

# datacenter update

Issue 29

Fall/Winter 2007

## *DataCenter celebrates 30 years*

### *Our Lives ♦ Our Stories ♦ Our Vision*

In 1977, a humble investigative library filled floor-to-ceiling with bookshelves, file cabinets, news clippings, and progressive spirit opened its doors to the public in uptown Oakland. Dedicated to the information needs of the Social Justice Movement, DataCenter has endured and evolved over the last thirty years while maintaining its commitment to being a grassroots resource for strategic research and information.

This past October, in the restored *Historic Sweets Ballroom* next door to DC's original offices, over 200 social justice workers, community members, former staff, board & volunteers from across the generations came together to felicitate our storied contributions to the Movement. The evening began with the Afro-Cuban rhythm of *La Familia Son*, mouthwatering tapas and entrées from *Café de la Paz*, and the conversational cadence of friends reunited.

DC Board Co-Chairs Andrea Cristina Mercado & Alex Vazquez welcomed guests to the space. The program opened with ceremonial blessings by Corrina Gould, a local Ohlone organizer, and scintillating storytelling performance of DC's 30 year history by local poetic activist Aya de Leon.

The evening's festivities honored the commitment and contributions of our surprise honoree Mary Anna Colwell and of two inspiring community groups All of Us or None and Domestic Workers United. Both organizations exemplify the strategic use of community-rooted knowledge and research tools to achieve social change and concretely advance the struggle for justice throughout the nation. Mary Anna has supported the Datacenter for 30 years as a funder,



board member, donor and volunteer. She epitomizes the integrity and dedication of our supporters who are vital to our longevity and sustainability.

It is said that information is the currency of the new millennium. We find that those who control information increasingly have access to wealth and power and those without information get left behind. At the DataCenter, we know that information is a powerful tool. And we know that research with action gives communities the capacity to define the issues, shape decisions and make change—like we've seen with the work of Domestic Workers United and All of Us or None. In looking to another 30 years, we look forward to advancing our vision of Research Justice—where community have access to, use of and control over information and knowledge to create and implement equitable solutions to social issues.

We all hold the seeds of the future. This year we celebrate an organization and most of all we celebrate you, our community who have made it possible for us to flourish for 30 years.

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the social justice  
Movement for the next  
30 years by making a  
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# Research Justice Advocacy

by Miho Kim

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**Research Justice Advocacy** is the DataCenter's newest program. With it, we boldly challenge those who already engage in various forms of research, as well as constituent community members, to challenge the systematic way in which marginalized community voices are dismissed and regarded as irrelevant in decision-making. For some time now, staff has been consistently practicing this within the organization in order to effectively position ourselves as genuine "partners" instead of "outside/top-down expert service providers." We came to realize that the organic shift in the relationship dynamic wasn't the only change that needed to happen; creating a *public* space for this work is actually directly relevant and critical to ensuring that ultimately, ALL research done in this world by default assume the expertise of community voices informed by first-hand experiences of injustice.

Unless we explicitly name the systemic violation of the right of all grassroots experts to *inherent* political legitimacy on par with those of the mainstream institutions like government agencies, think tanks, and universities in key decision-making spaces, we cannot articulate root causes, and strategies to address it. And that's what Research Justice is about – taking back the right of grassroots people as genuine experts and key partners in making decisions that affect their lives. To take root, we knew that this work had to be imbedded in and arise from the ground up, where community experts are genuinely engaged in the research process to make change happen.

Our first annual **Reclaiming Research Camp**, an intensive skills-building academy, was one way to cultivate grassroots research justice advocates rooted in communities so that they may continue planting the seeds of this social change agenda on the ground. Twenty organizers & activists collectively reflected their own life experiences to partnering with grassroots communities to empower

their voices through research, and yet struggled with the insidious ways in which conventional research imposes an uneven power dynamic between those who research and those who become research 'subjects.' When the space overflowed with more than 50 attendees and responses from across the nation, we knew this was a widely shared challenge with little spaces to turn to for support or peer-to-peer exchanges.

The way in which DataCenter forges research partnerships today are a result of hard-earned lessons from the past, as well as manifestations of trying to reclaim and redefine research on our *own* terms so that we ourselves as people of color staff from constituent communities could also fully own it as a powerful tool to level our platform. The Forum gave DataCenter staff an invaluable venue to share our rich institutional knowledge and reflections on how we have dealt with these challenges to stimulate a mutual exchange of ideas and concrete strategies across the room. Due to overwhelming responses, we have committed to producing concrete tools in the coming year for researchers who embrace research justice, so they may become stronger allies in challenging dominant research models.

The **Reclaiming Research Camp** and **Research Justice Forum** are just a couple of ways for us to engage a wide range of stakeholders who are positioned to provide crucial support for community-led efforts. This advocacy work complements our existing program work to ensure the people's Right to Know as well as people's Right to Be 'Legit', are in full motion. We are gearing up for another planting season on fertile ground as we approach our second year in this work – and certainly to our collective delight, there will be more and more of us doing it together.

*Miho is a veteran Information Activist and serves on DC's Coordinating Council.*

# PROGRAM UPDATES

To learn more about these projects and others like them, log on to [www.datacenter.org](http://www.datacenter.org)

## if another world is possible, another US is necessary...

DataCenter Information Activists traveled to the US Social Forum (Atlanta '07) to kick off a growing movement for research justice and to build strategic research expertise in organizing communities. We convened *Telling Our Stories: Information by and for the people!*, a participatory workshop exploring how research methodologies and infrastructure privilege those with power and perpetuate systemic oppression, and identifying strategies for reclaiming research to build community power and liberation. Participants shared their research experiences, brainstorming together the lessons learned from successes and strategies to overcome the challenges identified.

## Behind Closed Doors: Working Conditions of California Household workers

A participatory research project conducted by members of **Mujeres Unidas y Activas** and **Day Labor Program Women's Collective of La Raza Centro Legal**, and the **DataCenter**, analysing the household work industry in California, shows workers are primarily female immigrants. While supporting their employers' homes and families, findings show household workers work in substandard and often exploitative conditions, earn poverty wages too low to support their own families, and lack access to basic health care. "For 30 years DataCenter has been a critical resource for social justice movements around the country. Their work provides community leaders with research skills to win community campaigns. Through our collaboration with the DataCenter, immigrant women were empowered as community researchers and we were able to publish a report documenting the abuse domestic workers face in the Bay Area," commented MUA organizer Andrea Mercado (she also became our DC Board Co-Chair).

## Towards a Community Agenda: A Survey of Workers & Residents in Koreatown, Los Angeles

Fifteen years after the Civil Unrest in Los Angeles, a research report shows Koreatown residents and workers still face considerable challenges with substandard conditions in three main areas that community members identified through surveys: poor job quality and low wages, limited access to health care, and a lack of decent, affordable housing. Race relations and discrimination at the workplace and in housing also remain issues in Koreatown, according to the report. The *Towards a Community Agenda* report was authored by the **Koreatown Immigrant Workers Alliance (KIWA)**, a Koreatown community-based non-profit organization, in

association with the **DataCenter**. Organizer Vy Nguyen attests that "the DataCenter was a key partner for KIWA in producing effective and strategic research that lifted up the realities of Koreatown's working families and moved forward a community agenda that prioritized the community's need for just workplaces, affordable and safe housing, and affordable health care. The staff provided expertise with great openness and flexibility. Organizations like the DataCenter that can partner with grassroots groups to do strategic, community-based research are critical to our movement."

## San Francisco Peaks Stand Sacred!

Native American Nations and environmental groups won an important victory this Spring, when the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals ruled that a proposed ski area development and expansion on the sacred San Francisco Peaks in Arizona would violate the Religious Freedom Restoration Act and the National Environmental Policy Act. DataCenter has worked with the Save the Peaks Coalition since 2004, providing research support and training, and strategic campaign planning. Our research approach has distinguished between data and facts needed to defend one's position, and traditional wisdom and knowledge necessary to inform strategies and tactics that are culturally appropriate for the native communities involved. However, the struggle is not yet over. In May, the U.S. Department of Justice filed for a rehearing and appeal "en banc" on behalf of the Forest Service. "When DataCenter uncovered for us who were all the people behind this ski resort expansion, and where all the profits were going, so many people in and outside our community jumped on board and joined the campaign: we all knew who was behind the ski resort expansion and responsible for the desecration of our Sacred Mountain," noted Kevin Long (Diné) of ECHOES/Save the Peaks Coalition.

## Behind the Test Scores Teaching & Learning Under Arrest

DataCenter collaborated with Justice Matter on a report that highlights the teaching and learning crisis due to district policies that focus on raising test scores and results in rigid approaches to curriculum and teaching practices that do not meet students' learning needs. Based on an in-depth survey of 244 teachers in the West Contra Costa Unified School District (WCCUSD), the survey results show that assessments and policies around assessments, such as giving students more attention to raise test scores, impact teaching practices and their students learning. The report is being used by Justice Matters to work with teachers and their families and inform school policies around high stakes testing.

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# ...flashbacks... 1977-2007

## *Co-Founders Loretta & Harry Strharsky reminisce about DC's origins & history*

The founding political principles of the organization were focused on political economy and injustice of class contradictions irrespective of political boundaries and to provide actionable information to those in the frontline organizations engaged in struggles for justice. The principle of self-reliance was paramount; the organization had self-generated income from its research services and publications that comprised three-quarters of the overall budget. The organizing principle of sacrifice & volunteerism was the basis for the organization's existence. Without the more than forty original volunteers, interns, and work study students to move the collections from NACLA West in Berkeley to DC's offices in Oakland, to carry out the work of organizing & indexing the information, we would have really struggled and not survived in those early years. Most of the work was done by volunteers; the good will & sweat of brow and political discussions among 40 dedicated people. The volunteers were themselves activists & organizers.

DataCenter became a lightning rod for people requesting info. DC's focus on providing regular information on what was going on, the international political economic context that affected organizing, was invaluable to the rise of many progressive issues/movements—the church-led Sanctuary movement to defend immigrant rights, tracking the Rise of the New Right under the Reagan era, the Right to Know movement for government accountability & transparency, the impact of toxins in the environment on working people, the only national database on plant shutdowns, corporate accountability profiles for community, union and investor campaigns. ... DC has consistently been working on exposing the institutions of class ownership and the unjust distribution of wealth.

Injustice goes a long way back. People have fought injustice for a long time. DC has been fighting injustice for 30 years. For a progressive organization to have grown, prospered and arrive at its 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary is a huge accomplishment.

*Loretta & Harry Strharsky helped to found the DataCenter and shepherd its independence from NACLA. Harry served as the organization's first Executive Director 1977-1982 and served on the Board of Directors from 1997 to 2004. Loretta served as the original Office Manager from 1977 to 1987.*

## DC 2008 Wishlist

- updated laptop
- hardwood/bamboo flooring for our meeting room (~144 sq. ft)
- flooring installation
- graphic design work
- administrative volunteer
- web updating (Dreamweaver MX)
- print design work

if you have a skill or item to donate, please email [datacenter@datacenter.org](mailto:datacenter@datacenter.org) or Call 510.835.4692 x309

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