



# Just Harvest News

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A PUBLICATION OF THE JUST HARVEST EDUCATION FUND

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## Just Harvest Organizes Visit to Sen. Jane Orie's Office

“Pennsylvania’s budget stalemate is fraying our state’s social safety net. Cuts are already happening because of the budget impasse. Childcare centers are really struggling,” said Just Harvest’s **Kristie Weiland Stagno**. “We need a budget but we need the right budget. We need a budget which will support the most vulnerable.”

Kristie organized people from local family resource centers, colleges and mental health advocacy organizations to meet with **Drew Miller**, a legislative aide to Pennsylvania State Senator **Jane Orie** (R-N.Hills) on September 10 to discuss Pennsylvania’s budget crisis.

The deadline for the state budget was July 1 – it didn’t pass until October 10.

By early September daycare centers had to lay-off workers, and curtail their food deliveries and thousands of state employees went several weeks without pay.

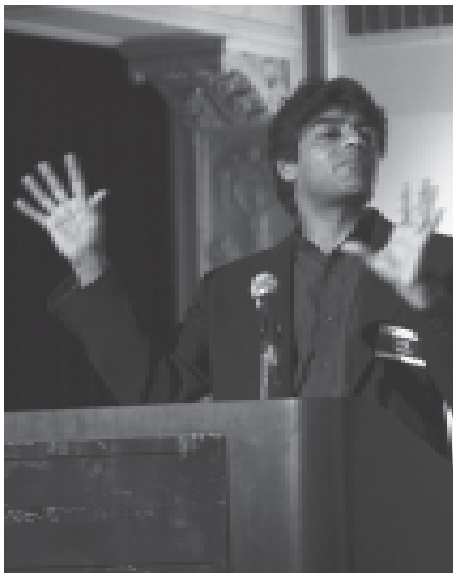
“I think it is disgraceful what is going on,” said **Andi Fischhoff**, the Development Director for Family Resources. “Harrisburg is failing all of us! Organizations and agencies are taking out lines of credit. They are losing staff!”

**Sharon Miller**, Director of Education and Community Relations for the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) of SW Pennsylvania, urged Sen. **Orie** to use her leadership to stop the budget from being balanced by cutting funding for human services. “It’s a mistake. It will devastate the safety net. The human cost will be immeasurable. It is the state’s responsibility to provide funding for mental health services,” she said.

Thirty days later Pennsylvania had a budget. Sen. Orie voted for it.



**Andi Fischhoff**, Family Resources; **Ray Firth**, Office of Child Development, Pitt; **Marc Bloomingdale**, Lutheran Service Society visit Sen. Orie’s office with Just Harvest.



**Raj Patel** inspires guests at the October 21 Harvest Celebration Dinner (photo by Mindy Harkless).

## Preparations Under Way for Tax Season

Preparations are underway for an active 2010 tax season. In addition to our South Side office, Just Harvest will manage a new free tax preparation site at Community College of Allegheny County Boyce Campus to replace a closing site at the Monroeville Mall. We are excited about this new partnership with CCAC to serve additional low-income workers in eastern Allegheny County and to provide an excellent service learning opportunity to their accounting students.

We are also working with the Money in Your Pocket Coalition to provide asset building opportunities for our tax clients. We are recruiting new volunteers that will serve as Asset Building Coaches to encourage savings and offer additional resources and referrals. We’ve partnered with Advent Financial to offer our clients without bank accounts a low-fee debit card that can be used to direct deposit their refund and save a portion of it for future needs. This will enable clients to receive their refund more quickly and avoid costly check cashers.

With all of these new services, we continue to prioritize providing a high-quality tax preparation service here at our South Side office. We’re keeping up to date on the many tax law changes occurring in DC and advocating for progressive tax changes to benefit our low-income clients. We expect to serve 2000 taxpayers this season with the help of many staff and volunteers.

More about tax law changes in the stimulus bill at [www.justharvest.org](http://www.justharvest.org).

To volunteer, contact Kristie at 412-431-8960.

## Perspective



by  
Anne Wachtel

### Poverty Simulation: Learning About Poverty Firsthand

As a brand new Just Harvest intern, one of my first tasks was to attend the poverty simulation organized by Just Harvest together with the Pitt School of Social Work. The September 18 simulation, held at the William Pitt Union, was a chance for me to experience—if briefly—what true poverty feels like in America. As a participant, I “became” a member of a low-income family as we struggled through a “month” (each “week” was a fifteen-minute segment) of bills, food shopping, finding child care, and going to work. It was truly an experience.

Though I was assigned the role of a nine-year-old girl being raised by my grandparents, I saw the true frustration of my peers (and grandparents!) as they struggled to provide for their families, even though most of the participants held a “job.” Most of my fellow participants were people like myself: either students of social work or current social service providers. We gained a unique insight into our future or current clients’ daily struggles.

Many of our volunteers—who played the roles of social service providers, bankers, police officers, and other authorities—were Just Harvest clients who have truly experienced the frustrating and discouraging circumstances of a person in poverty. Though there were several amusing moments (many of the toddler-aged children’s roles were played by *excellent* actors), no one who attended the simulation over-looked the gravity of the experience.

At the end, we all discussed the experience together. More than anything, I was struck by the overwhelming feeling of powerlessness I had during the program. It seems impossible to get ahead; in fact, I was in worse circumstances at the end than in the beginning of the event. This was the case for many of us. This experience allowed me to gain what many of my social work professors say is the most important trait in the helping professions: empathy.

*Anne Wachtel is an intern from the University of Pittsburgh School of Social Work.*



*Although the activity was a “simulation,” a number of families in a neighborhood, who have all experienced eviction, is not unusual. (Photo by Anne Wachtel)*

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**Just Harvest News** is published by the **Just Harvest Education Fund** four times each year and is sent to all members. We hope you will join **Just Harvest** by sending in membership dues: \$25, or \$5 for low-income.

A copy of Just Harvest’s official registration and financial information may be obtained from the PA Department of State by calling toll free, within Pennsylvania, 1-800-732-0999. Registration does not imply endorsement.

**Just Harvest  
A Center for Action  
Against Hunger**

#### Our Mission Statement

Just Harvest is a membership organization which promotes economic justice and works to influence public policy and to educate, empower, and mobilize the citizens of our community toward the elimination of hunger and poverty.

# Welfare Policy News

## State Welfare Changes Plans for Winter Heating Help

At an August 27 public hearing, PA welfare officials heard testimony objecting to changes in their plan for emergency heating funds (LIHEAP) for this winter. Most speakers, including Just Harvest's **Rochelle Jackson**, decried the Department of Public Welfare's proposal to shorten the time period covered, to raise the income guidelines for eligibility, and to lower the benefit amounts.

But when the Congressional appropriations came through in September, we learned PA would get an influx of federal funding, allowing the state to open the program one month earlier than they had planned.

The LIHEAP cash program is open from now until March 15 and the crisis grants— for people in imminent danger of being without heat—will be open from January 4 to March 15.

But this year DPW established a \$1,000 maximum benefit for the cash grant and \$300 for Crisis. Previously, there was no maximum for the cash benefit and for crisis the maximum was \$800.

Social service providers are very worried that people will need more help, or will need help longer if cold weather persists. "Last year, PA had extra money at the end of the season," one person observed. "Why can't we use that money?" She also noted that some states provide these grants all year long.



*Just Harvest Welfare Advocate **Rochelle Jackson** (seated) discusses our concerns about LIHEAP with welfare officials at August hearing. Left to right: **Janice Gladden**, Executive Director of the Allegheny County Assistance Office, **Mike Boyle**, Assistant Executive Director, **Rich Cunningham**, Assistant Executive Director. (Photo by Joni Rabinowitz)*

**VICTORY!!**  
For Now

## Advocates' Prompt Outcry Slows Welfare's Rush for New Limits

Responding to a groundswell of anger from advocacy groups across the state, including Just Harvest, the Department of Public Welfare (DPW) withdrew their proposed "emergency" regulations to cut back on special allowances for books, clothing, transportation, tools and other supplies for clients to look for a job or go to school.

DPW wanted to circumvent the comment period required by the Independent Regulatory Review Committee (IRRC) for changes in regulations.

"The regs are being rushed into promulgation without hearings or public comment, and with no excuse for this rush forward – except for the headlines generated by our Auditor General's often misplaced criticism of DPW," said attorney **Jonathan Stein** of Community Legal Services in Philadelphia. (Stein was referring to Auditor General Jack Wagner's frequent audits of the welfare department.)

Two of their proposals are of special concern: One would require that families spend any savings they have on hand, no matter its source, before qualifying for a special allowance. The other would set low, arbitrary limits on the total amount per year, or in a lifetime, that a person may receive. For instance, a person could only receive \$2,000 in her lifetime for books and school supplies.

Cash grants are meager – a family of 3 in PA only receives \$403 monthly. People need additional help to make those key first steps towards a job. About 156,000 people in PA could be eligible for these grants.

A public outcry by advocates and client groups, led the PA Attorney General to rule that in this case, no emergency exists to justify eliminating public comments. DPW withdrew their "final" proposals, but they have already implemented some parts of this plan. We expect them to reissue the regs in a new form which allows public comment.

**ACTION:** Call Secretary Estelle Richman at 717- 787-2600 and tell her welfare consumers need to keep special allowances.

## Inadequate Welfare Staffing Leads to Unfair Denial of Food Stamp Benefits

As we watch the food stamp (SNAP) rolls sky-rocket, we've found that the Welfare Department denies large numbers of applications, mostly for "failure to submit verification."

A person's verification for food stamp eligibility should be fairly easy. Most households need to prove their identity, social security numbers, address, and income for all the members of the household. So why are 13% of the state's applications rejected for "failure to provide required information?"

Welfare officials admit that workers are requiring too much documentation – that they are "over-verifying." And for over a year the state DPW has been "looking into it."

In our opinion, understaffing—not having time to look carefully at each case — is the main cause of this problem. Gov. Rendell has frozen new positions at the Welfare Department for months. How can the state experience an increase of almost ¼ million people in a year, have fewer staff (due to retirements and frozen hiring) and not have the clients suffer?



# State News



## Harrisburg Lawmakers Distinguished — by Being the Last State in the Nation to Pass a Budget

The partisan squabbling over the budget this summer—resulting in PA being the last state to pass a budget—ended with an inadequate budget of \$28.7 billion.

Throughout, Gov. Rendell stuck with his insistence on education funding; the Republicans, along with most Democrats, refused to consider any tax increases. Most state workers eventually got paid after a month's stalemate, but departments were cut and

programs faltered. The Departments of Agriculture and Environmental Protection experienced huge cuts and additional staff is being furloughed right now.

Advocates and providers are still poring over the numbers to determine the effect of the final budget on their agencies and clients, and the government continues to fine-tune their plans. An additional factor: one-year federal stimulus monies figured in this year's budget, but they will be gone next year.

Welfare will experience a 10% cutback. Although the local offices are losing staff through retirements, and caseloads are rising—cash, food stamps, and Medicaid—no new staff have been promised. The inadequate funding for child care programs will probably stay the same. Most of the housing and economic development programs received cuts, including programs which help people whose houses are being foreclosed.

The State Food Purchase program for food banks maintained its \$18 million grant which has remained flat for several years. Food banks continue to seek increases because of on-going hikes in food costs and more people seeking their services. They will again seek \$20 million in 2010-11.

The real culprit, of course, is the recession, forcing thousands more onto the unemployment lines and the food stamp rolls. Federal dollars to the states are drying up and stimulus assistance is short-lived. A budget dependent on one-year fixes is poor planning. Next year's budget is already in the works, and without improvements in people's working lives and some increased taxes, it will prove to be a worse struggle.

## Budget Impasse Costs WIC Families Fresh Summer Produce

Fresh fruits and vegetables are part of many people's diet, especially during the summer months when local fresh food is available and farmers markets are well-stocked. The Farmers Market Nutrition Program (FMNP)—a federal-state program—gives \$20 in coupons for income eligible seniors and WIC families to shop at the farmers markets. But this year, because of the budget impasse, the state cut off disbursement of the WIC coupons until late October, after the budget was passed. In addition to WIC recipients and staff, North Hills resident **Richard O'Toole** was very disappointed. On his own, he had organized a farmers market in the downtown WIC office and in the McKees Rocks FOR center near the WIC office there, in response to the perennially low redemption rate of the WIC coupons. But there were no customers this year. We hope he will do the program again in 2010.



*Just Harvest joins in broad human services coalition demanding a fair and immediate state budget. Speakers presented graphic reports of closings and cutbacks in services at this rally on September 3 at the Focus on Renewal (FOR) Center in McKees Rocks. (Photo by Joni Rabinowitz)*

## The Public Speaks Out Against Budget Crisis

The impasse over the state budget—101 days, longer than anybody remembers—spurred a lot more legislative action, coalitions and joint work than we've seen in a long time. People made their voices heard in many ways, and more desperately, as the weeks wore on and agencies' services contracted, leaving thousands of our Pennsylvania neighbors in trouble. Several hundred people with disabilities and their families told of the hardships they were facing, at a forceful rally at the State office building in downtown Pittsburgh, where dozens of human services providers and recipients testified. A week later a coalition of human services groups packed the hall at the FOR (Focus on Renewal) Center in McKees Rocks, where **Marc Cherna**, Director of the Allegheny County Department of Human Services, told the crowd that the county could no longer make payment advances to their contracted agencies. Most agencies have a mix of different kinds of funding, but a loss of county support can be devastating for some.

Just Harvest joined up with economic development and housing organizations, along with the 300 member Greater Pittsburgh NonProfit Partnership for a focused lobbying campaign and an op-ed piece in the Post-Gazette, calling on the legislators to quickly pass a fair and adequate budget including new revenues.

## Local News

### City Feeds More Children in "Open" Summer Food Sites

“All but one of our sites is ‘open,’ now,” said **Carly Walker**, Program Coordinator of the city’s Summer Food Service Program. “Now, any child who goes to one of the city-sponsored sites may eat there.” The City provides meals in about 80 community based sites, such as recreation centers, Boys and Girls Clubs, and Y’s. Carly said it’s hard to compare the numbers with previous years, because in 2008 the Pittsburgh Public Schools took over sponsorship of all the city sites in, or affiliated with, schools—totaling 50 sites.

Most of these sites are “closed” or “enrolled:” only children who have signed up may participate.

The 113 sites in the County served about the same number of meals as last year, **Sally Petrilli**, Service Administrator for the County’s Summer Food Program, told us. She said participation in the public housing communities is especially frustrating. “I don’t know if the parents want the kids to stay in the apartments when the parents are working, or if they’re still

confused about whether they have to register in advance,” she said.

She thinks a program like Meals on Wheels would be good for these communities, where the meals could be brought right up onto the floors where the children live. “There are always new ways to reach people with meals,” she said. “Maybe something like that would work.”

**Shauna Ponton**, our Child Nutrition Advocate, distributed 17,000 fliers in the most vulnerable communities early in the season.

### We Teach New Teachers About Poverty

Together with Dr. **Malcolm Thomas** and **Ivy Iro** (Greater Pittsburgh Food Bank), Just Harvest’s **Joni Rabinowitz** (Just Harvest) gave a vivid picture about poverty to 160 student teachers at an afternoon training organized by the Pittsburgh school district and **Tom Gordon**, Slippery Rock University Coordinator for the Pittsburgh Public Schools Collaboration.

“I’m thrilled that these student teachers could hear about the realities of poverty and

hunger they will be seeing in their everyday work,” Tom Gordon said. “It’s so important for them to understand how poverty affects many of their students every day, how it harms their ability to learn, and WHY we have poverty—which is where Just Harvest comes in.”

Malcolm delivered a dynamic PowerPoint presentation with a forceful and personal talk. Joni connected poverty to decisions made by public officials who have control over parts of people’s lives. Ivy

described the pains of hungry children in classrooms. “They can’t learn if they’re hungry,” she said.

Tom Gordon was pleased with the program. This was the first time the Collaboration—a union of 6 area universities – included an educational portion about poverty. “My goal is for teachers to really understand how poverty affects students and education—we have to get to this generation!” he said.

### Middle-Class is Key

The *State of Working America, 2009*, the Keystone Research Center’s (KRC) annual report, documents the changing nature of Pennsylvania’s economy and proposes strategies to alleviate the crisis now known as the *Great Recession*.

Though it praises Washington’s quick response to the economic crisis, the report is highly critical of the long term financial plan. It cites the erosion of the middle class as a key risk for the ongoing economic health of the nation. What is more troubling, they observe, is that the stimulus plan, the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) doesn’t address these issues.

Although the rise in statewide unemployment has slowed, worker’s wages have stagnated. Since 2001, practically the entire Pennsylvania workforce—up to the 95<sup>th</sup> percentile—experienced a decline in inflation-adjusted wages. Additionally, 14% of middle-class workers are now underemployed while the top 1% of Pennsylvania earners captured 68% of the total growth in Pennsylvania personal income between 2001 and 2006. These

trends have not held steady through the current recession — instead the income gap continues to widen.

This, the KRC suggests, is a dangerous aberration from the economic policies that pulled us out of the Great Depression of the 1930’s. Then, the federal government built the middle-class by enacting the minimum wage, protecting the right of laborers to unionize, and establishing unemployment insurance and social security. Now, unfortunately, the ARRA has neglected to enact serious structural reforms to strengthen and protect the middle class.

If the middle-class continues to struggle and the ever-present income gap persists, the long-term health of our financial system remains at risk. But, if strong structural reforms are enacted, the economy will be stabilized for the long term as middle-class people participate in the economy. The middle-class is the key, the KRC insists, to unlocking a prosperous future for our economy, our nation, and our families.



During the budget negotiations this past summer, Just Harvest gathered outside PPG headquarters on August 19 to oppose a special interest tax break for multi-state companies, which some lawmakers were proposing. These special interests wanted to change how corporate income taxes are calculated, so that the 12% of the largest Pennsylvania corporations would benefit. We distributed 800 leaflets and talked to many sympathetic passers-by. Channel 11 and KQV Radio covered the action. Here, Just Harvest’s **Brian Gilmore** holds a sign announcing our message. (Photo by Joni Rabinowitz)

# In the Community

## Annual Dinner Spotlights Sustainable Food Needs



**Michael "Q" Roth**, President of the Board of the East End Food Co-op, accepts our Seeds of Justice Award. (Photo by Joni Rabinowitz)

## Global Food System Punishes Poor Here and Abroad, Patel Says

**Raj Patel**, a leading critic of the global food production system, gave a stirring presentation to over 300 Just Harvest supporters at our 21<sup>st</sup> Annual Harvest Celebration Dinner on October 21.

Identifying the common links between hunger at home and in the Third World, Patel argued that multinational food processors and the international trade policies that benefit them drive small farmers and urban workers into destitution while also destroying the health of millions of consumers. He challenged the audience to focus on "the underlying political and economic structures that allow people to be hungry," rather than be satisfied either with alleviating hunger by giving food to charity or being more ethical consumers in our individual buying decisions. An activist and scholar, Patel is the author of *Stuffed and Starved: The Hidden Battle for the World Food System*, and of the forthcoming book *The Value of Nothing*.

Patel identified common roots in the seemingly contradictory outcomes of hunger and obesity, seeing them as parallel end results of an unsustainable system that makes people servants of a supposedly "free market" instead of the other way around. Despite the bad news of growing hunger, poverty, and obesity, Patel remains hopeful, as he pointed the way toward a one-word solution: "Democracy."

"We are not consumers of democracy," he concluded, "We are its proprietors!"

This powerful message resonated with the crowd, which also joined in honoring the East End Food Coop with our annual Seeds of Justice Award. Just Harvest Board President **Barbara Finch** presented the award, which was accepted by Co-op Board Chair **Mike "Q" Roth**.

On behalf of Just Harvest and the United Steelworkers, USW Vice-President **Fred Redmond** presented Patel with our George Becker Memorial Award, named for the late union president and Seeds of Justice Awardee. The event was emceed by WTAE-TV News Anchor **Andrew Stockey**.

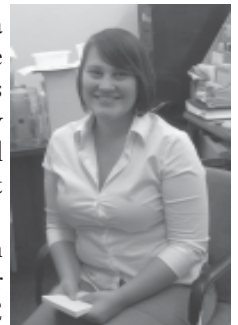
Just Harvest is especially grateful to our event sponsors – the USW, the Falk Foundation, the University of Pittsburgh, and Carnegie-Mellon University – as well as more than 100 advertisers in our event program book. Thanks to these sponsors, advertisers, guests, and donors to our wonderful silent auction at the event, Just Harvest raised approximately \$16,000 to support our anti-hunger and anti-poverty advocacy.

## Comings and Goings



**Theresa Orlando**, Just Harvest board member, holds the flag of Ireland— one of 194 nations' flags — at the September 21 "planting" of an International Peace Pole at St. Mary of the Mount on Mt. Washington. Marking the UN Day of Peace, the Peace Pole Project began in Japan in 1955. (Photo by Joni Rabinowitz)

**Former VISTA worker Brian Gilmore** moved to Philadelphia where he's working at an organization which helps low income seniors sign up for public benefits – similar to our Food Stamps Make a Difference program. He plans to attend Drexel University next fall for a Masters in Public Policy, focusing on environmental policy, Brian says his time at Just Harvest helped him learn about meaningful policy change that is just for all.



This fall **Anne Wachtel** (at right), a senior in the BA program at Pitt's Social Work School, joined our Just Harvest team for her field placement. She's working on a project that would allow WIC recipients to use their new fruit and vegetable vouchers at Farmers Markets. Some states have done this already, but it requires a close cooperation between WIC and the Dept. of Agriculture. Ann wants to spend some time in the Peace Corps after she graduates next spring.

## WIC Gets Help from Stimulus

**The WIC program in PA will receive about \$462,264 from the US Dept of Agriculture (USDA), to study implementing an electronic benefit transfer (EBT) system. The state expects the study to take about 14-18 months. This award is part of an \$8.5 million grant from the federal stimulus act (American Recovery and Reinvestment Act- ARRA) to WIC agencies across the county. The FNS (Food and Nutrition Service) of USDA administers the program nationally – in PA the Health Department runs WIC.**



## WIC corrections from last issue

WIC serves pregnant, postpartum and breastfeeding women, infants and children to age 5 (not 6).

The current WIC food package has a value of \$72.14. The infant formula package is valued at \$167.19 (not \$35.00).



## Thank You

**J**ust Harvest Education Fund gratefully acknowledges recent grants from the Neighbor-Aid Fund at The Pittsburgh Foundation for our food stamp participation project, and from the United Way of Allegheny County for our free tax preparation program in the upcoming tax filing season.

Special thanks in this issue go out to First Unitarian Church for sponsoring a special Sunday collection to benefit Just Harvest; and to the Steel City Derby Demons for hosting Just Harvest friends and donating some of the proceeds at a Roller Derby event in September. And also to the freshmen at Pitt's Forbes Hall for their donations at our recent presentation.

We are grateful to the family of long-time Just Harvest member Mary Louise Wright for inviting contributions in her memory to Just Harvest. Mary Louise passed away in August at the age of 97. Memorial gifts were received from: Jeanne Beaman, Andrew Dale, Doreen Hurley, Joyce Rothermel & Michael Drohan, and Judith & Roger Sutton.

And, of course, thank you to all our recent members and donors: Candy Aiden, Mary Arenth, Robert & Sandra Arnold, Milton & Myrna Backal, Jane Becker, Sara Bennett, Grace Boncuk, Glenrose Bradford, Patricia Breece, Joan & Joseph Bruno, David Caldwell, Darla Cravotta & David Weber *in honor of Joni Rabinowitz*, Sylvia Denys, Doris Dick, Garrett Dorsey, Charlotte Dunmore, Kim Eaton & David Etzi, Nancy Evans, John & Rose Evosevic, Sen. James Ferlo, James & Kathryn Flannery, Robert Foley, Cheryl Fu, Martha Garvey, Ben & Peggy Gessler, J. Donald & Evelyn Geyer, Lee Grossman-Leibson, Joseph & Catherine Hajdu, Yasmin Haut & Kellie Tikkin, Anne Hawkins, Sr. M Francine Horos, Timothy Hrehocik, Judith Johnson, Carol Kinney, Ruth Kolb, Caroline Kostuch, David Krupp, Paul Lepus, Lawrence & Claire Levine, Marc Levine, Michael & Jane Louik, Clark & Brigid Lund, Cary Lund, David & Margaret Lyle, Louise & Michael Malakoff, Sr. Vivian McElhinny, Nathan & Dorothy Melamed, Cheryl Morden & Reubensnipper, Bertha Morimoto, Nancy Niemczyk & Myron Arnowitt, James & Tricia Nowalk *in honor of Joni Rabinowitz*, Theresa Orlando, Nicholas Parrendo, Councilman Bill Peduto, Cecelia Perz, Carmen Putorti & Dawn Predmore, Judith Rivas, James Ruck & Gail Britanik, Lorraine Sauchin, Harold & Marla Scheinman, Joseph Seidel, Joshua & Amanda Shapira, Christine & Gregory Smith, Kathleen Smith, Jeri Spann, Marjorie Spenser, Judith Starr, William Sulanowski, Sandra Swetland, Bonnie Thurston, Ronald & Joan Varner, Stephen & Carolyn Wachtel, Sr. Maureen Watson, Jean Weaver, Michael & Cheryl Weiland, Nancy Welfer, Tim Whelan & Barbara Miller, May Whitcomb, Ramona Wigginton, Gina Wilson, Jacqueline Wilson, Bill Wood, Laura & Ronald Zinski, Allegro Hearth Bakery, Hill House Association, Riverview Presbyterian Church Thrift Store, Society Of St. Vincent DePaul, St. Raphael Food Bank, Temple Sinai, and Westminster Presbyterian Church.



*The Steel City Derby Demons held a Derby Bout on August 22 to benefit Just Harvest. Participants and guests donated cell phones to our Phoneraiser project and learned about Just Harvest's work. A good time was had by all, and the Derby Demons donated \$200 to Just Harvest. (Photo by Joni Rabinowitz)*

## Food Stamp News

### Food Stamps Make a Difference – Our Program Sees Results



*After 45 days of frustrating phone calls, Americorps VISTA **Noah Whelan** rejoices when he finds his ACCESS card, for food stamps, in his mail box. (Photo by Joni Rabinowitz)*

**I**n August Food Stamp (SNAP) participation in Pennsylvania increased more than it had in any month in over 5 years. In fact, it's a good bet that this is the biggest monthly increase in new cases in 15 years!

**Now, more than one in every nine Pennsylvanians is on food stamps – 1,453,000 individuals altogether.** Across the country, the numbers are similar.

In addition to growing family insecurity and lack of jobs, we can also credit program improvements for the upsurge. Last spring the federal stimulus act added about \$40 per month to the average family's food stamp benefits. In the summer Pennsylvania liberalized its income guidelines, and October saw a federal annual rise in income limits. More and more, working people – employed and unemployed – are discovering this important federal benefit that helps them put food on their tables.

With three part-time staff doing food stamp (SNAP) applications on-line at Just Harvest, our Food Stamps Make a Difference program continues to help hundreds of people. In October, we filed 168 applications; we did 203 in September and 188 in August.

#### National Food Stamp(SNAP) Profiles

- Most recipients (49%) are children or elderly (9%).
- Nearly one-third (29%) have jobs.
- Only 11% receive cash welfare benefits.
- 41% have incomes at or below HALF of the federal poverty line—or \$11,050 for 4 people.
- Sixteen percent have zero income.

*\*Food Stamps is now officially called SNAP - The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program.*



## Low-Income Families Score Gains in Federal Food Spending Bill

Although Congress has put the 5-year reauthorization of the child nutrition programs on a back burner, they continue to pass their annual spending bills, or appropriations. The Agriculture Appropriations bill Congress passed in October provides tens of billions in on-going nutrition support, adds 4 more states to the ten states which receive Afterschool Meals funding, boosts WIC fruit and vegetable vouchers, and invests new funding in the Commodity Supplemental Food Program, summer nutrition, child care food, school meal equipment and school meal direct certification.

The spending bill also extends the child nutrition programs for one year, to September 30, 2010, but Congressional leaders are resolved to complete the reauthorization process sooner.

### Just Harvest on the web

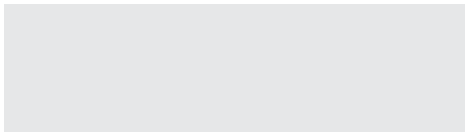
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[www.justharvest.org](http://www.justharvest.org)  
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### Part-time Communications/ Media Coordinator

Just Harvest is creating a new part-time professional staff position to coordinate our communications and media activities, to educate the community about hunger and poverty, and to build awareness and visibility for Just Harvest's mission and programs. Duties include writing/ editing Just Harvest News. Read full job description at [www.justharvest.org](http://www.justharvest.org)

To apply: E-mail cover letter, resume, writing sample and professional references in MS Word format by January 1 to [search@justharvest.org](mailto:search@justharvest.org) or mail to Just Harvest, 16 Terminal Way, Pittsburgh PA 15219.



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