

The Grassroots Leader

Everyone a Learner. Everyone a Teacher. Everyone a Leader.



Learn

Teach

Lead

Volume 1 Issue 3

October 2010

Mission: The Grassroots Leadership College supports the development of grassroots leaders by building skills and relationships in a supportive and stimulating environment.

Hello GLC graduates, workers, and friends!

This month we've got some powerful stories from powerful people. There's Mark Solbrilsky one of our office volunteers. Mark has lived with Cerebral Palsy his entire life and has taught all of us in the office a whole lot about communication; using a computer mouse mounted on a headband as his voice. There's Tamra, who came to the GLC back in 2004 just a year and half after ending her prison time who is now starting a home for women getting back on their feet after prison. And there's lots more!

They are all just regular folks doing extraordinary things. That's what community organizing is, regular folks coming together and creating the change that they need. How do we overcome the odds in our own lives? How do we live out our dreams? What is our role in organizing movement?

October 25th marks the anniversary of the passing of one of the greatest organizers of the Civil Rights movement—Rosa Parks. Rosa is known for sitting down, but there wasn't any miracle in that moment. She was able to inspire a movement not because of magic but because of who she was, what she had already done, and because she happened to be the one in the right place at the right time.

Rosa and her husband Raymond were committed community leaders, both active in the NAACP. She joined the Montgomery chapter of the NAACP in 1943 where she served as secretary to President E.D. Nixon. She didn't sit on the bus until December 1st 1955. Rosa wasn't the first person to break the bus segregation laws. Jackie Robinson, Irene Morgan, Sarah Louise Keys, Claudette Colvin, and others had all broken the way.

Rosa's leadership over the years meant that she gained the friendship and the respect of many who were ready to follow her into the fray. She studied hard and worked hard to gain that respect. She was a trained organizer having attended Highlander Folk School in Tennessee.

Rosa's story makes me wonder; what happens when it's our turn to sit on the bus? Are you ready? Have you learned the skills you'll need? Have you built the connections in the community? Have you built up your own emotional strength?

The Blacks of Montgomery and their allies walked for 381 days before they won. The struggles continue.

Peace,

Amy S. Mondloch,
Executive Director



Welcome

Randy Stoecker: Strategies on how you can get your community inspired, motivated and ready to take action

How many of you have tried to get a child to eat vegetables? It is kind of like getting people involved in social change work. Kids hear that eating veggies is the right thing to do, and most of us talk about how getting involved in social justice work is the right thing to do, but we also think of both as having some pretty icky aspects. And kids may not really deep down believe that eating veggies will help their health any more than the rest of us believe that we can really do things like end poverty in our lifetime. In both cases we need to get people to imagine a better experience—with both veggies and social change. This upcoming workshop, *Something is Happening Here! Framing Issues to Inspire Social Action* on Thursday Oct. 28th, is about helping inspire people's imaginations. We will start with some very basic principles. First of all, if we keep talking about "veggies" there is only one choice—you either like 'em or hate 'em. But if we start talking about sweat peas, baby carrots, broccoli florets, string beans, and so on—you can like some of 'em and hate the rest. Social change is the same. If ending poverty isn't your passion, then maybe eliminating domestic violence is. And you all know the classic strategy for veggie eating—you start with a couple of small pieces and work your way up to more. That's also true for social change. You can't end poverty for everyone everywhere tomorrow, but you can pick off a few small bites to chew. Of course, all this is easy to say, but it can be hard to do. So in this workshop we will actually practice how to do this. So bring your issues. We'll supply the veggies.



GLC Grad Instrumental in Starting Transition Home for Women

Discouraged by the inadequacy of available opportunities for women returning from prison and rehabilitation programs, Tamra Oman enrolled in the Grassroots Leadership College's general semester program to gain leadership training on how to take action. Building on her work during that semester, Tamra was instrumental in opening Wisconsin's first Oxford House for Women.

Upon opening its doors on September 11th, *Madison Place Oxford House* joined the more than 1,000 Oxford Houses around the United States; the first which was established in 1975 in Silver Spring, Maryland. **Oxford Houses** are cooperatively run, democratically governed transitional housing options for those struggling with alcohol or drug dependency issues where members elect their own officers and are collectively involved in house finances by participating in weekly "business meetings."

The Oxford House that Tamra helped start is also home to the **Sister House Inc.**, an organization with the goal of developing businesses that will sustain operations, provide job and life skills workshops and offer employment opportunities for women transitioning from prison, jail, or chemical dependency.



Since Tamra's own release from prison, she has dedicated herself to assisting individuals; creating programming specific to ex-offenders and recovering persons who have multiple issues and concerns; as well as increasing her own skills and knowledge as a role-model, teacher and leader.

Mark Sobrilsky: Proving them wrong

Mark, tell our readers a little bit about who you are.

My name is Mark Sobrilsky; I just turned 40 this past September the 8th; and I have Cerebral Palsy. My kind of Cerebral Palsy was due to lack of oxygen from birth. With me, it affected my muscle coordination and my speech, but it didn't affect my cognitive thinking at all. I can't verbally speak, so I use a laptop computer to talk. Here is how I use my laptop to communicate: I use specialized hardware called a HeadMouse and it is mounted above the laptop screen. I wear a headband with a small little sensor in the middle and the HeadMouse picks up a signal from the sensor, so that's how I move the mouse. There is special software called Dragger32 that I use for single click, double click, and dragging. To choose what I want, I just aim to the selection and hold still for a second, then it automatically selects my choice. Also, I have an on-screen keyboard called Skeleton Key and it works the same way where I aim to what I want, then I hold still for a second, then it automatically selects the key. It has a keyboard layout, word prediction, and abbreviated expansion. Word prediction is where I type a letter and a list of words come up on the left side letting me choose which word that I want. Abbreviated expansion is where I program 2 or 3 letters to type a sentence. For example, when I type "hh," it automatically types, "How are you?"

"The doctors thought that I was profoundly mentally retarded. I proved them wrong"

I was born in Beaverdam, WI. My mom had a hard time taking care of me because she had a lot of issues with my dad, and I had special needs. The doctors told her that I would be better off in an Institution like Central Colony which is now known as Central Wisconsin Center which is here in Madison. The doctors also thought that I was profoundly mentally retarded. I eventually proved them wrong when about 2 years later a nurse took interest in me and had me live with her daughter and her daughter's husband in Marshall, WI. I finally got someone willing to try to communicate with me; they started to do some testing and found out there wasn't any wrong with me mentally. After a few years they were having another child of their own, so I moved into another foster home which was on a farm and it was horrible. I only lived there for about 6 months because they really neglected me. My mom flew back from California and took me out of that foster home and arranged for me to live with Marge and Spence.

Marge and Spence lived in Madison, WI. That is when I really excelled with everything. They fought very hard to keep me in the regular school system. I could understand the schoolwork and the

What does, "Everyone a learner, everyone a teacher, everyone a leader" mean to you?
"To me, it means that everyone is equal"



homework just fine, but it obviously took me longer to do it. When I went to Lafollette High School, the school fought to put me in special education because they didn't want to pay for someone to go to classes with me to take notes for me nor pay for an afterschool tutor to come to my house. Marge and Spence couldn't help me in school because they had other foster children in wheelchairs and one required to be watched 24/7 and needed help with everything. The school finally came to an agreement with Marge and Spence where the school paid for someone to take notes for me in class and part of the cost for an afterschool tutor. Marge and Spence paid for the rest.

Before Marge and Spence took me in, their family traveled all over the

world as the Harmonica Minstrels. They were Born Again Christians. Their oldest son Kurt traveled all over the world as the Mountain Man later in his life. He was a Ventriloquist and did Christian Crusades. I think he was the second best Ventriloquist in the world. I moved in with their family in 1978, and in 1983 Kurt died from a brain tumor. Everyone took it extremely hard including me. A little while after that, the whole family grew apart and eventually we stopped going to church. Even now when I mention Kurt, tears come to my eyes. Marge died in 2000 due to heart problems, and Spence has since remarried and now lives in Pardeeville. Marge and Spence's other sons and daughter still live in Madison, and have families of their own.

My mom moved back to Wisconsin in 1990 after my dad committed suicide. My mom and dad got a divorce after my brother was born and they never went back together. My dad remarried to a woman named Lucy and they lived in Beaverdam. I think that they got a divorce about a year before my dad committed suicide. I was told that my dad went off his depression medication, and Lucy & her boyfriend kept going to his place to harass him. I guess he couldn't take it anymore, so he got his gun, killed Lucy, almost killed her boyfriend and then killed himself. After that, my mom decided to move to Janesville to be closer to me and my brother named Mike who he is 11 months younger. I never knew that I had a brother until a few years after I lived with Marge and Spence. He moved in with them when he was 2 and a half and I moved in when I was 8. I guess that they didn't want to tell me in case things didn't work

out. Now he is living in Brodhead with his new girlfriend.

How did you start volunteering for the GLC?

After I finished MATC Truax in 2005, where I took several computer classes, some graphic design classes, and earned a Website Development Certificate, I went to United Way to get help searching for volunteer jobs and GLC sounded like a good match, so my lunch person, Tenaya, helped me in the interview. The interview went well and GLC decided to have me. I do data entry and website maintenance, and have been working for GLC off and on since 2005.

Why is the GLC important to you?

GLC has given me a chance to work on my skills when most other places won't hire me since I do things slower due to my physical limitations.

What does, "everyone a learner, everyone a teacher, everyone a leader" mean to you?

To me, it means that everyone is equal: that everyone can learn, teach, and be a leader to each other.

Tell us about any favorite experiences you have had working with the GLC.

One of my favorite experiences was at a volunteer awards ceremony. I didn't win any awards, but it was still fun to go to. Another one was where people talked about having trolleys run in some places in Madison in addition to the Metro

busses. Especially in the winter, trolleys would help because some busses only run once an hour, but some people didn't like that because it might raise their property taxes.

What are your favorite things to do? What makes you happy?

I enjoy spending time with my girlfriend Julie. She works a lot, so we cherish every moment we spend together. During the summer, we went to Bratfest twice. We also went to the Dane County Fair. We walked around, watched some shows, she asked some guys if they would help me get in the bumper cars so we could ride, and they said sure. They waited until we were done, and they got me back in my chair. We also wanted to go on the Ferris wheel, so she asked another guy to help her get me on the Ferris wheel. He was nice and helped, so we were able to ride on the Ferris wheel. When we were done, the guy wasn't around and the carnival guys wouldn't help because of legal issues. I tried to stand up on my feet and support my own weight the best I could, but was unable to stand up on my own, so Julie had to pick me up, kind of drag me down the Ferris wheel ramp and get me back in my chair. We had a lot of fun. I might be an adult, but I'm a kid at heart in some ways.

"You must do the thing you think you cannot do"

-- Eleanor Roosevelt

Learn

Teach

Lead

GLC Events

Fall Workshops

Workshops are free, offered in English and Spanish, and include dinner and child care.

Please register for all workshops and forums at least one week prior to the event.

All workshops: 5:30pm to 8:30pm at **James Reeb Unitarian Universalist Congregation, 2146 East Johnson Street, Madison WI**. Register at www.grassrootsleadershipcollege.org or call 441-0085

- Is There Anybody Out There? Using Social Media for Social Change. - Local activist Stacy Harbaugh will help you strategically build your organization's online presence and develop effective strategies for using social media to reach people and encourage action. Tues., Oct. 26th
- Something Is Happening Here! Framing Issues to Inspire Social Action. - Join GLC faculty member Randy Stoecker as he shares techniques on how to inspire people to care, motivate action and lead to effective solutions. Thurs., Oct. 28th

Interactive Community Forum honoring Rae Atira-Soncea
Spinning Our Skills and Weaving New Connections [register here](#) Sunday., Nov. 7th
10 to 4pm Overture Center

Getting Involved: An informational session on becoming a GLC board member and other volunteer roles. Sunday., Nov. 7th
4pm Overture Center

Board Meeting, Volunteer Discussion Session and Dinner
- GLC Office Downstairs 1321 E. Mifflin St. Thursday., Nov. 4th
6pm Dinner, 7pm Meeting

Additional Events

Dialogues on Homelessness. For more info, contact Donna at (608) 609-8522 or madisonhomelessnessinitiative@gmail.com 2nd Saturdays, Oct. to May
Madison Central Library
1:30-3:30pm, 2nd floor

Art Exhibit: Sober Journey: Stories and Visual Art
Opening reception Nov 8th, 5:30-8:30pm. For more info, contact Dr. Stephanie Joy Smith, arts curator Stephanie@hep.wisc.edu November 8th to 14th
Commonwealth Gallery
100 South Baldwin, 2nd Floor

The Joy of Meetings: Recipes for Success Learn to make your meetings fun, inclusive & productive! To register & find more information, visit <http://www.dcs.wisc.edu/pda/workplace/meetings.htm> or contact Kathy Germann, 233-6757 or kathy@kathygermannconsulting.com Oct. 26, 8:30 to 4:30
Pyle Center, UW Campus
\$175, includes book

Honoring Our Common Differences: Creating Inclusive Organizations Join facilitator Kathy Germann in a safe forum for self-reflection and dialogue about inclusivity. Cost \$150. For more info, visit <http://www.dcs.wisc.edu/pda/diversity/honor.htm> November 9th
8:30am to 4:30pm
UW-Madison Pyle Center

Learn

Teach

Lead

Contact Us

The Grassroots Leadership College

1321 E. Mifflin St. Suite 201
Madison, WI 53703

www.grassrootsleadershipcollege.org

Phone: (608) 441-0085

Email: amy@grassrootsleadershipcollege.org

Please send your stories, article ideas, or general comments to
andrew@grassrootsleadershipcollege.org

Your Support

Click on the Donate Button and
Help Support the Grassroots Leadership College

Donate

We Thank you!!!

Check Us Out



Want to know what's going on at the GLC?

Just can't wait for the next newsletter?

Visit us on Facebook, MySpace, or Twitter.

It's easy! Just click on an icon.

Additional Supporters



Learn

Teach

Lead