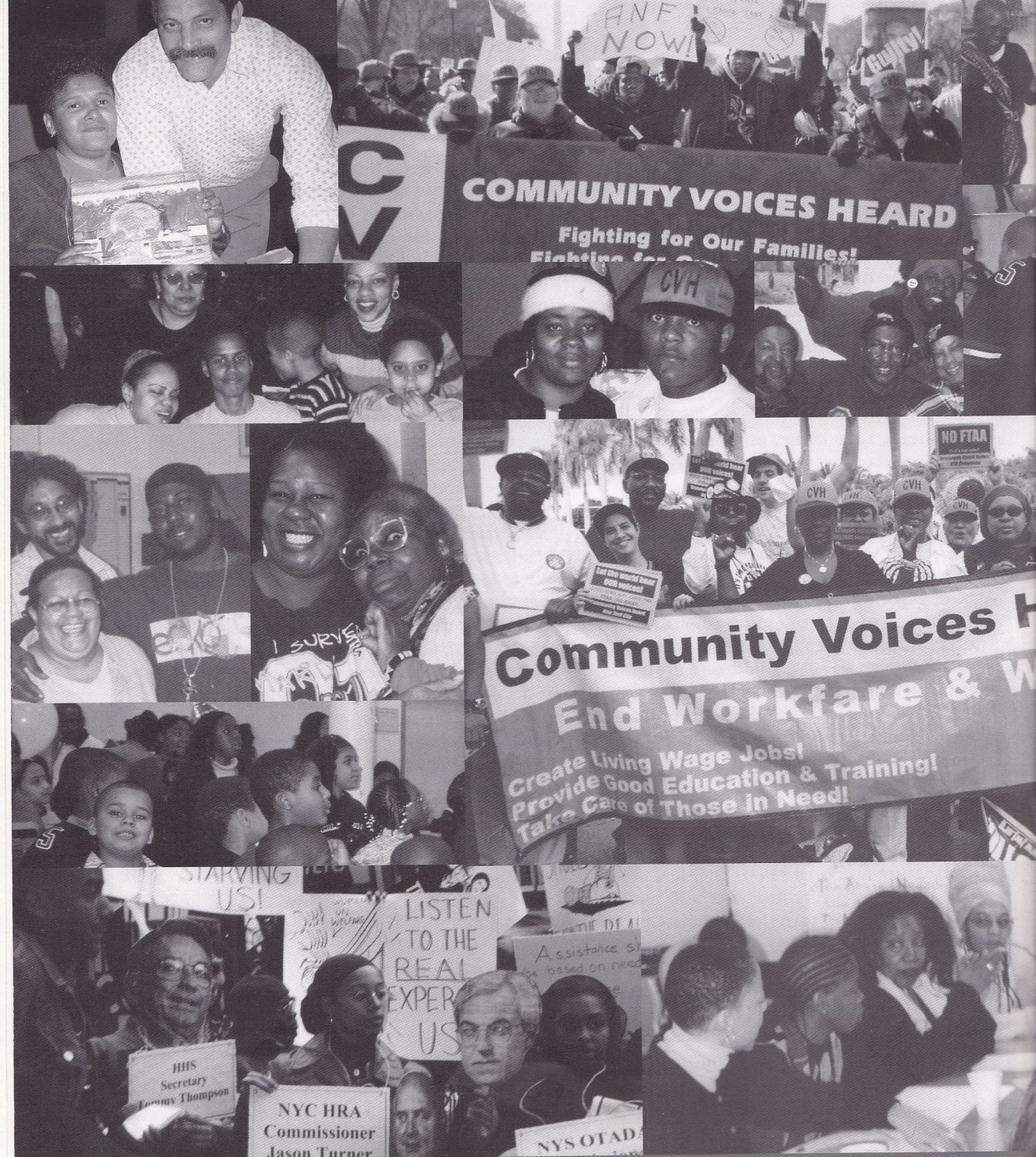


Community Voices Heard 10th Anniversary Celebration & Gala Dinner

May 9, 2005

**Hon. Shirley Chisholm Lights of Freedom Awards
The Alhambra Ballroom
Harlem**



CVH By the Numbers: 360 Leaders intensively trained and developed at comprehensive leadership training workshops, weekend retreats, and CVH Saturday Schools



12,000 Low-income New Yorkers signed up as CVH members

Community Voices Heard A Decade of Speaking Up and Speaking Together

On a sunny Saturday morning, in May of 1994, a group of people, mostly women – some homeless, many on-welfare, and plenty who were unemployed – came together so that their voices might be heard. For too long, they had been shut out of the halls of power, denied a seat at the table, and trampled by both those who openly targeted the poor and those who claimed to advocate on their behalf. They were tired of a government that showed them nothing but neglect and malice. For these brave people it was now or never. No longer would the decision makers be allowed to maintain their power at the expense of the most unfortunate – the poor, women, and people of color.

At our expense.

10 years ago, we said enough was enough.

We were united, motivated, and organized. We had no choice. Between 1993 and 1996, attacks on the poor were especially vicious, shrouded in lies and misinformation. Proposals to eliminate aid to poor families and children were gaining momentum and support. The radical right demonized us in order to shore up power among the middle class, eventually taking over Congress. Lawmakers were publicly discussing the option of forcing poor women to live in labor houses, making them “work off” their food and shelter. Those elected to represent us were

considering supporting legislation that would put the children of women on welfare into orphanages. They told the world that we were mismanaging our money, that we were liars and cheats.

Together we demanded to be heard. We spoke up. Loudly. We reminded the world that women on welfare were going to college despite the retrogressive cycle of public assistance that demands women get off welfare without helping them find the skills and training to do so. We reminded the world that most women on welfare were in fact white and that most of us were working part time or using welfare for unemployment relief. We showed the world that we were real people, mothers with children, families with friends and neighbors.

From that first 1994 meeting of 80 people, Community Voices Heard emerged and would eventually become one of the leading organizations working for economic justice in the country. Some we knew when we started, some we found out later, but from the very beginning we drew from a wide array of influences throughout the history of the social justice movement. We combined the relational organizing technique of the IAF, the humor and direct action of Alinsky, ACORN and ACT-UP, the political education and leadership development of the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee, and the philosophy of Paolo Friere.

1992-1994

Context: Fingerprinting and other early welfare reform begins in NY. Bill Clinton becomes President pledging to “end welfare as we know it”

CVH Milestone: Initial Attempts to organize welfare recipients start in NYC.

1994

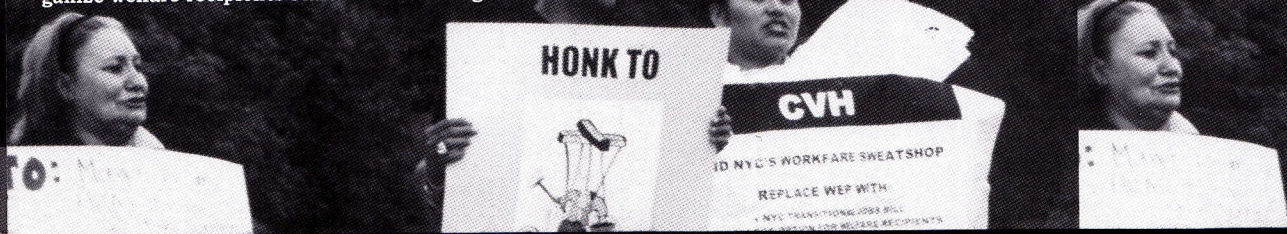
Context: Attacks on welfare recipients nationally intensify

CVH Milestones: CVH's founding organizing meeting; 1-on-1 meetings initiated to build an organizing committee.

1995

Context: Mayor Giuliani transforms Welfare Centers into Jobs Center and aggressively expands WEP in NYC.

CVH Milestones: March on NYS capital protesting Governor Pataki's proposal to eliminate aid to single adults.



We hit the ground running. Our direct action campaigns were unique, fun, and media-savvy. We led marches on Albany, targeted Mayor Giuliani's appointees at the Human Resource Administration (HRA), as well as the Mayor himself. With the Urban Justice Center and Housing Works, we went to the home of the Mayor's main architect of the Work Experience Program (WEP, a welfare reform initiative that creates an endless revolving door, trapping people in low-level jobs and allowing the city to have a constant supply of cheap labor), knocked on the door of his brownstone and asked him and his neighbors if he lived there, who he was sleeping with, and why he was attacking poor families. We took our children to the HRA where we demanded childcare and additional money so that mothers forced into no-pay WEP work would have adequate childcare. We organized Workfare workers to testify and protest against inhumane working conditions and their egregious lack of rights. Finally, along with Good Old Lower East Side, we brought 100 people to Washington DC to tell elected officials, both in and out of the White House, the real deal about poverty.

Confident and with growing influence, we turned our attention to welfare reform in New York State. Our direct action campaigns increased in scope and intensity: we took over the Assembly Speaker's office and demanded a meeting about the impact of Workfare and welfare cuts; we tried

to evict the state Budget Director in Albany when the elimination of welfare for single adults was proposed; and we disrupted the capital building when legislators were poised to vote on a plan that again failed to provide families with the resources they needed to move off of welfare.

At the end of this campaign, while we were able to defeat the most punitive proposals, we knew that a fresh approach was needed. In addition to fighting against what was wrong with the system, we also needed to fight for what we knew was right. Real welfare reform means good paying jobs, education, training and a strong safety net. Between 1998 and 2001, CVH worked hard to get New York City and state to replace Workfare and WEP with our own version of welfare reform. Our efforts to organize WEP workers and welfare recipients, develop leaders, organize work committees, and launch innovative research projects left both the labor movement and the city government with no choice but to recognize us, and in turn, reckon with us as one of the most important economic justice organizations in the city.

Working with DC 37, the American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees, the National Employment Law Project, FPI and the Fifth Avenue Committee, we forced the New York City Council to override a mayoral veto and pass the Transitional Jobs Bill. We organized over

1996

Context: Welfare reform (Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Act) bill passes in Congress

CVH Milestones: CVH becomes an independent organization; educates hundreds of women on new welfare law

1997

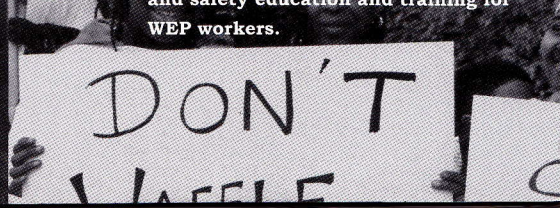
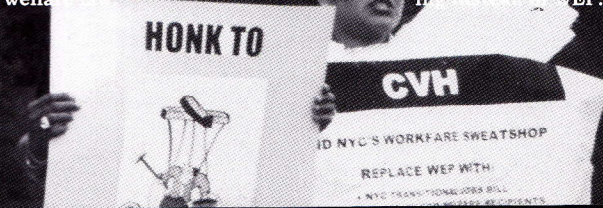
Context: WEP is forced onto women with children. Five-year clock starts ticking

CVH Milestones: CVH members decide on jobs campaign - fighting for paid jobs that include education and training instead of WEP.

1998-1999

Context: Hundreds of thousands New Yorkers tossed off welfare caseloads due to sanctions and WEP rules.

CVH milestones: CVH releases first report on workfare; sues Mayor Giuliani and wins the right to health and safety education and training for WEP workers.



150 WEP workers to march for jobs, hitting city agencies, City Hall, and the City Council building where we infiltrated Council Members' offices. The event was one of our most publicized and culminated in getting on the phone with City Council Speaker Peter Vallone and asking him to support the bill while WEP workers cheered in the background.

Even after the bill passed, Mayor Giuliani refused to implement the program. In response, CVH researched and released a report showing that WEP workers were doing critical municipal work thereby displacing city workers. We collected thousands of job applications and delivered them to city agencies that should have hired WEP workers, we marched on Gracie Mansion, we organized a protest of the opening day of the New York Philharmonic in the Park, and we took over the offices of dozens of city hiring agencies.

Not known to rest on our heels, we secured almost \$50 million in state funding for wage subsidy programs for welfare recipients – a first step in our fight for jobs. In August of 2001, after multiple direct actions, policy research, ceaseless advocating, alliance formation, media blitzes, and legal challenges, the city implemented the Jobs Opportunity Program for welfare recipients resulting in thousands of men and women receiving pay ranging from \$7.50 an hour to just over \$12.00 an hour for their labor. Another CVH success story.

CVH soon learned, however, that being on the front lines in the fight for economic justice means being prepared for anything and everything.

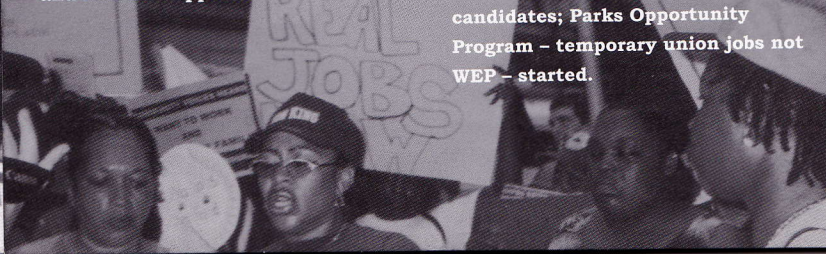
A few weeks after the Jobs Opportunity victory, the tragedy of September 11th occurred. Swift to respond, CVH took on new roles and responsibilities: we monitored services at welfare offices for people impacted by the attack; made sure city systems were still in place; fought to include stories and images of low-income people impacted by this crisis in local and national media; and worked to ensure that the programs we had fought for and won weren't dismantled due to emergency cuts.

The consequences of September 11th continue to impact all of us. The elimination of over 50,000 jobs in lower Manhattan, as well as the on-going efforts to redevelop and reinvigorate the city's economy, demand that CVH be vigilant and creative in guaranteeing that federal reinvestment include an awareness of the needs of all New Yorkers impacted by the events of that day.

In 2002 we turned our attention to the national debate on the reauthorization of welfare reform legislation. We coordinated our strategies with those of other organizations across the country, including the Center for Community Change, the ENGINE, and the Center for Third World Organizing, to have the greatest impact on federal anti-poverty policies. We joined GRO in Missouri, the Miami Workers Center, and the Philadelphia Unemployment Project, in organizing demonstrations here at home and in Washington DC. We met with Senator Hillary Clinton and reported on our work in front of Congress. When the men and women we elected ignored our demands, we took our fight to their homes. We showed up at President George Bush's home in Crawford

2000

Context: Bush elected President
CVH Milestones: CVH joins with other welfare groups to start the National Campaign for Jobs and Income Support.

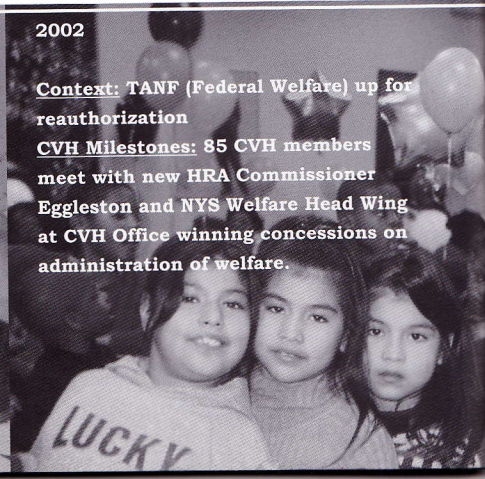


2001

Context: Mayoral election – no more Giuliani!
CVH Milestones: 600 CVH and ACORN members pack accountability session and get commitments from Mayoral candidates; Parks Opportunity Program – temporary union jobs not WEP – started.

2002

Context: TANF (Federal Welfare) up for reauthorization
CVH Milestones: 85 CVH members meet with new HRA Commissioner Eggleston and NYS Welfare Head Wing at CVH Office winning concessions on administration of welfare.



Texas, we helped bring over 100 welfare moms to the front steps of Senator Clinton's home in Washington DC, and we illustrated her "waffling stand" on welfare by sending her a breakfast of... you guessed it, waffles.

Within two months of Mayor Bloomberg being elected we put the new HRA and State Welfare Commissioners in a room with nearly 100 of our members. At that meeting, we demanded a seat at the table – we got two. Though our relationship with city officials is often turbulent, we currently have two CVH representatives on an advisory committee forcing the HRA Administration to seek out our advice and recommendation on many economic justice issues.

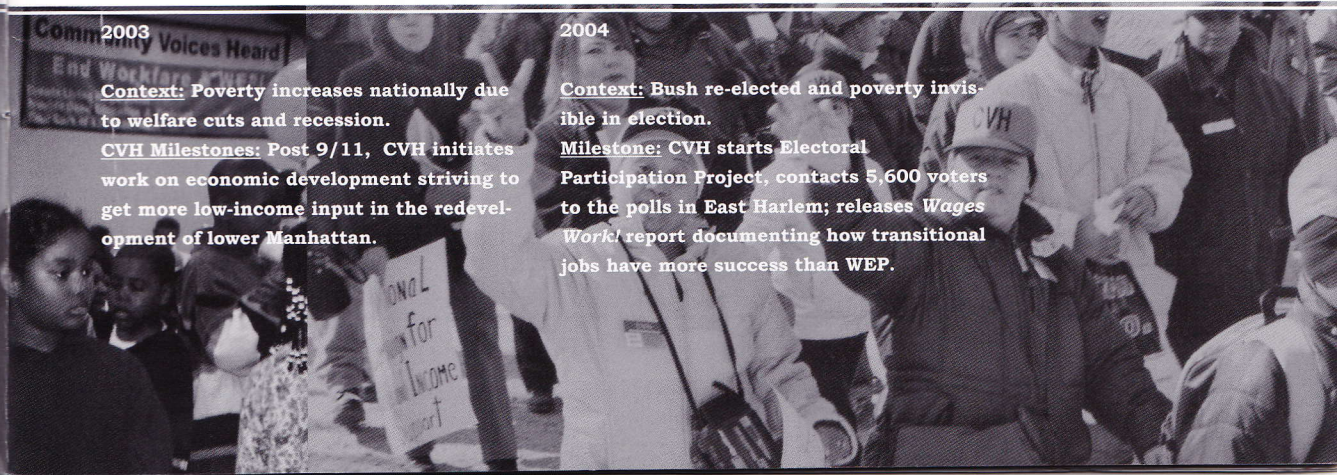
Organizing workers in the Transitional Jobs Program remains a priority. We vigorously and successfully opposed Mayor Giuliani's attempt to privatize over 7,000 job slots that were public sector positions. Seeking to cut the salaries of the jobs we won and give the money to a private agency to run the program, CVH along with DC 37 and Parks Local 983, mounted an aggressive three-month campaign to stop the Mayor's plan. After taking over the City Council's chambers with over 400 workers, we won, ensuring that the program would continue for another slate of workers.

A cornerstone of our work has been, and continues to be, building and developing leaders. We provide top-notch training and leadership skills to our members so that they can take the fight against economic injustice with them wherever they may go. We have trained people

in the coalfields of West Virginia and Ohio. We were present at the World Social Forum in Porto Alegre, Brazil, where we deepened our understanding of the global justice movement. And in 2003, we met community activists from the favelas (slums) of Rio de Janeiro and initiated a partnership that has led to two exchanges, a documentary, and a workshop at the 2005 WSF. We have also, after much deliberation, proudly come out in opposition to the war in Iraq and the billions of dollars wasted on military spending.

During last year's important election cycle, we conducted a successful electoral project in the South Bronx and East Harlem. Talking to over 5,500 people, we identified issues, educated voters, and moved almost 1,300 people to the polls in 13 election districts. We trained our members to organize and run voter canvassing projects, Get Out the Vote operations, and conduct training sessions for community residents. And in exciting CVH fashion, we ended 2004 by bringing nearly 300 of our members to a Unitarian Church on the Upper East Side to meet with City Council Speaker Gifford Miller.

Here we are in 2005, 10 years since that first May morning, still speaking up, still speaking up loudly. We are a group of low-income people, many of us women, many of us with families, coming together in order to be heard. One voice can make a powerful sound. But a community of voices? Organized, mobilized, and demanding to be heard? That's a sound, that cannot, will not, be ignored.



2003

Context: Poverty increases nationally due to welfare cuts and recession.

CVH Milestones: Post 9/11, CVH initiates work on economic development striving to get more low-income input in the redevelopment of lower Manhattan.

2004

Context: Bush re-elected and poverty invisible in election.

Milestone: CVH starts Electoral Participation Project, contacts 5,600 voters to the polls in East Harlem; releases *Wages Work!* report documenting how transitional jobs have more success than WEP.