

The Moms Clean Air Force: Fighting for Our Kids' Health

Fighting for cleaner air and against climate change and they mean business!

BY SUE MAYFIELD GEIGER

We've often heard the expression, "It takes a village," and of course, we take that to mean that people must come together to promote needed change. That is certainly true, yet the quote is actually an African proverb meaning that a child's upbringing is a communal effort, and is the responsibility of that community to be responsible for interacting with children so that they may experience and grow in a safe and healthy environment. Moms Clean Air Force is a nation-wide village of moms and dads united against air pollution and climate change for every global citizen, but particularly for our children. With over one million members in 23 states, dedicated leaders and members of this organization are making waves—very big ones—as they continue to meet with lawmakers at every level of government and on both sides of the political aisle to build support for commonsense solutions to pollution.

We are extremely honored and pleased that Catherine Flowers, Houston Field Organizer for Moms Clean Air Force, took the time out of her busy schedule to provide us with more insight:

How long have you been involved in Moms Clean Air Force? I've been the Houston-based field organizer since June 2019.

As the Houston field organizer for Moms, you are an experienced social entrepreneur and disaster specialist who mobilizes fence-line communities impacted by air pollution and climate change to call for action at all levels of government. Explain to our readers what drew you to this organization. When I learned that Moms Clean Air Force was seeking a field organizer in Texas to serve its more than 60,000 members across the state, I jumped at the opportunity. As a woman of color and a mother of three, this work hits home in three ways. First, the topic of health disparities faced by black and brown children is close to my heart. Air pollution has a cumulative impact on families already dealing with the impacts of food insecurity, lack of access to public transportation, and environmental exposures. Second, my family was forced to evacuate from New Orleans when Hurricane Katrina hit. My children were very young. The trauma of that experience has focused much of my career on addressing extreme weather and its aftermath. Third, my own children are involved in this important work, too—it's truly a family affair! My younger son suffers from asthma, so I know firsthand about air pollution and its harmful impact on children's health. Interestingly, air pollution has become this son's kryptonite: the more educated he becomes, the more his passion evolves. Last July, our family traveled



Catherine Flowers at the Houston Climate Strike.

In Houston, where in 2018 we experienced 110 days with high pollution, we parents have cause for real concern. – Catherine Flowers

to the nation's capital to meet our elected officials and press for bigger, bolder climate solutions. The experience was unforgettable.

How will San Antonio have a significant impact not only on Texas, but on the country? How is the city poised to become a national leader in combating global warming? We've been working to move the city of San Antonio toward a just and equitable future since September 2018. Our goal is to build a grassroots movement to support the city's first ever Climate Action and Adaptation Plan (CAAP). To its enormous credit, San Antonio's City Council passed its Plan with a 10-1 vote in October of 2019. Moms Clean Air Force has been proud to partner with a city committed to carbon neutrality by 2050. San Antonio is indeed setting an example for other cities in Texas and everywhere in this country.

Houston is your adopted hometown. How come? Hurricane Katrina made me a climate evacuee. I came to Houston from New Orleans, where I continued to serve as the director of community and governmental affairs for the Governor of Louisiana. In this role, I served more than 80,000 fellow climate evacuees. I then chose to remain in Houston to serve as the executive

director and church administrator for Good Hope Missionary Baptist Church, where we focused on disaster relief. Mayor Annise Parker recruited me to create the City of Houston's Department of Neighborhoods. From there, I went on to advocate and lead on affordable housing, homelessness, healthcare, and disaster relief. Social impact has always been at the very core of my life's work.

You work on air pollution, climate change, toxic chemicals, and other national campaigns. How much headway is the organization making thus far? At the national level, we've mobilized our members to fight for protections that keep our families healthy and safe from the threat of air pollution, toxins and climate instability. We've been successful in helping members of Congress get behind the first serious federal efforts on climate-focused legislation in ten years with the 100% Clean Economy Act of 2019, which has more than 150 original co-sponsors. Imagine zero climate pollution—a 100% clean economy with clean buildings, agriculture, transportation, industry, and electricity. It's ambitious, but we can do it. In Texas, we work closely with the One Breath Partnership to tell our stories and fight for clean air, every day, for everyone. Last month, I spoke at a joint press conference to highlight how Houston suffered 110 days of poor air quality due to air pollution in 2018. There are thousands of children suffering from asthma in Houston, including

my son. It's why we need to strengthen, not weaken, our clean air protections. As parents, we have a responsibility to do everything we can to protect our children.

Moms get things done, especially when it comes to our environment. Can women without children be a part of your organization? Absolutely. We all have moms! Many members work in their honor! We welcome anyone who cares about what kind of air they breathe and what kind of planet they want future generations to inherit. We can all be good stewards. Our members are mostly mothers, but we also boast many fathers, grandparents, aunts, uncles, and caretakers alike.

Why do you think teen activist Greta Thunberg has captured the world with her message? Do you think her voice has been a wake-up call? Greta has captured hearts and minds with her simple message: let's get serious about climate change, and fast! Greta's moral outrage, her sense of urgency, and her grounding in the science is a powerful combination. But Greta is not alone. There are millions of young people ramping up their efforts and educating their peers and families. Like so many, I was inspired by the turnout for the climate strike last September 20th. To see elders, indigenous activists, labor groups, faith leaders, humanitarian groups, and environmental organizations join youth the world over sent a big message. Our tent is big and growing—and you, dear reader, have a place within it. Join us! I should add that we are gearing up to show equal force with the upcoming 50th anniversary of Earth Day around April 20th, so please save that date and check our website at www.momscleanairforce.org for events.

What do you make of all the pro-climate talk by businesses at the recent World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland? On the one hand, it's worth noting that, yes, a lot of business leaders and institutional investors are saying they will tackle climate change. It's good that they're vocalizing how runaway climate change affects their bottom line—because it does. On the other hand, we hear much less about the concrete actions that will be taken. It's our job to hold these companies accountable. We also need to remember that consumer power is real. Take the transportation sector. After several major automakers sided with President Trump in his attack on our nation's clean air standards, consumers—including our moms—vowed to boycott those companies. Meanwhile, business leaders specifically called out these companies, which include GM, Chrysler, Toyota and others, for exposing themselves to increased economic and climate risk through this harmful step. These automakers are completely out of step with millions of American consumers who support strong clean air standards.

How can our readers get involved to bring the needed changes? I would point to two important things. One is simply to talk. Strike up conversations with neighbors, colleagues, and family members about climate change because having these conversations is the first step toward solving the problem. Moms Clean Air Force has many online resources to help you with information about climate change action. The other thing is to get involved politically. Talk to everybody you vote for, and to everyone trying to get your vote. Speak out and speak up. Ask them what actions they will take to stop climate pollution and protect our children's health and future. Politicians work for you. Vote for politicians who will vote for a healthy planet.

For more information and to get involved, please visit their website: momscleanairforce.org



Speaking at a press conference in Houston, Catherine Flowers addresses the growing number of high pollution days in the city as cause for concern.



In Washington, DC, Catherine and two of her children joined other families from across the country to press lawmakers to act on climate change.

Moms Clean Air Force members from OH, TX, NM, CO, and AZ who testified in Dallas in support of strong methane pollution protections from the oil and gas industry.

