

Solid Ground's Big Picture News

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Since our Groundviews newsletter focuses mostly on the people involved in and affected by Solid Ground, we produce the semi-annual Big Picture News to give you an agency-level view of our work. ~ The Editors

Advocating for a better world

From our earliest days, Solid Ground has balanced direct service with advocacy. Sure, we can help 58,000 people lead better lives – but we also want to change the public policies and private practices that keep people trapped in poverty.

This double-edged approach is perhaps most clear right now in our response to the mortgage crisis. As the profile of Mortgage Counselor Erin Rearden in this issue of *Groundviews* clearly illustrates, we work on the frontlines with people facing mortgage default or foreclosure. In addition, we have predatory lending and tenant specialists working closely with renters and people trapped in other messy credit situations.

But there will always be too many people needing these services if we don't change some of the state policies affecting the mortgage and banking industries.

Systems-level advocacy

For the upcoming legislative session, our Statewide Poverty Action Network (Poverty Action) is working with a coalition of advocates to propose a significant change to how mortgage defaults play out in Washington State.

They will work to pass **legislation calling for mandatory mediation between homeowners facing foreclosure and their banks** – currently the law in 23 states or municipalities – where mediation has helped 60% of people in foreclosure keep their homes.

In addition, our Tenant Services staff are working in concert with the Tenants Union to **promote legislation that would remove significant barriers to accessing rentals**, including creating a portable credit screening process, so that tenants are not subject to paying screening fees over and over each time they apply for a rental.

These systems-level advocacy efforts arose in response to policy changes people with low incomes recommended.

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Poverty Action is the largest anti-poverty advocacy group in Washington State. It operates under the guidance of 5,000 members and a member-selected Board, addressing the critical issues identified by its constituents: people living on very low incomes. Poverty Action also registers and mobilizes low-income voters in our state.



Our Long Term Care Ombudsman Program (LTCOP) provides visitation and complaint resolution for 19,000 residents of King County nursing homes, boarding homes and adult family homes. For many in this vulnerable population, LTCOP staff and volunteers provide the only available source of independent oversight.

Individual advocacy

Solid Ground's advocacy efforts also include free civil legal assistance for individuals and families whose state public benefits have been denied, reduced or terminated. Since the early 1980s, our Family Assistance program has successfully represented thousands of people for whom public benefits have meant the difference between serious deprivation and adequate housing, food and medical care.

For many more, we have provided legal counsel and practical advice – as well as serving as a resource for those who choose to advocate on their own behalf. In this economic climate, demand for these services has skyrocketed as people who have never had to turn to public benefits find themselves in dire straits.

Over the past year, the program investigated hundreds of complaints, most of which were related to abuse and neglect. LTCOP successfully resolves the great majority of complaints they receive. They also offer telephone consultation on long-term care for residents, families and providers.

As an advocacy organization, Solid Ground's credibility is based in more than 36 years of firsthand experience of the real challenges people with low incomes face. As a direct service provider, our work with individuals and families is sustained by our advocacy – by knowing that more than just helping people, we are helping to make ours a more just and caring community.