

# Mothers Acting Up

## *A Political Force to be Reckoned With!*

Mothers Acting Up's (MAU) trademark is a mother on stilts with children held high on her shoulders, an undeniable impression of mothers as exuberant, protective, visible, and large. MAU is inviting mothers to walk tall and be a powerful political force in ensuring rights for all children. Mothers Acting Up is a movement to inspire, invite, and educate mothers to create systematic change by becoming politically active on behalf of children's well being around the world. It was started by four of us mothers in Boulder, Colorado just a year and half ago because we could no longer bear the discrepancy between how we are able to raise our children and the conditions under which other mothers must try to raise their children. We want nothing less than total political upheaval in which children will no longer be the bottom priority in our world's governments, but, rather, a top priority. We're packing our kids into station wagons, driving them to our government offices, asking questions, and generally making many a senator's assistant sweat beneath the collar. We're busy ringing the phone off the hook at the White House Comment Line advocating for specific issues affecting children in war torn nations. We're marching in parades, meeting in coffee houses, networking with other movements across the nation, joining together and sharing our burning desire for systematic justice and protection for all the world's children. We've even been written up in the New York Times, we admit modestly to all we meet.

But where did it all begin? To launch our movement, we had our first Mothers Acting Up Mother's Day Parade on the Boulder Pearl Street Mall in 2002. This was inspired, in part, by the words of Julia Ward Howe, who in 1870 called for women to rise up and oppose war in all its forms, thus, she declared a Mother's Day for Peace. She asked women of her nation "Why do not the mothers of mankind interfere in these matters, to prevent the waste of that

human life of which they alone bear and know the cost?" (qtd. in Richards and Elliott, 1925: 159). She continually inspired women to focus on that which unites over that which divides. In just that spirit, we asked mothers on Mother's Day to forgo a day of pampering and, instead, get out on the streets and declare themselves a visible and vibrant force speaking out and acting up on behalf of children's rights throughout the world. Hundreds heeded our call! Amid audacious costumes of every sort, many of us donned stilts in the parade to show mothers as large, impressive, and a force to be reckoned with! We had letters to our representatives for people to sign, voter registration cards, and, to the delight of all, free cake. We asked people to sign on to the movement and commit to at least one hour of action a month as set out on our website.

News of our website has spread like wildfire. It has become the backbone of our movement and an incredible tool for reaching out nationally and internationally to other concerned folks who likewise feel that the priorities of their government do not reflect their priorities, especially concerning children's welfare. We continue to improve upon and maintain our website, [www.mothersactingup.org](http://www.mothersactingup.org), that provides easy actions each month that specifically address some crisis facing children toward which our actions will most likely have the greatest effect. By increasing our membership we bring all our voices together to speak out on specific, timely issues and get noticed on the political radar screen due to our sheer numbers and the moral authority mothers possess.

But, we know, for those who don't live within driving distance to Joellen's kitchen table where we meet, it takes more than a website to feel connected. So this past January we posted a "Parade Packet" on our website that included an entire recipe for putting on a MAU parade in any community, from sample press releases to designs for stilts. We encouraged anyone who nibbled at the idea to email or call us to receive a flood of encouragement. The result was that just one year after the inception of MAU, eleven cities throughout the country, including New York City, Los Angeles, Tampa Bay, Cincinnati, Albuquerque and Vashon Island, WA hosted Mothers Acting Up Mother's Day Parades, to celebrate mothers claiming their voice to speak out for the rights of children. These courageous mothers who organized parades, several while still nursing babes, overcame their own doubts and fears to make visible their commitment to protect the kids everywhere.

Naturally, these communities who hosted parades want to keep the ball rolling and are now forming their own local MAU groups. United together in a community that meets regularly, they are supporting each other in their commitment to act up and to create local actions that benefit children in their own communities and beyond. Back at "MAU Central" here in Boulder we are hard at work, continuing to grow and respond to the needs of our members, learning much from their experiences. Soon to appear on the site is a new packet, "How Now New MAU: How to Form a MAU Group in Your Community." Also in the works is a new program we are launching entitled

“Political Fitness 101: Flexing Our Mother Muscle for the 2004 Elections!” Recently several MAU members traveled to South Africa to work with AIDS relief workers there and to bring their stories home. They met Winnie, Cora, and Lulu, elderly African women who daily tend to the suffering with a spirited, weary, yet rock-solid faith.

We mothers have been sleeping giants long enough. Excuses for inaction, be damned. We’re rolling up our sleeves and getting to work. The house is a mess, not to mention the senate. The gargantuan momentum created by mothers moving from concern to action has the potential to catapult us to a better future, one in which children’s needs are prioritized and their rights protected. Let us whisper this to each other, sing it on the streets, yell it from our roof tops, and declare it in our houses of government: we will protect our children with our personal and political strength wherever they live on earth!

### **References**

Richards, Laura E. and Maud Howe Elliott. 1925. *Julia Ward Howe*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company.