

PROGRAMS AND CAMPAIGNS

Bank Organizing: Post-Foreclosure Eviction Defense Campaign

In 2007 City Life/Vida Urbana (CL/VU) started noticing the increasing number of foreclosure evictions in housing court. Around this same time one of the tenant leaders we'd been working with came to us with a notice from a major bank announcing they owned the building where he lived and he had to leave. Supporting him and others to stay in their homes led us to launch the Post Foreclosure Eviction Defense Campaign. Since 2008, eviction defense has been the thrust of (CL/VU) organizing strategy to halt housing displacement for working class people both tenants and owners.

Foreclosure evictions have disproportionately affected communities of color, and reasserted our mission to work toward racial justice as well as confronting bank power with collective people power.

Using a model and strategy CL/VU refers to as “**the sword and the shield**,

- We work closely with tenants and other community residents informing them of their rights through legal services assistance and ongoing casework—**the Shield**.
- **The Sword**. Encouraging residents to stay in their homes, we organize blockades, vigils and other public actions to exert public pressure on the banks. We then draw on *the potential of a non-profit bank*, Boston Community Capital, *to purchase at current real value the homes of foreclosed residents and where possible to resell it to them*.

Three elements of our strategy have led to success in reducing housing displacement and fostering movement building:

1) **Building Individual and Collective Power**. We encourage tenants and other residents to find their voice and take a stand to stay in their homes in the face of eviction. We support them in joining the Bank Tenant Association (BTA). The BTA mobilizes people as a group to fight foreclosure, builds community solidarity and new leadership for the growing movement.

2) The **collaboration with legal services organizations**, their staff and students;

3) The **partnership with Boston Community Capital (BCC)**, a non-profit financial intermediary committed to preserving healthy communities for low-income people

Tenant Organizing

Over the past 30 years, CL/VU has fought for rent control and preserved hundreds of units of expiring-use housing. Using a model of tenant-landlord

negotiation drawn from labor organizing, we have won long-term contracts on over 1000 units that stipulated affordable rent and upkeep. We continue to work with Tenant Associations to support organizing in their buildings and negotiate collective bargaining agreements the same as labor unions do in the workplace. The issues include rent increases, section 8 housing, management relations and other tenant issues. We also actively support their broader involvement in the movement. These leaders continue to meet monthly for mutual education.

Movement Building and Leadership Development

CL/VU maintains an active and aggressive grassroots effort through its bank tenant and tenant associations along with effective coalition work and engagement with political leaders. We promote the ongoing education and development of bank tenant and tenant leaders.

- **Leadership Team**

CL/VU organized and now works closely with a group of bank organizing and tenant organizing leaders. This group holds political discussions around movement building and plans strategies and tactics for eviction defense, and links them to other community issues.

- **Radical Organizing Institute (in Spanish)**

The East Boston Bank Tenant Association in conjunction with the Chelsea Collaborative is initiating a seven week "Radical Organizing Institute" primarily aimed at developing its Spanish speaking tenant and community leaders. It will combine political education with practical organizing skills and be held March - April 2010.

- **Radical Organizing Conference and the Summer Institute**

CL/VU provides leadership in planning this annual conference and sponsoring related events for the Solidarity Economy Conference.

The Summer Institute was initiated in 2008 as part of the Radical Organizing Conference, and provides a forum and training opportunity around developing the methods and theory of radical organizing, including political education and strategy.

- **Coalitions.** CL/VU participates most actively in the following Coalitions because of their strategic importance to our foreclosure organizing:

- Massachusetts Alliance of Predatory Lending (MAAPL)
- Action for Regional Equity
- Committee on Occupied Housing in Foreclosure
- Community Labor United
- Boston Tenant Coalition
- Right to the City
- Jobs with Justice

