

Stories of Hope

— 2013–2014 —



UUSC

Celebrating human rights partnerships



— Contents —

Introduction

Story 1: Danielle Neus.....1

Story 2: George Friday.....4

Story 3: Nelson Escobar.....7

Story 4: Malya Villard-Appolon....10

Introduction

Dear friends,

UUSC envisions a world free from oppression and injustice. We strive to achieve this through key partnerships, including with the people in this booklet. We invite you to join us in empowering the marginalized to realize their full human rights.

These stories, written for an intergenerational audience, are intended to be accessible to many age ranges. For more in-depth information about these partners, please visit our website at uusc.org. While we and our partners come from diverse backgrounds, we share a grassroots rights-based approach and common values. We build our partnerships through collaboration, coalition building, and sustainable community solutions. UUSC gains as much from these partnerships as we contribute, increasing our own understanding and sharing it with our supporters.

I believe you will be inspired to become members of UUSC and join us in this vital work — because it's not only their struggle but everyone's struggle! Please make a donation online at uusc.org or by using the reply form at the back of this booklet. Stay informed about this work by subscribing to our e-mail list at uusc.org/emailsSignup. Advancing human rights is the work of many joining hands!

In fellowship,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Bill Schulz". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large, sweeping "S" at the end.

Bill Schulz
President and CEO

Visit uusc.org to learn more.



Story 1

Danielle Neus

You may have heard of the Papaye Peasant Movement (MPP). It's an organization that has strengthened rural communities around Haiti through popular education and farming that is good for the earth. Danielle Neus, spokesperson for the Bright Educators of Delmas (known as GEAD), has brought this kind of community building to Port-au-Prince, the capital of Haiti that's still affected by the devastation of the 2010 earthquake. Danielle is teaching people in Port-au-Prince how to grow personal gardens using recycled tires. This gives them the knowledge and tools they need to eat healthily, make a living, and build strong, safe communities in Port-au-Prince.

Danielle learned the importance of community organizing and farming as a child. She spent a lot of time with her mother who was working as an “animator” (someone who works to create change in Haitian communities). She also helped her grandfather, who was a farmer. When Danielle first discovered MPP, she saw her passions coming together: people working with one another to learn not only how

to grow food and eat well, but also how to build thriving communities. She signed up for an MPP training, and there she met Emmanuel Exuma, Guerna Salomon, and Adelaine Joseph — three young adults who shared her vision of strong and healthy communities. They joined together to start GEAD.

In a country that was already struggling, the earthquake made it very difficult for families to live well in Port-au-Prince. Food was hard to come by, and most of the vegetables available in the city had no nutrients because they were poorly grown or harvested. After losing their homes and access to steady food, water, and other supplies, Haitians were left with communities that were split up, and they had no way to make a living within the city. Danielle immediately saw how tire gardens could benefit the people of Port-au-Prince. So she began a project with the other GEAD members to bring the idea to the city.

Now, with the help of MPP and UUSC, GEAD is working to give Haitians a way to return to the city. Their initial project trained 60 families to make tire gardens, which allowed them to grow cabbages, eggplants, spinach, and other food that's healthy to eat and valuable to sell. And GEAD uses popular education, which invites Haitians to work together — to learn from each other, combine their resources, and find solutions that benefit the entire community. Danielle shares the GEAD motto: “We are all one, we remain one, and we will die one.”

Danielle says that, in order to achieve common goals, honest communication is everything. The group that started GEAD finds success because each member is able to speak freely about their dreams and their fears. She believes that community

members must talk openly and work together, because they may all have the same goals and never know it if they don't speak up.

The next step for GEAD is to open its own training center in the city, so that they can train more families at a faster rate. It would also allow GEAD to locally produce compost, a vital material that currently must be brought in from the countryside. Danielle believes that providing training for youth is especially important, because moving communities forward is a responsibility shared by every generation. Her goal is not just to teach her fellow Haitians to plant seeds and grow food, but also to plant the seeds of community organizing and empowerment so people may rebuild their lives.

Go deeper and take action:

- Learn more about tire gardens at uusc.org/tiregarden.
- Check out resources and information in Workshop 2 of UUSC's *Beyond the Mountain* Haiti curriculum at uusc.org/beyondthemountain.
- Sign the statement to raise a moral voice on Haiti recovery to the U.S. government at uusc.org/haitistatement.
- Make a donation to UUSC today at uusc.org/givetoguest.



Story 2

George Friday

George Friday started community organizing when she was only 14. One day, her teacher put her down because of her race and class. That unfair treatment inspired George to stand up for herself and other students. She talked to her classmates, and they formed a group of students who all believed that nobody should make others feel bad because of who they are or where they come from. The teacher who belittled George was dismissed, and the school started to pay special attention to students to prevent such treatment from happening again.

This helped George realize early on the power of people working together. While a person standing alone might be scared and feel like no one is listening, groups of people can stand stronger and have a louder voice together.

George, now a national field organizer for the Bill of Rights Defense Committee (BORDC), worked from then on to help individuals and small groups create coalitions. A coalition is formed when groups that may be different, but share a common purpose, join together. As a result, people learn from one another and share resources. Then, when they take

action together to create a fairer world, they have a much better chance of being heard, achieving their goals, and defending their rights.

BORDC works with UUSC to plan meetings of groups and leaders. When groups get to know each other well, they're more likely to stand up together when faced with injustice. Working with BORDC, George has helped to start campaigns in over 30 cities across the United States on several issues.

For example, George works with the Northwest Arkansas Workers' Justice Center (NWAJWC), a UUSC partner, to create relationships with other allies. They are doing this to strengthen workers' rights and civil rights. With BORDC's help, NWAJWC is connecting with other organizations like the OMNI Center for Peace and Justice and the Arkansas United Community Coalition.

BORDC has helped these organizations work together on projects to protect the rights of Latino and Marshallese workers in their community. They team up to say no to hurtful policies, including a law that allows local police to stop and question anyone suspected, without any good reason, of being an undocumented immigrant. NWAJWC and its allies, united with the help of BORDC, held a rally last year to put an end to this practice and demand better from their police and lawmakers. Together they made a much more powerful statement than if they had acted alone.

UUSC partners with BORDC in its work for equality and shares its vision of a better world. To create that world, we need to empower people to learn and value the experience of others, to care for each other, and to stand up for each other. The result is strong, safe, and just communities.

According to George, the biggest obstacle in getting people to work together is helping them understand the power of their voices. She believes that people are often hesitant to speak out because they think that lawmakers, not the community members themselves, are better experts on how a community should be. In order for things to change, George says, communities must change what they believe is possible — and the way to do this is to work together.

Go deeper and take action:

- Learn more about BORDC and get involved at uusc.org/bordc.
- Read more about George's work at uusc.org/georgefriday.
- Explore how UUSC defends civil liberties around the world at uusc.org/civilliberties.
- Make a donation to UUSC today at uusc.org/givetoguest.





Story 3

Nelson Escobar

Workers' rights are human rights. When workers are paid unfairly or treated poorly because of their race, language, or gender, it is important to stand up for the rights of those people. Nelson Escobar, the chairperson of the Worker Action Committee at the Northwest Arkansas Workers' Justice Center (NNAWJC), has been the target of unfair treatment by employers himself and is now working to protect workers around Arkansas.

Northwest Arkansas is home to many industries that too often mistreat their workers. There are many poultry processing plants, hatcheries, and factory farms, and many people have jobs in construction, service, and agriculture. The state is also home to the fastest growing Latino and Marshallese population in the country. Poverty, immigration status, and language barriers make it easier for employers to treat their workers badly. Nelson and NNAWJC give workers the information and help they need to make sure their human rights and dignity are not ignored.

Nelson has a long history of witnessing injustice. He was born in El Salvador and lived there through the 12-year Salvadoran Civil War, which left almost 75,000 people dead and another 20,000 in tent camps with no food, water, medical care, or money. Nelson came to the United States seeking asylum, hoping to find justice and dignity after living through such a horrific experience.

He began working at a cleaning company in Arkansas but soon felt taken advantage of by his bosses. He approached NAWAJC to ask for help writing a letter in English demanding that he be treated fairly. The letter worked, and Nelson stayed involved with NAWAJC to help others seek justice. After spending time as a volunteer, he began working full-time to restore his community's dignity as he was able to restore his own.

Workers in northwest Arkansas are often bullied by their employers into staying silent when they're treated poorly. Many have families to support and cannot afford to lose their jobs, despite how low their wages are. People with undocumented immigration status are threatened with deportation unless they cooperate with their company's unjust practices. Employers also take advantage of workers who don't speak English by coercing them to sign their rights away. This allows companies to continue underpaying workers (a practice called wage theft), ignoring safety rules, refusing to pay people when they get hurt at work, and overlooking sexual harassment and even worse treatment within factories.

Nelson is teaching workers to demand the wages and the rights they deserve. NAWAJC offers training for workers to learn English, computer skills, workplace health and safety information, and more. Though he's struggled with English himself, he leads by example and does not let language barriers stop him from standing up for himself and his community. With UUSC's help, Nelson is empowering workers around Arkansas to speak up, regain control of their lives, and work together for justice.

Go deeper and take action:

- Learn more about NAWAJC at uusc.org/nwawjc.
- Watch a video about the injustices faced by food workers at uusc.org/nwawjcvideo.
- Explore how UUSC supports food workers' rights at uusc.org/ccf/foodchain.
- Make a donation to UUSC today at uusc.org/givetoguest.



Story 4

Malya Villard-Appolon

Natural disasters often make current inequalities even worse. The earthquake that shook Haiti in 2010 was no exception. While violence against women was a problem even before the earthquake, women and girls living in tent camps for earthquake survivors experience increased violence on a regular basis. But Malya Villard-Appolon, UUSC partner and 2012 CNN Hero of the Year finalist, is working to stop that.

For many years, Malya has worked to end violence against women in Haiti as cofounder of the Commission of Women Victims for Victims (known as KOFAVIV). When the disaster struck, KOFAVIV's clinic was destroyed, along with its records. Despite the loss, Malya understood that women and children were more at risk than ever, so she continued to work through the chaos. Malya knows firsthand the difficulties that women who have been assaulted face — she is a survivor of violence herself and has even been threatened at gunpoint to stop her work. That has made her even more

determined to help other women find justice and peace in their communities.

In the spring of 2011, UUSC brought teams of medical volunteers to Haiti to help KOFAVIV care for survivors of violence against women. KOFAVIV now supports women in several ways. Survivors are offered immediate medical care and someone to go with them to the hospital after being attacked, and they receive information about how to avoid infections and stay healthy. Women may also seek support in taking legal action against the people that hurt them. Sadly, very few perpetrators are ever tried in court, as Haiti's judicial system is often corrupt and controlled by bribes and threats.

Mental and emotional support is just as important as legal support for survivors. When a woman has gone through an assault, she sometimes feels she does not deserve her rights. KOFAVIV affirms the inherent worth and dignity of women so they have the self-esteem to take a stand for their rights. With help from other UUSC partners, KOFAVIV helps women deal with stress and learn ways to feel better.

Women survivors of violence often have money and belongings stolen, too, and sometimes their homes are even burned. KOFAVIV offers survivors financial support that empowers women and their families, and the organization also teaches skilled crafts (such as sewing) that women can use to make a living. They also have programs for children and teenagers who have been affected by violence.

In addition to helping women heal, KOFAVIV helps prevent future violence against women and girls. KOFAVIV makes sure there are female camp workers in areas that women use. Since many women do not

trust male leaders within the camps, the women workers are an important resource for women residents. Malya is working to provide women with separate showers and toilets so they may take care of their most basic human needs in safety. She distributes whistles and also asks for increased police presence and better lighting to make it safer to move around the camps.

The most important part of Malya's work is helping women to speak out about the violence they've encountered. Survivors often feel alone and afraid — but KOFAVIV teaches women how the power of their combined voices can lead to a movement that will transform their lives and their communities. With the help of UUSC and KOFAVIV, women are building a new Haiti where all can live free from violence.

Go deeper and take action:

- Learn more about KOFAVIV in Workshop 1 of UUSC's *Beyond the Mountain* Haiti curriculum at uusc.org/beyondthemountain.
- Read a UUSC staffer's account of Malya being named a CNN Hero of the Year finalist at uusc.org/hero.
- Make a donation to UUSC today at uusc.org/givetoguest.



Please join UUSC in our work with these partners — make a contribution to support our efforts.

Your donation of \$40 or more earns you and your loved ones annual UUSC membership benefits. In addition, all individual and family unrestricted contributions of \$100 or more are eligible to be matched dollar for dollar by the UU Congregation at Shelter Rock in Manhasset, N.Y. — doubling the impact of your gift!

Complete the form on the other side of this page and mail it to the following address:

UUSC
PO Box 808
Newark, NJ 07101-0808

All donations are tax deductible to the extent permitted by law. UUSC's tax ID is 04-6186012. UUSC's CFC number is 11685.

UUSC thanks you for your generous gift!

Your donation of \$40 or more earns you annual UUSC membership benefits and a gift of \$100 or more is eligible to be matched — doubling the impact of your gift! Please list all who are included in your gift.

Total gift enclosed

\$

Individual Name(s) _____

Youth Name(s) _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Phone _____ E-mail _____

Congregation _____ City _____ State _____

Check enclosed (payable to "UUSC")

Charge my credit/debit card:

↳ MasterCard Visa

American Express Discover

Card # _____

Expiration date _____

Cardholder signature _____

Print cardholder name _____

I would like to establish a monthly pledge of \$ _____.

↳ Transfer funds each month from my checking account **OR** Charge my credit card every month

↳ **Enclosed is a check for my first monthly contribution to UUSC.** I authorize my bank to transfer my pledge from my checking account each month. I understand that a record of each gift will be included on my monthly bank statement.

All donations are tax deductible to the extent permitted by law. UUSC's tax ID is 04-6186012.

UUSC is an independent, nonsectarian 501(c)(3) nonprofit member organization. We are a leading voice for human rights and social justice in the United States and around the world. Please support our work — begin or renew your membership today!

As a member of UUSC, you join a community of over 40,000 supporters who share your principles and passion for justice. You also stay up to date on pressing human rights issues through periodic mailings, action alerts, and our semiannual newsletter, *Rights Now*. And most importantly, you join a coalition of others who put their hands to the arc of the universe and help it bend toward justice.

Advancing human rights is the work of many joining hands. Join us — with a gift that earns membership for you and your loved ones this year!

For more information about UUSC, visit uusc.org.



Unitarian Universalist Service Committee
689 Massachusetts Ave., Cambridge, MA 02139-3302
617-868-6600 • 617-868-7102/fax
volunteerservices@uusc.org • uusc.org
CFC#11685