



South Star

Newsletter of the South Region, American Friends Service Committee • Winter 2016

“Justice cannot be for one side alone, but must be for both.” – ELEANOR ROOSEVELT

WV COMMUNITY MEMBERS, POLICE WORK TOGETHER TO ADDRESS RACISM

By Lida Shepherd

Editor’s note: As cities across the U.S. continue to grapple with issues of racist police violence, Charleston, West Virginia made headlines in October when its police chief and local community groups announced a plan to improve race relations in the city. Lida Shepherd with the AFSC West Virginia Economic Justice Project was part of the 14-month collaborative planning process that led to this remarkable agreement.

Our first meeting with Chief Brent Webster of the Charleston Police Department in October of last year was slightly tense. We were sitting around the table to discuss the fact that the arrest rate of Blacks in our small city of just over 50,000 people was more than double that of whites.

At the table were a team of student and faith leaders, and representatives from NAACP-Charleston, Black Ministerial Alliance, AFSC, ACLU, Kanawha County Public Defender’s Office, East End Family Resource Center, and the West Virginia Coalition Against Domestic Violence.

Before getting into the problem at hand, we each shared our personal thoughts on why it was important to address racism—a dialogue that em-

phasized this meeting was not about singling out the Charleston Police Department as a racist institution but rather addressing the broader problem of systemic racism that plays out not only in our city but across our nation.

Takeiya Smith, AFSC racial justice intern, shared that she had been pulled over and unduly questioned by police on a couple of occasions, for no apparent reason other than being Black. Pastor Matthew Watts, a community leader on Charleston’s West Side, described handing keys to his son on the sidewalk of his own neighborhood and then being challenged by the police who suspected drugs. I attested to the fact that—unlike others at the table—I don’t worry that one day my four-year-old daughter, who is white, might not walk away from an interaction with police unharmed.

We were meeting with Chief Webster as part of a process that had begun more than a year earlier, when AFSC and partner organizations convened a Call to Action for Racial Equality community event to talk about problems and actionable solutions to racism in our city. Over 150 people showed up at a community



Top: Lida Shepherd stands with Charleston police officials during a press conference about the community agreement. Above: Charleston Police Chief Brent Webster and Takeiya Smith, AFSC racial justice intern. Photos: AFSC/West Virginia

gymnasium on the East End of Charleston, and the issue of community and police relations was one of several major issues raised by community members.

Based on what we heard from community members, and after having obtained the arrest rate data from the police department, our newly forming coalition met again in November as part of a follow-up event

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follow-up event at West Virginia State University, a historically Black college. There we started to develop a list of proposals to share with Chief Webster and Corporal Errol Randle to improve relations between community members and the police.

Part of what made our first meeting with police tense—besides the usual defensiveness that comes up when talking about racism—was one of the explanations they gave for the racial disparity in arrest rates. They told us that arrests were driven by 911 phone calls, i.e. “We get a lot of calls from the West Side,” a predominantly Black neighborhood of Charleston.

It’s a credit to everyone in that meeting that this point of tension didn’t shut down negotiations. Instead, we all agreed that it would be helpful to have more data on arrests—which ended up being one of the eight initiatives police announced last week to improve race relations in our city.

This plan of action is significant in

part because the collaborative process through which we arrived at this moment had already served to deepen the relationship between the police and the community, which is important for three reasons:

1. We are better equipped to deal collectively with violent or deadly incidents if they happen.
2. We have an understanding of our mutual self interest in addressing racism as well as mass incarceration not only in policing but also in other parts of the criminal justice system, and are ready to tackle policy solutions together as well.
3. We are better poised to take on new opportunities or struggles as they arise, with open lines of communication and mutual trust.

But clearly this didn’t happen overnight. Since that first meeting last fall, our coalition, which now includes leaders from the Charleston Police Department, has continued to meet monthly to agree upon and fine-tune

the plan, which includes:

- De-escalation training: Five police officers will become certified de-escalation trainers through the nationally accredited RITE curriculum. All officers already completed de-escalation training in May.
- Publishing monthly arrest statistics across race, age, gender, and cause of arrest: Data will educate officers and community members about crime trends and possible causes of racial arrest disparities.
- Body cameras: Starting next month, officers will begin wearing body cameras and implement national best practices to make sure the devices protect both officers and community members.
- Youth advisory council: A new council of at least 10 young people, ages 18 to 25, across race and religious differences, will plan ongoing dialogue and events between youth and officers, and will also make

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**American Friends
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Editorial Committee

Bryan Vana
Ann Lennon

Design by Beth Spence &
Bryan Vana

Photography by Bryan Vana
unless otherwise noted

Atlanta Regional Office

75 Marietta St., Suite 501
Atlanta, GA 30303
Phone: (404) 586-0460
Fax: (404) 586-0465

Interim Regional Director
Ann Lennon

SAVE THE DATE:

CENTENNIAL SUMMIT APRIL 20–23, 2017



Since 1917, the American Friends Service Committee has been a successful Quaker experiment in nurturing the seeds of change and respect for human life that transform social relations and systems. As part of our 100th anniversary celebration, we will host a summit articulating a vision forward for peace and justice by joining movements that are reaching out to make the connection between militarism, racism, and materialism. Sign up for centennial celebration updates [here](#).

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D.C. BILL GRANTS PAID LEAVE CITY-WIDE

By DC Peace & Economic Justice supporter Alex Frazier

On December 6, the D.C. City Council passed a bill to create one of the only city-wide paid leave programs in the country. The bill, known as the Universal Paid Leave Amendment Act of 2016, would provide eight weeks of paid leave for workers to take care of new babies, six weeks for workers to take care of sick family members, and two weeks for personal medical emergencies. It would mandate the replacement of 90% of the salaries of workers who make up to 1.5 times the local minimum wage, and 50% of wages beyond that amount. This system was specifically intended to benefit low-income workers, who are least likely to get paid leave from their current employers but are most in need of a steady paycheck. The vote, which was the first of two, was a major preliminary victory for AFSC-DC and its partners in the D.C. Paid Leave Coalition, who have been advocating for the bill since before its introduction last October.

During the spring of 2015, students from AFSC-DC's Human Rights Learning project at Dunbar High School got involved in the bill's creation. The basic approach of the Human Rights Learning project involves using the Universal Declaration of Human Rights as a framework to empower D.C. youths and community members to identify, examine, and address social justice issues in their communities. The students met with Joanna Blotner, the manager of the D.C. Paid Family Leave Campaign, several times to learn about the bill. They utilized their new understanding of human rights and their own personal experiences to write testimonies in favor of the bill, which Joanna collected for use in the campaign. They also organized a

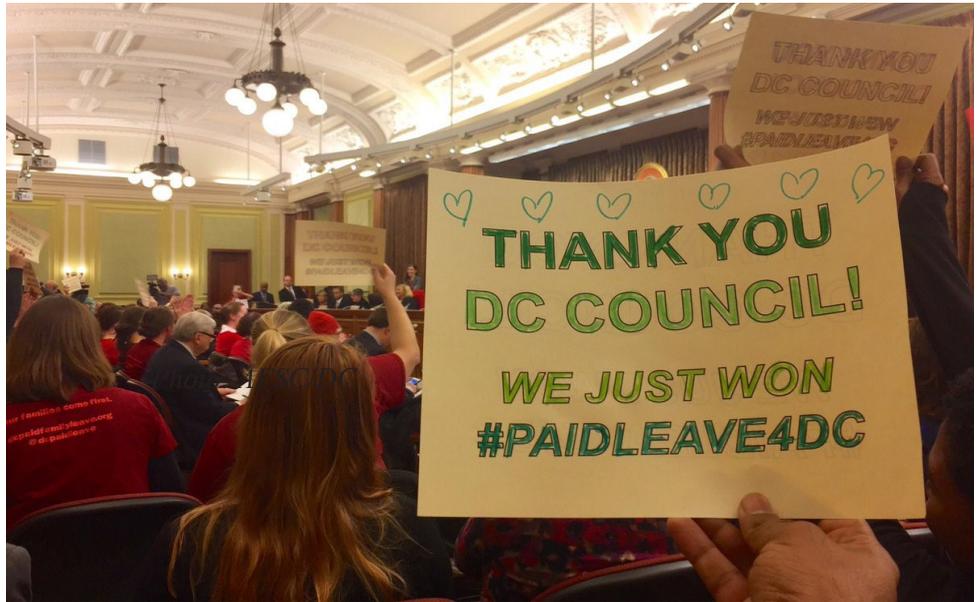


Photo: AFSC/DC

forum with representatives of Councilmembers David Grosso and Kenyan McDuffie to expand on the reasons that the bill would benefit their communities. Both councilmembers were co-sponsors of the original paid leave bill.

While most councilmembers were in favor of the bill, a few had serious objections to its provisions. Some, like Councilmember Jack Evans, worried about the program's more than \$238 million-per-year expense. (The money would come from a .62 percent increase in payroll taxes and be put into a communal pool that all business would share.) Others, including Councilmember LaRuby May, disapproved of the fact that the bill would cover the 64% of D.C. workers who live in Maryland and Virginia, moving much needed D.C. funds away from the District. In addition, outside groups have expressed the concern that the bill would add more regulations to small businesses in the District that would make it harder for them to survive and thrive.

These doubts about the bill caused Councilmember Evans to plan a motion to table and therefore kill it in the vote on December 6. The members of the D.C. Paid Leave Coalition, including AFSC-DC, worked hard to gain enough support

from the other councilmembers to block the motion. Their many volunteers called, emailed and tweeted at the councilmembers, hoping that the massive show of popular support would be enough to influence them to vote for the bill. On behalf of AFSC-DC, I personally went to every single office in the council building on Pennsylvania Avenue to lobby for the bill. Their efforts continued even on the day of the vote, when they filled the council room with people wearing red, the campaign's signature color. It was a diverse crowd; I saw pediatricians, business owners, and mothers with small children, all there to demonstrate how much they cared about getting the bill passed.

The work paid off when the council, after some debate, passed the paid leave bill 11-2. However, the bill is not completely secure yet. It will come to a second vote on December 20, and may have been changed or weakened in the meantime. Even if it passes that vote, it will go to Mayor Muriel Bowser, who has yet to publicly support it. AFSC-DC and its coalition partners will continue working to influence both the council and the mayor to make the correct decision and give D.C. workers the rights they deserve.

PEACE BY PIECE ATL: UNDERSTANDING RESTORATIVE PRACTICES IN A YOUTH SPACE

On Saturday, November 12th, AFSC's Youth Program Officer, Nia Eubanks-Dixon, joined Peace by Piece Atlanta to provide our newly restructured program with an insightful training on restorative practices to use while working with youth and other constituents. In the process of the day-long intensive session, eight members of PXP Atlanta embraced engaging activities in group pairs and social circles that pushed us to move past our comfort zones and ultimately look within ourselves to recognize and overcome conflicts that may appear to originate with others.

For example, we practiced the use of affirmative statements as a means to express honesty and clarity whenever a constituent feels offended. These expressions allow you to state clearly what your issue is, yet it also requests that you identify your issue with the offenders' actions, rather than the offender himself. We also learned how to acknowledge shame and, rather than get caught in negative cycles



Youth Program Officer Nia Eubanks-Dixon and Atlanta Peace by Piece participants during sessions focusing on restorative practices for working with youth on social justice issues.

Photos: AFSC/ATL



that struggle with the shame, take definitive steps to bring light to the real issues that exist behind the shame. Lastly, we took steps to understand social fundamentals and the benefits of creating clear boundaries with our youth cohorts and providing the support they need to thrive in an effort that can be truly restorative.

As we move to begin our new program in the beginning of 2017, Peace by Piece Atlanta is working hard to grasp deeply meaningful practices such as this one that will help us interact at a higher level with our youth cohorts as we encourage them to recognize the great capabilities that are inherent within them. We are truly grateful to Nia Eubanks-Dixon, Ann Lennon, Anyango Reggy, and AFSC as a whole for providing a seemingly unlimited amount of support to create an awesome program in our amazing city.

- JOEL DICKERSON, PEACE BY PIECE ATLANTA PROGRAM DIRECTOR

WILL MY BOYS SURVIVE? WILL I? REFLECTIONS ON THE #CHARLOTTEUPRISING

By Toni Etheridge

On Sept. 20th, 2016 Keith Lamont Scott was gunned down by a police officer in Charlotte, NC. His deadly circumstances played out on American streets like far too many police shootings. This killing struck a nerve.

As a Black, educated woman with two male boys, I fear for their safety when it's dark outside. In the United States, we know slavery was abolished in 1865. However, as Bryan Stevenson says, "Slavery didn't end, it just evolved." Black voices have



Photo: AFSC/Lori Khamala

shouted out, "There's a siege upon people of color, the orders seem to be number one: incarcerate or number two: shoot to kill." The shootings we see are born of the same root as slavery and Jim Crow. How much "strange fruit," how many lynchings before we as a society say, "Enough!"

For me there have been many, many times when I think quietly to myself and ask, "Will my boys be targeted, will they survive?" I think every parent of Black or Brown children has similar thoughts.

The street reality is that when a police officer interacts with Black or Brown folks too often a shot is fired.

I am not a school teacher, nor a sociologist. I can see, and not just because I am a person with dark skin, but, because I AM a human being, that we as a society have a monumental problem on our hands. And no one at the helm seems willing to take this problem on and speak truth to power.

Click [here](#) to continue reading this piece on AFSC's [Acting in Faith](#) blog

SNAPSHOT: TALENTED TENTH WITH GA RESTORATIVE JUSTICE

In August 2015, the Atlanta Municipal Court piloted a new leadership program as an alternative to sentencing non-violent offenders. As part of that pilot program, AFSC's Georgia Restorative Justice began working with youth in the form of the Talented Tenth Leadership Program.

I developed Talented Tenth in 2002 to be an academically based and community based program that facilitated young people—identifying their talents, transforming them into marketable skills, and then making a contribution to their community. When the program was presented to Judge Herman Sloan and Vanessa Gayles, they saw the potential of these young men and women who are marginalized in society and part of that revolving

door of the criminal justice system.

Participant Kwame Garcia, commenting on his future while working with Talented Tenth, says “The ultimate thing I’ve learned from this program [is] at any given time, either you are a product of your environment or your environment is a product of you, and you have to decide what you want it to be. Everybody has their role ... and I feel like I have a greater role.” Garcia is just one of several young people who have continued to develop their skills with the program, and with continued work can realize the goals he has set for himself.

- MASON WEST, GEORGIA RESTORATIVE JUSTICE PROGRAM DIRECTOR



Above: click to watch the Georgia Restorative Justice Program's Talented Tenth year in review

WV ACE STUDENTS ENGAGE CANDIDATES



Photo: AFSC/Liz Brunello

In Logan County, 20 students hosted an event that attracted candidates for the state house, senate and U.S. Congress. Participants from AFSC's Appalachian Center for Equality asked questions on many different topics ranging from juvenile justice reform to diversification and job training for ex-coal miners. In addition to simply giving the public a chance to learn more about the candidates for public office, the young leaders saw the forum as an opportunity to spotlight candidates

with solid policy plans and ideas that would bring the county into the 21st century and emphasize quality education for students that prepares them for emerging job markets (while ideally retaining and attracting families to the county).

In Boone county, students hosted a post-election community forum in November that brought out students, parents, teachers, as well as the newly elected county commissioner, senator and delegate for the district. Again the topics and questions raised by students were diverse, but some strong themes included: rapid identification and cultivation of new industries/job markets for the area that would (1) increase the tax base and (2) create new sources of revenue that could help save the crumbling school system; addressing mental health disparities for rural children residing in the county and greater region; creating a county-wide youth council that would take action on issues of social injustice, resource scarcity, etc.; addressing environmental issues ranging from escalating pollution

problems to the dangerous potential consequences of unchecked climate change and deforestation happening in the area (which could result in more natural disasters like flooding and landslides); addressing the rapid increase in drug addiction and cases of opiate over-prescription/overdoses.

These are rough political times for all, especially in these impoverished counties of Appalachia. So while ACE doesn't anticipate huge legislative victories this year, these student meetings and legislative forums are not just symbolic—we are building (sometimes unlikely) alliances with our students' representative policymakers and strengthening relationships now so that good things can happen pre- and post-session. ACE participants certainly feel energized to keep these legislators accountable after officials made promises about what they intend to do for West Virginia communities.

- LIZ BRUNELLO, APPALACHIAN CENTER FOR EQUALITY PROGRAM COORDINATOR



Above left: Atlanta Avenue in Peoplestown and right: Housing Justice supporters protest outside City Hall

ATLANTA ECONOMIC JUSTICE SENDS CLEAR MESSAGE WITH PEOPLESTOWN: WE SHALL NOT BE MOVED

On Monday, Nov. 21st, residents of Peoplestown and Housing Justice League members marched to Atlanta’s City Hall to testify in front of City Council members who voted to authorize eminent domain proceedings against Peoplestown residents Mr. and Mrs. Darden and Tanya Washington. Protesters brought “Thanks-taking” themed posters plastered with the face of Mayor Kasim Reed, highlighting Reed’s gentrifying tendencies and impassivity in meeting with residents. The group outside City Hall was only a small part of the [6,000+ signatories who signed a petition](#) supporting Tanya and the Dardens’ resistance to displacement.

Tensions came to a head in City Council, where individuals on both sides of the displacement issue spoke their opinions. Peoplestown residents who supported building the park, and thus the displacement of Tanya and the Dardens, reiterated their concern for flooding in the neighborhood and beliefs that park construction would prevent flooding. They cited conversations with engineers and watershed department officials who

suggested the park construction was a useful response to the issue. Many of these residents were well-dressed white professionals.

Following their narratives, Tanya Washington spoke. Many of her supporters yielded their speaking time, giving Tanya 16 minutes at the podium. Articulate, visceral, and honest, Tanya spoke about the timeline of park construction within the neighborhood and her commitment to staying in her home. Tanya highlighted that the current park construction plan was not the best possible. Initial drafts of park construction placed it close to the Turner Field stadium, away from the 100 block of Atlanta Avenue. She noted the city wished to advance this park plan because they had already displaced most residents on the block. “But going forward with a wrong displacement project doesn’t make it right,” Tanya noted.

The city’s legal takeover of the block is un-coincidentally occurring with the sale of Turner Field, Tanya noted, and hints at a larger project of making over the Peoplestown neighborhood. This may not be problematic, except that it is happening at the expense of long-time medium to low income

homeowners and for the benefit of wealthier homeowners. A majority of the pro-park advocates do not represent the demographics of the affected community. The city’s legal takeover of the block is a dangerous precedent in Atlanta, where resident displacements in other neighborhoods, such as Vine City, are foreseeable and looming.

Park development without displacement in Peoplestown is not only possible, but has been recommended. At the beginning of the building process, the Department of Watershed had nearly 22 site options to choose from when deciding a location. Building on some of these site locations would not have required resident displacement at all. Nonetheless, the City advanced with building on the 100 Atlanta Avenue block, more or less evicting the majority of its residents. Even now, in the final stages of the block takeover, displacement need not continue.

Organizers noted that developers already plan to build around resident Mattie Jackson’s home, which sits in the middle of

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the block. If this is possible, it is also possible to build around the block-corner homes of the Dardens and Tanya Washington. Even amidst the City’s relentless displacements and subsequent public defacing, it is possible for the city to maintain dignity—by not displacing the Dardens and Tanya.

After the public testimonies, residents and Housing Justice League members walked to Mayor Kasim Reed’s office in an attempt to meet with the Mayor and request his intervention in the eminent domain proceedings. His office doors were locked, however, even though Reed was visibly present in the Mayor’s room. For half an hour, Housing Justice remained outside the office calling for the Mayor. But the Mayor’s office denied communication, and Kasim Reed did not speak with residents.

The eminent domain proceedings will be taken to court in the coming weeks, and Tanya Washington has promised a strong resistance. “These displacements are being fueled by a project of economic development rather than public safety,” she noted, “and will likely benefit private developers

among others. Somebody is receiving large sums of money from this process, and it’s not the residents.” As Peoplestown locals continue fighting against forced removal, the Housing Justice League remains relentlessly by their side. Testimonies and actions will continue as long as necessary to keep the Dardens and Tanya Washington in their homes.

- TIM FRANZEN

ATLANTA ECONOMIC JUSTICE PROGRAM



Above: Atlanta Avenue resident Tanya Washington



Click preview image to watch: support Occupy Our Homes Atlanta’s movement to prevent displacement in the Peoplestown community

WV police continued from page 2

annual recommendations to continue to improve the relationship between youth and officers.

- A department-wide series of day-long anti-racism trainings for everyone from the police chief to new recruits.

- A series of roll call presentations, where officers and community leaders across Charleston can hear from one another.

- A new annual Community Service Award, where community leaders will work with police officers to create community policing

standards—and then recognize all officers meeting those standards in a given year.

- Collaboration between police leadership and community leaders to advocate for state policy changes to address re-entry and recidivism and to offer second chances for ex-offenders.

Since the press announcement, the response from across the country has been overwhelming. More than 300,000 people have viewed [this video about this agreement featuring Takeiya and Chief Webster](#). Corporal Randle has received calls from around the country praising the department’s

efforts, including one from a senator in Indiana who wants to know how they can replicate this work in their own state.

Here in Charleston, the response from community members has been one of cautious optimism. People see that certainly there are no quick, easy solutions to systemic racism in our society, and that we still have a lot of work to do, but this is a step in the right direction.

West Virginia hasn’t historically been on the forefront in addressing racial and economic inequality, but for once, we might be leading the pack.



**American Friends
Service Committee**

South Region

3600 Clipper Mill Rd., Suite 212
Baltimore, MD 21211-1848

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SOUTH REGION PROGRAMS



ATLANTA

75 Marietta St., Suite 501
Atlanta, GA 30303
Phone: (404) 586-0460

Interim Regional Director

Ann Lennon

Atlanta Economic Justice Program

Tim Franzen

Georgia Restorative Justice Program

Mason West

Peace by Piece Atlanta

Joel Dickerson

BALTIMORE

3600 Clipper Mill Rd., Suite 212
Baltimore, MD 21211
Phone: (410) 323-4200

Friend of a Friend Program

Dominique Stevenson
Phone: (240) 707-0110

GREENSBORO

529-D College Rd.
Greensboro, NC 27410
Phone: (336) 854-0633

NC Immigrant Rights Program

Lori Fernald Khamala

MIAMI

1175 NE 125th St., Suite 417
North Miami, FL 33161
Phone: (305) 600-5441

American Friends Immigrant Services

Lucio Perez-Reynoso

NEW ORLEANS

PO Box 4155
New Orleans, LA 70178

Peace by Piece New Orleans

Dee Dee Green
Phone: (504) 418-5070

WASHINGTON, D.C.

1822 R St. NW, First Floor
Washington, D.C. 20009
Phone: (202) 544-0324

DC Peace & Economic Justice Project

Jean-Louis Peta Ikambana

WEST VIRGINIA

Appalachian Center for Equality

Liz Brunello
2207 Washington St. E
Charleston, WV 25311
Phone: (727) 455-2137

WV Economic Justice Project

Rick Wilson
1201 Porter Creek Rd.
Milton, WV 25541
Phone: (304) 743-9459