



A Friend in Need

The EMA Fund's Semi-Annual Newsletter

Summer 2009

Eastern Massachusetts Abortion Fund ♦ P.O. Box 390412 ♦ Cambridge, MA 02139 ♦ 617.354.3839 ♦ www.emafund.org

HELPING MORE WOMEN THAN EVER

As the EMA Fund celebrates our tenth anniversary, we continue to seek out ways to have a greater impact.

One of the planks in the EMA Fund's strategic plan is to be more effective by helping more women obtain their abortions without perpetuating the cycle of poverty. Many women call the EMA Fund when their credit cards are maxed out, their utility bills are unpaid, their phones are on the verge of being shut off, and homelessness is a possibility.

The lack of accessible abortion services forces these women and their families to go further into debt while facing bleak job prospects, decreased subsidized housing options, and mounting credit card bills. In order to decrease the financial impact of terminating a pregnancy while continuing to serve as many women as possible, the EMA Fund has significantly expanded our program in three ways over the last year.

Expanded Service

The EMA Fund has expanded our service area! Boston and the surrounding areas have become a hub for abortion services for people from all over northern New England, where it can be difficult to find a provider.

The EMA Fund knows that the economic crisis has left low-income women with fewer resources than ever. Weeks or months spent trying to find money for a first-trimester abortion can often mean that women must travel out of state to obtain more expensive second-trimester procedures.

Additionally, women coming to the EMA Fund's region from other states are often in particular need of funds because they have increased travel expenses, are farther along in a pregnancy, or are fleeing abusive or hostile situations. We recently provided assistance to a woman who was traveling to Boston from Maine for a two day procedure. She was only a few dollars short, but had planned to sleep in her car, and wasn't sure how she was going to pay for gas or food on the trip. The EMA Fund helped her find an inexpensive hotel and made a small grant so that she could save some money for food and drive back to Maine.

Increased Grant Amounts

The EMA Fund has been seeing our clients' financial needs increase, even after going through the EMA Fund's financial counseling process to help them

muster funds. In response, **the EMA Fund has doubled the standard amount we give to women seeking abortions.** We continue to work with each woman who calls us individually in order to make grants and provide counseling specific to her situation.

One of the EMA Fund's intake volunteers recently said, "If I'm working with someone who can't raise the last \$150 for her abortion, being able to give her \$100 is meaningless." Granting more money creates more access to abortion.



Continued...

If you have picked up this newsletter because you need money for an abortion, call us at 617-354-3839.



EMA FUND CELEBRATES TEN YEARS BY DOING MORE *CONTINUED...*

Board of Directors:

Wendy Brovold
Ayesha Chatterjee
Laurie Gutierrez
Sarah Morton
Erin Kate Ryan

Newsletter Editor

Amy Mortensen

The EMA Fund is a resource of grants and financial counseling for women who are unable to afford the cost of their abortions. By collaborating with these women, their health care providers, and other abortions funds around the country, the EMA Fund works to ensure that all women may obtain the reproductive health care they seek.

The women who obtain funding from the EMA Fund are young women, immigrant women, women between jobs, women whose health insurance will not cover abortions, women who must travel out of state for their abortions, and any woman who finds that *rights are meaningless without resources*.

The EMA Fund does what the government won't do: provide women with the means to make the choice that is right for them.

The Eastern Massachusetts Abortion Fund is a 501(c)(3) organization and an affiliate of the National Network of Abortion Funds.

Extending Services

In January 2008 the EMA Fund began extending our services to women earlier in their pregnancies. Due to this change, we're now in a position to assist women seeking funding for medication abortions (e.g., the abortion pill), which are just as expensive as surgical abortions.

So, when a young woman called us six weeks into her pregnancy with debilitating morning sickness that was keeping her from her job as a house cleaner, we were able to help with her appointment later that week. This assistance enabled the young woman to go back to work as soon as possible, saving her job and her only source of income.

As we celebrate ten years of connecting rights to resources, we look forward to seeking new ways to have a greater community impact.

FROM THE BOARD PRESIDENT

Ten years. It sometimes seems we don't have time to think about our history when there's so much going on in our present: higher demand than we've ever seen, increasing numbers of calls from women coming to eastern Massachusetts for their abortions, worries about how the state budget crisis will impact health care access. In the midst of this, there are a number of initiatives that I'm very proud of: the new website launch, spring and summer house party plans, expanded eligibility guidelines, and new, enthusiastic volunteers from our last training. Still, I want to pause for a moment to consider where the EMA Fund has been in the last ten years.

I've been volunteering with the EMA Fund now for nearly nine years. A friend told me about the organization and encouraged me to go to the EMA Fund's first volunteer training – back then, a two hour meeting. I left with a binder, a volunteer shift scheduled, and more than a few apprehensive feelings about my

ability to do this work. Since then, some things have remained constant, while some are completely unrecognizable. Our focus and core mission remain: to ensure that women in eastern Massachusetts have the resources they need to access abortions. Yet, we're increasingly grappling with how to integrate advocacy into the work to be able to effect long-term, sustainable change.

One of the EMA Fund's first grants helped to pay for a woman's commuter rail fare and MBTA tokens.

We still train, support, and depend on a group of amazing, committed volunteers. We've developed a two-day, ten-hour training program that covers topics that include the basics of an abortion procedure, how to teach financial counseling and self-care, and lots and lots of role plays! Our voicemail remains our link to the communities we serve, and women still have concerns about confidentiality. Of course these days, cell phones have made it increasingly easier to reach the women who call us, and we no longer need to worry about long-distance costs!

Strong, effective partnerships with local

NO ONE CAME!

(AND THAT'S A GOOD THING.)

The EMA Fund recently held an un-party to celebrate our tenth anniversary. What's an un-party? A great way to support the EMA Fund by staying home in your pajamas and writing a check! We'd like to extend a hearty thank you to all the supporters who didn't show up. Because you took a stand against needlessly uncomfortable formal wear, the EMA Fund met our fundraising goal for the event.

We hope that you took advantage of your night off and did something completely nonsensical, like celebrating your un-birthday with the Mad Hatter and the March Hare.

And please, do not come again.



abortion providers, health centers, and other advocates have evolved over the years, but we still see the same need for assistance with logistics in addition to the cost of the actual abortion. Collaborating with a community health center, we recently made a grant to cover a woman's taxi from the health center to the hospital for her appointment and back again. One of the EMA Fund's first grants helped to pay for a woman's commuter rail fare and MBTA tokens. We've also seen providers come and go – there are now fewer doctors providing abortions at hospitals, while clinics in Brookline and on the Cape have closed. More women seem to need to travel further for their abortions – to New York, Georgia and Kansas.

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With the 2006 Massachusetts health care reform law, we're now able to help more people obtain health insurance – a positive, long-term impact on their lives – but the cracks in the system have become more evident. Each week, we still receive calls from uninsured and under-insured women: recent immigrants, individuals with high deductibles, those unable to use insurance because of fears for their personal safety, women in between jobs, or working for the federal government whose insurance does not cover abortions.

Personally, I've witnessed the last of the visionary board members who founded the EMA Fund transition off the board, while new, talented volunteers have brought their ideas

and energy to the organization. I currently have the privilege of working with a board that includes strong, skilled, and passionate women who are engaging in long-term strategic planning. We challenge each other to answer the "Why not?" and "How come?" questions as we think about how to be more effective in helping more women obtain their abortions without perpetuating the cycle of poverty.

The EMA Fund community has strengthened in the last ten years to a diverse and wide group of activists, volunteers, donors, and friends who continue to play an integral role in the work. And what about you – what do you remember about the EMA Fund from the last ten years? Have you referred someone who needs help to the EMA Fund? Did you stay at home, catch up on past issues of The New Yorker, and send in a check for an EMA Fund non-event? Are you a former volunteer? Or did you recently hear of the EMA Fund and the need for such an organization? I'd love to hear about your recollections of the EMA Fund, as well as how you envision the EMA Fund's future. And if you think you might be interested in volunteering on the board, I'd be happy to talk more with you. You can email me at laurie@emafund.org.

All the best,

Laurie

CELEBRATING YOUNG LEADERSHIP

Last month, EMA Fund board member Ayesha Chatterjee was featured on Feministing.com, the largest gathering place on the internet for young feminists of all stripes. (Yeah, we're all pretty impressed with her)



Besides being an EMA Fund board member, Ayesha works at the Boston Women's Health Book Collective, publisher of the legendary *Our Bodies, Ourselves*. Previously, she consulted with Care International on a pilot project to address violence against women in Tajikistan, a country in Central Asia that suffered a devastating civil war in the 1990s.

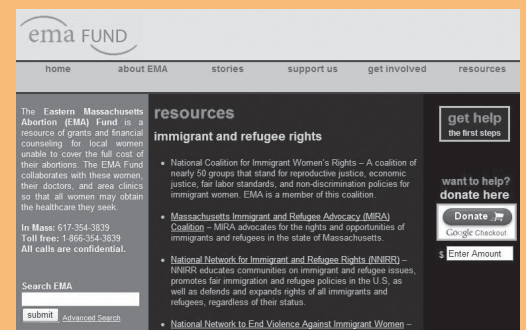
Interested in knowing what Ayesha has to say about reproductive justice? Read the interview online by visiting www.feministing.com/archives/014475.html.

VISIT US ON THE WEB

The EMA Fund is pleased to announce the launch of its new website. We'd like to extend our deepest thanks to volunteer Jonathan Salomon. We couldn't have done it without him.

Visit us today for resources, ways to get involved or to support our work.

www.emafund.org



A FOUNDER'S PERSPECTIVE

But the more things change, the more they stay the same



In 1999 there were 75 local funds affiliated with the National Network of Abortion Funds. Can you guess how many of those were in eastern Massachusetts? (You can probably guess where this is heading.) None.

Ten years ago – in a part of the country that fancies itself to be one of the most liberal and enlightened enclaves of civilization – if you couldn't afford to pay for your abortion, you were on your own.

With your support, a small group of women got together and started the Eastern Massachusetts Abortion Fund. We believed – and still do! – that the “right to choose” is meaningless without money, without transportation, without services in your language. And thanks to you and your unwavering commitment, this right has been made a reality for many women in eastern Massachusetts over the past ten years.

We believed – and still do! – that the “right to choose” is meaningless without money, without transportation, without services in your language.

Can you believe it's been ten years? So much has changed...

You and I – and thousands of women who needed assistance to pay for their abortion – somehow survived eight years of “Dubya” in the White House. More people in Massachusetts are insured than ever before, but with every new system comes new cracks – and the most marginalized women are still falling through. That's not to mention all the women and girls who can't use their insurance to pay for their abortion because it's not covered by their plan, or because they can't have a paper trail going to their parents. The need still far exceeds our resources.

So you and I should both be proud of what we have accomplished – starting this fund ten years ago and keeping it going ever since with nothing but volunteers. We should also remain vigilant in our commitment to the belief that any woman can have an abortion – even if she can't pay for it, even if her insurance doesn't cover it, even if she's a minor.

The more things change...

POWERED BY PASSION

The EMA Fund runs on the dedication of two dozen volunteers committed to increasing abortion access in Massachusetts

As volunteer coordinators for the EMA Fund, Tali Ruskin and Adina Koch work to train and support our team of volunteer advocates. They recently took some time away from their busy schedules to answer a few questions about how they became involved with the EMA Fund and what they've learned in their time with the organization.

How did you start volunteering with the EMA Fund?

Tali: Before moving to Boston I was living in Washington DC, where I worked on the National Abortion Federation hotline and volunteered with the DC Abortion Fund. It was during this time that I came to understand the complexities of the issue of abortion access, including lack of financial resources. I knew then that, as long as barriers to abortion care continued to exist, I would stay connected and committed to this work. So when I moved to Boston, I sought out the EMA Fund to see how I could get involved, and have been volunteering ever since.

Adina: I needed to complete a service project for a seminar in "Race, Class, and Gender" at my university and saw the ad on SoJust.org. As reproductive health care access has always mattered to me, I fell in love with the work we do and decided to stick around.

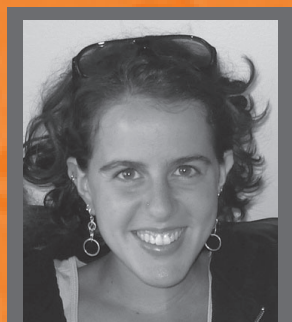
What do you enjoy most about volunteering?

Tali: I enjoy that the EMA Fund is able to fill one of the many holes in the complex web of abortion access.

Adina: And I enjoy the fact that our work directly helps women in need during the stressful moments when what we do really makes a necessary difference. I am also empowered by the belief that we are contributing to building the movement for reproductive justice when we help those who have been most disadvantaged by the structural inequalities women face in their access to care.

What's the biggest challenge about volunteering?

Tali: The biggest challenge about volunteering is brainstorming with our clients the ways to come up with more money for their abortions, while taking into account that many of them often have other financial struggles in their lives. It is difficult, and sometimes impossible, to find that balance in such a way that does not perpetuate the cycle of poverty and debt.



Tali Ruskin

Adina: Yes, along with our lack of resources, an endless amount of funds and practical support for our clientele would help immensely. Our biggest challenge, however, is the reality of lack of access to care and the legislation and economic inequalities that make it so our work is so needed.

Have your opinions about abortion and abortion access changed as a result of your volunteering?

Tali: Volunteering with the EMA Fund has definitely deepened my understanding of the need for safe, legal, and accessible abortions. Every client we work with has a unique situation, and every single one of them deserves the same level of respect and quality of care, regardless of their financial resources.

Adina: My opinions have not been so much changed as they have been strengthened. I now more tangibly realize the need that exists for every woman to have a safe, legal, and economically feasible way to make choices and have access to her chosen type of reproductive health care. My eyes have been opened to the sad truth of how these inequalities are not only macro, but make it so that women we pass every day on the street have to resort to such extreme means in order to care for themselves.

If your friends asked you why they should volunteer with the EMA Fund, what would you tell them?

Tali: I would tell them that it is a great opportunity to become an activist in the reproductive justice movement in such a way that makes a direct and tangible impact on the people we serve. Volunteering with the EMA Fund also provides a unique opportunity to develop personal and professional skills within a supportive environment. Because the EMA Fund is an all-volunteer organization, we all have the empowering experience to have a real voice in the work and direction of the organization.

Adina: People should volunteer with the EMA Fund so we can help to make care more accessible for women. We need more volunteers to grow beyond the necessary direct service work we do. With more support, we will be better equipped to not only raise the funds to increase how many we can help, but also expand into other areas in the hopes that the fight for access to safe and fair abortions can be won.



Adina Koch

EMA FUND FAST FACTS

Over the past six months we have:

Increased our monthly budget by **1/3** to assist women and girls traveling to Eastern Massachusetts.

Collaborated with **11** other abortion funds across the country on difficult fundraising situations.

Spoken with **183** women and girls in need.

Interested in supporting our work? Donate online at www.emafund.org.



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