

Swanhilda: We sent an open letter.

Sarika: (What happened afterwards)

Swanhilda: We wanted an open dialogue. We wanted this letter to start an open dialogue. In the letter, we put a deadline - I can't remember what it was, the third or fourth week of November. So we sent that and for the first time, WPSD responded! They refused this, they didn't want an open dialogue.

But they said they would release a statement. I mean we had no idea if they even got the letter until they publicly disclosed to the Pittsburgh community that they refused our desire to have an open dialogue.

WPSD Board wrote that they would work to improve things, that they will add Deaf members to the school board, increasing the percentage they will incorporate bilingual training, etc. But this doesn't satisfy our list of demands - we want an open dialogue! That discussion is lacking! They keep refusing and they don't explain why. Why is that so hard? Why not have a legitimate open dialogue with the stakeholders, five of our own and five of theirs? But they refused this too.

So we sent yet another open letter requesting this: 5 of our stakeholders, 5 of theirs. We could fly to a neutral location to be decided and the NAD (National Association of the Deaf) could mediate the discussion. We would remunerate the NAD for this!

The deadline for responding to the request was December 4th and WPSD has not responded. . Nothing. No response.

No response at all. The first open letter we sent, they rejected our wishes. This second open letter - there just hasn't been any response. Now We need to try a different way.

Sarika: When did you all decide to restart the hunger strike?

Swanhilda: The first round of the hunger strike chain has been continuing. That allows the rest of the protesters to have some respite as people take turns hunger striking (three days at a time). Our initial letter was refused and it seems they don't really care about the hunger strike because no one will die from not eating for 3 days using this hunger strike chain. Other things also came up during this strike but they didn't bother to pay attention. We thought if they see the long number of days and the extensive list of people involved in the chain hunger strike, they might see it as a serious threat and

show we really want a change. That's the reason we feel it's not enough and I needed to go back.

Sarika: Are you on your own as a second time hunger striker?

Swanhilda: No, the second time Paula Joseph and I returned to the strike (continually). But she gave up after ten days because she has young children and needs to take care of her kids. My kids are older and can are able to take care of themselves. So she stopped after 10 days, but I'm still going.

Another one of the strikers, Mateo, is on his 15th day now. 14th or 15th day. He lives quite close by, here in Colorado. It's his 15th day so far. The three of us were doing it together until Paula left, and then the two of us.

But now there are 40 or 50 people involved I think. Today, I think there are 7 people involved in the hunger strike.

Sarika: Wow! And still no response!

Swanhilda: Nothing at all.

Sarika: So at this point your demands, your list of demands - has it changed or...?

Swanhilda: Our cause has remained steady and clear.. For now our strike's purpose is to have start open dialogue, that's all I ask. If we have this open dialogue, the hunger strike will end. I mean, of course we still want our other demands met. But our priority is having an open dialogue.

Sarika: I understand - the open dialogue. Why does WPSD keep refusing?

Swanhilda: We are trying to figure out why they are refusing . why it's so hard!

Sarika: Even I've been trying to comprehend that as well. So it seems they can agree to your other demands: greater Deaf representation on the board, bilingual training, etc. But they're not willing to engage in an open dialogue.

Swanhilda: Really, it doesn't matter who is managing the school, whether they are hearing or Deaf, as long as they value the children. If they were willing to have this open dialogue, we could talk about what it would look like to improve . But I don't see

that and they've been so resistant! If they really wanted to see an improvement, they would be willing to have a discussion - because it's healthy! But they resist and they refuse. It's strange, I'll give you that.

Sarika: I myself have been trying to get in touch with someone at the school and even I've had a lack of response. Do you have any other comments or I guess what are your goals now? How long will you continue the hunger strike?

Swanhilda: I will continue fasting until we have an open dialogue.

But maybe we need to change the dynamic maybe a push or something - we're not getting anywhere and it's tiring. Our approach is getting diverted. We're going to engage more at the ground level, connect with the community and educate them. So many of them often think that Sim Com (simultaneous communication) is ASL because there is signing involved. They don't realize (the problem). We want to educate them because they don't realize this and think that they will be fine using Sim Com. . So we're going to try these different strategies now.

Sarika: Right, more of a grassroots effort

Swanhilda: To light a fire under them, because it's becoming stagnant. All of this takes a lot of energy!

Sarika: Absolutely!

Swanhilda: But I believe we will succeed!

Sarika: Anything else you want to share?

Swanhilda: A problem we've been facing since the beginning is an issue with 'diversion'. WPSD is trying to divert us from our goals. But our cause is very clear. Our list of concerns has always been that there is 84% (I think it may be 83% or 80% but hard to see) Hearing representation on the board, that there is oppression and that language has been taken away. (again...not so sure this is what's meant but it was what's signed) . They won't answer to these issues and instead look to other areas to show what they do have. (not sure on this phrasing but that kind of the point....they're saying 'other things have have have'). They're trying to distract us by diverting us from our goals.

Sarika: Right, I get it. I wish you best of luck! I hope everything works out and I really hope you get SOME kind of response - especially toward an open dialogue!

Swanhilda: I believe it will happen. I see it.

Sarika: Thank you and keep in touch!

Swanhilda: Thank you!