



ACORN Canada

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ACORN Canada 2011

Uniting Communities for Justice

Year End Report





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Executive Summary

In 2011 ACORN Canada engaged 769 new full members and 7,906 members in total. To date we have over 45,000 members across the country. These are people committed to creating positive social, economic and ecological justice in their community. Across the country we held 266 events, turning out 3,397 people. That's five events every week, where we focused on building community leaders and strengthening community capacity to lobby for change in many different areas.

Highlights

Healthy Homes and Tenant Rights

Healthy Homes

On May 26th 2011 ACORN Canada's Healthy Homes Campaign was launched with a rally at the main intersection in Downtown Surrey, BC – 108th Ave and King George Boulevard - with a modest turnout of 30 people. Lead by new dynamic member Susan Collard – who had just lost a precedent setting case at the Residential Tenancy Board against her notorious landlord, the Sohota family – the main objective of the launch was achieved: the Mayor of Surrey was forced to respond to Global BC News about why the city does not have minimum building standards even though the Provincial City Charter explicitly gives cities the jurisdiction to do so.

In July, 110 Ottawa ACORN members held a press event launching a tenant rights campaign at Herongate, highlighting the slum conditions in the buildings. The Herongate campaign received plenty of great press coverage and was a big rallying point for Ottawa ACORN members in 2011. In August, Herongate members won a meeting with the Mayor of Ottawa to step in and enforce property standards such as double weekly garbage pick-up from the city, a full time by-law staff dedicated to inspecting units and general support. They also won a follow up meeting and commitment from Mayor Watson for a meeting in September. In November, the leaders in Herongate met with a pro-bono lawyer and voted to launch a rent-abatement campaign through the housing tribunal.

Toronto

In January through May Toronto ACORN members held a series of chapter meetings and meetings with MLS city staff helping design the MRAB tenant enforcement protocol. We had a number of victories including getting the Licensing and Standards Committee to produce a report recommending that the city approve communication efforts on behalf of the MRAB program, whereby individual tenants would receive audit results by mail post-inspection.



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Remittances

Our national campaign to regulate remittances was launched in 2011 demanding a 5% cap on international money transfer fees and transparency. From January to June members did six events including press events and actions in Ottawa, Metro Vancouver and Toronto - including a national day of remittance justice. These activities won us meetings with the Financial Consumer Agency of Canada, the CEO of FICOM, and a conference call with Weston Unions public relations department. In June, an 80 person press event on the door step of the Deputy Minister's office won us a meeting with the DM in July. In late November traction was finally achieved when the federal and provincial NDP showed interest in introducing a private members bill.

In November, Toronto and Ottawa ACORN members joined with participants of the Occupy Movement to hold further actions against Western Union. Both of these events received great press coverage and helped to raise the profile of the campaign.

Social Assistance Forum and Disability Rights

Ottawa ACORN members did a number of events throughout the year, focusing on raising social assistance rates. In September they held a Social Assistance Forum, inviting candidates from every provincial political party to participate in the debate. Over 120 people attended, as well as representatives from the NDP, Green Party, Liberal Party, Family Coalition Party, People's Party for Special Needs, and the Communist Party. A great success for Ottawa ACORN's first all candidates' forum!

In BC, a member-led campaign around disability rights is underway, with the goal of organizing people on PWD and increasing the rates. While still in its early days, the campaign has achieved the victory in the reinstatement of the Community Volunteer Supplement by the government.

Eco Justice

In Toronto the Live Green organizers launched recycling programs in three out of a total of four buildings in Weston, Jane and Finch, and East York. 124 members turned out to Live Green opening spring events in the month of May, planting over 300 trees, launching community gardens, and participating in recycling programs in their buildings.

In BC, ACORN built a partnership between Vancity, BC Hydro and itself that would have BC ACORN organizers and members doing green organizing in North Surrey. Coinciding with our Healthy Homes campaign, the Green Connections project allowed us not only to work on the important environmental issues, but also financially maintain organizing efforts for the Healthy Homes campaign.



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Transit Campaign

Toronto ACORN members and leaders joined with TTC riders to launch a campaign to stop proposed bus and streetcar service cuts to hundreds of routes. Several rallies, including an ACORN rally where the TTC Commission was awarded a stocking full of coal - plus rallies in conjunction with the Respect Coalition and deputations at council - led to council eventually voting down the proposed service cuts.

ACORN Canada Free Income Tax Sites

In 2011, ACORN Canada's tax sites in BC and Ottawa filed over 2800 tax returns, which resulted in over \$3 million going back into our communities, and saving low and moderate income families from paying \$80 to a corporate filer.

Convention

In June 2011, Ottawa members hosted ACORN Canada's first Bi-Annual Convention at Carleton University; over 120 members participated from across the country in workshops, actions, doorknocking and social events over a three day period. The workshops focused on: tenant rights, community outreach and speaking to the press.

The members also did a participatory workshop that involved petitioning in three wards, pressing community members to call local councilors in support of Ottawa's Living Wage Campaign. The convention ended with an 80 person action demanding a meeting with the deputy minister of finance to discuss remittance regulation.

The convention featured various speakers from political and union organizations, as well as local musicians and workshop facilitators. Our members were energized and enthusiastic to meet their fellow ACORN members and organizers from across the country and to share strategies, ideas and victories.