

Local mothers continue their worldly role

Contributed by: Brit Horvat/YourHub.com on 9/16/2007



Co-founders and volunteers for Mothers Acting Up girlcott outside Momentum, 16th and Pearl streets, in Boulder Sept. 8.

Provided by: Juliana Forbes

How is it that a handful of local women take on the task of benefiting the world's children when their main office consists of a carriage house near downtown Boulder?

The four founders of Mothers Acting Up (MAU), a grassroots organization whose mission is to passionately and publicly advocate for children around the world, make it possible by following their own recipe for change.

Five years ago, **Beth Osnes, Joellen Raderstorf, Juliana Forbes** and **Erica Shafroth** decided to bring some joy and positivity into their activist work. They were disturbed by the decisions their federal leaders were making and how the consequences - ranging from environmental degradation to exploding military budgets - were affecting children everywhere. These mothers combined their proactive desires and determination to be heard in the political sphere and thus created MAU.

"Activism is often thought of as aggressive, angry, dangerous and risky, whereas MAU is celebratory, informative and interested in partnering up with congress, representatives and corporations," says Osnes. "Our biggest impact is based on how many women we can mobilize."

Currently, MAU has 25 groups across the U.S. and members in Israel, S. Africa, Bolivia, Argentina and Namibia. Osnes says they hope to have 50 groups by the end of the year - including one in the U.K. In addition to the four core members in Boulder, they are now joined by **Anjali Kochar**, who lives in the Bronx, and **Paige La Grone Babcock**, who lives in Nashville.

The core members of MAU run the Web site and all its content, plan events and come up with the tools necessary for them.

"Basically, we'll send out a recipe for a particular activity with all the tools necessary, and it's up to the local community to decide how they will act up," says Osnes.

According to Osnes, while MAU members partake in small activities such as fundraising dinners at their homes that produce direct, tangible change, their most significant action comes from focusing on systemic change.

"We want to have a seat at the table where people are deciding where we'll go to war, how to lower carbon dioxide emissions, where our natural resources are going, how health care is being handled and how to eradicate extreme poverty. All of these things directly affect children," says Osnes.

According to Osnes, picketing and rallying outside of Congressmen's and Senators' offices is less effective than discussing issues face-to-face with them because "they know who we are when we call now. It's our chance to prove that mothers don't just volunteer in schools. They are just as able to talk about environmental policies, where resources are being allocated and so on."

Every month, the MAU Web site has a specific call to action for women across the nation to take on. Several MAU members and volunteers recently attended Representative **Udall's** Town Hall Meeting at the Thornton City Council Chambers on Sept. 12, as this month's call to action is to tell Congress to vote 'no' on more Iraq war funding.

On their site, they give instructions on how to find your members of congress, how to get your kids involved by chalking, pointers on what to say over the phone and via e-mail. The following is an excerpt from a sample e-mail that MAU members can send to federal leaders:

"The amount you will debate, \$145 - \$190 billion, would provide: primary education for every child on earth (\$30 billion), universal access to water and sanitation for everyone on earth (\$21 billion), end hunger in the U.S. (\$7 billion), and give a free laptop to every U.S. student in kindergarten to graduate school (\$86 billion)."

In addition to directly approaching those who make the big decisions, these women coordinate many community-involved, celebratory activities that are almost always accompanied by a woman or two on stilts. Some of these include an annual Mother's Day parade, field trips, presentations, school projects, activism rehearsal workshops and activities that MAU calls girlcotts.

Sept. 8 was the most recent girlcott, where MAU members and volunteers celebrated a new store in Boulder called Momentum, 15th and Pearl streets. They praised this store for featuring all Fair Trade certified products - meaning it ensures sustainable wages, no child labor and creates economic opportunities for women in impoverished areas of the world.

"The 'girlcott' included mothers on stilts, others holding signs and even a toddler in a tutu!" says Osnes. "They presented the owners of the store with a girlcott certificate of appreciation and handed out fliers about the store to passersby, telling them how MAU was celebrating its positive impact on the world's children."

Osnes' most significant role in spreading MAU's positive activism is through her educational, theatrical pieces that she writes and performs. She recently performed a one-woman play this month called *(M)other* at The Dairy Center for the Arts in Boulder

In *(M)other*, Osnes participates in a "baby swapping" program organized by the United Nations that involves seven mothers from seven different countries. These mothers, who all have six-month-old babies, are expected to "swap" their children for one month. During this time, Osnes' character realizes that her work as a mother is not limited to her own home.

"This woman thinks she's separate from everyone else and that her child is all she can really care for," says Osnes. "Then, she realizes that the world is her community."

In writing this play, Osnes not only interviewed women from seven countries, but learned their accents for parts of the performance where she tells each woman's personal experience with the "baby swap."

Osnes plans to take this play to Nashville in November and Austin in May as a tool that she hopes will get mothers and others invigorated. She hopes that others will become inspired and fortified from this performance and chart their own determined path.

For more information on Mothers Acting Up or how you can get involved, go to www.mothersactingup.org.