

# MARStar

Newsletter of the Middle Atlantic Region, American Friends Service Committee

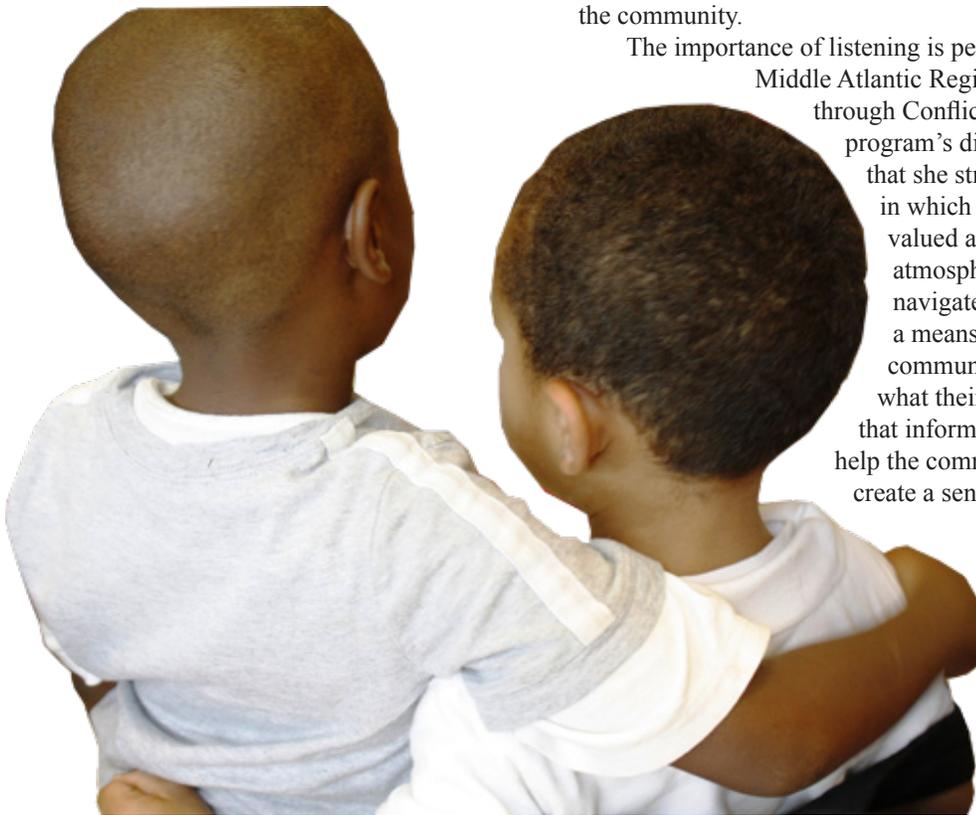
Fall/Winter  
2011

*“Courage is what it takes to stand up and speak; courage is also what it takes to sit down and listen.”*

— WINSTON CHURCHILL

## *Fostering peaceful communities and positive change*

BY IMANI WILLIAMS



Among public-serving nonprofits, the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC) stands apart because of the unique manner in which it works. AFSC’s various program directors seek to encourage change and in the words of West Virginia Economic Justice director Rick Wilson, “focus their energy so it’ll do the most good.” Drawing on the Quaker value of nonviolence, AFSC helps foster peaceful communities and positive change. It is through a focus on listening, empowerment and impact that each community can develop the tools to address a diverse assortment of issues.

Rooted in nonviolence, AFSC naturally functions in a manner that encourages listening. Although the notion of listening might seem elementary, it is essential to the success of each program. The belief that everyone has something important to say guides AFSC to value the voice of each individual as well as the collective voice of the community.

The importance of listening is perhaps most easily seen in the Middle Atlantic Region’s Youth Empowerment through Conflict Resolution program. The program’s director, Miafere Jones, noted that she strives to create an environment in which all of her students feel valued and listened to. That type of atmosphere helps teach youth how to navigate conflict and also serves as a means to discover the needs of the community. AFSC asks the community what their needs are, and then based on that information, determines how it can help the community meet those needs and create a sense of solidarity.

Rick Wilson also recognizes the importance of listening and solidarity in his work with the West Virginia Economic Justice project. His work has shown that one effective way to mobilize communities is through the use of coalitions; therefore, balancing conflicting

*Photo: Samantha Fein, AFSC intern*

*please turn to page seven*

# Relocating MAR to a historic old mill

The AFSC's Baltimore office's recent move to a new space at 3600 Clipper Mill Road produced a number of challenges. One was to sort through a great deal of "stuff" which was discarded, packed for the AFSC archives at the Central Office in Philadelphia, or put on the trucks headed to our new address. We're unpacked now and ready to forge ahead with our programs.

As we look around our new quarters, it's appropriate to acknowledge with gratitude the generous donors who supported the capital campaign some 20 years ago that enabled AFSC to purchase 4806 York Rd. That space was very

important to the work of the Middle Atlantic Region and holds memories of many productive meetings and exciting programs.

AFSC (MAR included) downsized in the last two years, which meant that the building was underutilized and that Brooke and I have spent too much time on building maintenance and management issues, time that could be better spent on program work. Consequently, it was no longer prudent to retain ownership of the York Road building. Fortunately, Loyola University purchased it as part of their commitment to the renaissance of the York Road Corridor. The proceeds from this sale will be invested to support our occupancy costs in Meadow Mill and program work in the Baltimore area.

Our new office is in a building that houses other nonprofits, including ACLU, Big Brother Big Sister, and several local arts organizations. It's located in the Hampden neighborhood of Baltimore, close to public transportation, and is very much in the city. Downsizing means fewer square feet, but while we are closer together, there are enough offices for staff, a space to gather, and several computer stations for interns. The office is quite

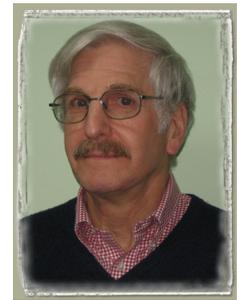
cheerful, with bright colors, large windows, and skylights.

We would like to share our new office with you and other AFSC supporters.

**You're cordially invited to**

**an Open House on Wednesday, November 9 from 5 p.m. to 8 p.m.**

Given that this occasion will come towards the end of my interim position as Regional Director, I look forward to the opportunity to update you on the exciting work that has taken place during my tenure and to give you my thanks and farewell. I do hope that you will be able to join us.



Howard Cell  
Interim Regional Director

*In Peace,  
Howard Cell*

*Interim Regional Director*

P.S. I know that AFSC's work will continue in capable hands. I hope that you will use the enclosed envelope to make a generous contribution for the programs in this Region.

## The MARStar

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## PA Conference against Torture Oct. 28-29, 2011

AFSC's PA Program has been working for a number of years on the rising acceptance of torture in our country, including helping to form the PA Network Against Torture. The network is organizing a conference in Harrisburg this October.

Recognizing that torture is happening not only in places like Guantanamo, but in U.S. prisons, the network decided to focus on three major issues: U.S.-sponsored torture; torture in our domestic prisons; and training for professionals and volunteers who support survivors of torture, trauma, and solitary confinement.

**To register and for more information, go to: [www.panetworkagain-  
sttorture.org](http://www.panetworkagain-<br/>sttorture.org)**



*Photo: Brooke McDonald, AFSC*

## Developing skills for tomorrow's leaders

A majority of the 51 participating young people gave high marks to a six-week summer leadership program in Baltimore's Park Heights community, sponsored by AFSC's Youth Empowerment Program and two other Baltimore non-profits, Park Heights Renaissance and HABESHA's The Griot's Eye Program.

The students, ranging in age from 14 to 19, attended seminars on personal development, civil engagement, advocacy and film production as part of the Park Heights Summer Youth Leadership Program.

The program's intent was to use these elements within a context of service leadership and creative teamwork to encourage students to become change agents in their economically challenged community.

"As a bonus, they had the chance to develop professional skills and skills like conflict resolution and how to create portfolios," said Mia Jones, director of the Youth Empowerment program.

The issues the youths chose to address included teen dating violence, youth homelessness, predatory relationships between older men and younger girls and education.

Within their chosen topics, they worked to write and film public service announcements, which they presented publicly at a community presentation.

Other program highlights included taking a field trip

to Howard University in Washington, D.C., representing their issues of concern at the mayoral candidate forum and participating in the Park Heights Community Fair and a career fair.

Through pre-testing and post-testing, program sponsors learned that the students felt they had increased their skill levels, particularly in the areas of camera operation and public speaking.

"Learning to use the camera gives them another skill to take to future job markets, especially those that require technical skills," Mia said. "Effective public speaking can help in all areas of their lives – education, employment, even entrepreneurship."

Many students reported improved interpersonal skills. Said one, "I gained confidence in meeting new people and putting forth my opinion." Another said, "I learned to work with others and sometimes some I don't like." A third said simply, "I became a leader."

While the Park Heights Youth Leadership Program faced the overwhelming challenge of accomplishing many tasks with challenged youth in a short amount of time, the program's organizers felt their overall goals were reached.

The students' improved views of their own ability to lead gave them the confidence to create projects to improve their communities. "It's hard to place a value on this kind of outcome," Mia said.

# Interns give with cheerful hearts

*They spent the summer of 2011 writing stories, creating videos and learning how the tools they created can help spread the message and promote change.*

Amanda Scrandis worked as a multimedia intern with AFSC this summer. She created videos outlining the work of the Middle Atlantic Region, which will be used for outreach, and a video for the Youth Empowerment Program, which can be found at <http://afsc.org/program/baltimore-youth-empowerment>. Amanda came to AFSC looking to gain some work experience before starting school at Towson University in the fall. “This position fit everything that I loved. I was able to create my own video projects and it was at a place that held the same beliefs that I did,” she explained. “I would like to especially thank Brooke [McDonald] and Paula [Cell] for giving me this opportunity to work for them. I appreciate all that they have done for me.”

Communications intern Janae Griffin was excited to get the opportunity

to work with AFSC this summer and found it to be a rewarding experience. She began the internship hoping to gain more hands-on experience with videography and to improve upon her writings skills, and this, she says, is exactly what happened. Janae also helped create videos that will be used for outreach, and she produced a video for the Pennsylvania State Program (<http://afsc.org/office/pittsburgh-pa>) during her time at AFSC. “AFSC gave me the opportunity to intern with them even though I am out of school, which proves that it is never too late to live your dream!” she said.

Imani Williams worked with AFSC as a communications intern during the summer. She wrote articles highlighting the Middle Atlantic Region’s work, the methods it uses to reach the community and the work of a couple of its programs. During her time at AFSC, she was able to gain work experience and to learn more about nonprofits and how they operate. In her words:

“I’d never heard of the American Friends Service Committee before I applied for an internship there, so as I prepared for the interview it only made sense that I should research the organization. After casually browsing through their website, I thought I’d learned all I needed to know. I saw that AFSC wanted nonviolence—so did I. They pushed for social





justice—that sounded good to me. All of AFSC’s core values seemed to mirror all of my basic moral values, so I figured that regardless of the job description, I’d be happy working for an organization that had such good intentions.

“What I found during the course of my 8 week internship was that AFSC does more than just advocate for world peace. They work through direct service. I was able to hear and see for myself, how AFSC affects the lives of various individuals within the community. I learned how they work within communities using popular education as a vehicle for change, and I saw examples of how their work is effective.

“I believe it’s important to invest in organizations like AFSC because not only do they work towards a good cause, but they try to create change by working with individuals. AFSC understands that change can begin with a single person and a single community, and that change can then spread so more and more lives are affected.

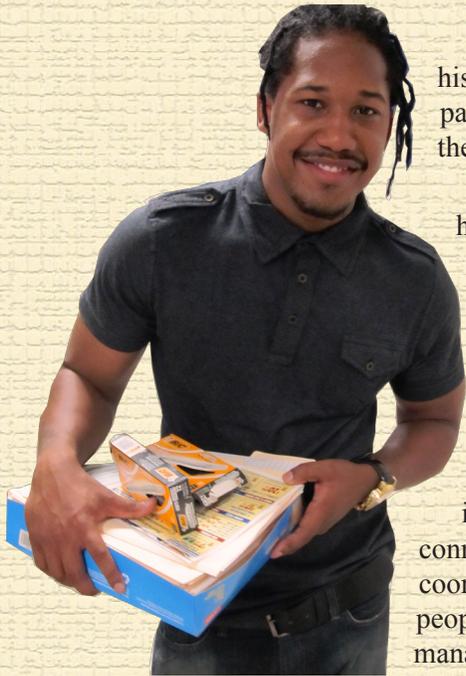
“One single donation to AFSC won’t solve the world’s problems, but one single donation might go towards changing someone’s life—and that, to me, is what makes giving worthwhile. Knowing that my contribution can make a difference allows me to give with a cheerful heart, and thus, giving becomes a rewarding experience rather than a chore I feel compelled to do.”



*Imani Williams, shown at left on page four, wrote the lead story on page one of this newsletter. Janai Griffin and Amanda Scrandis, shown above and with AFSC filmmaker Tony Heriza, worked as videographers. Their video about the D.C. program can be found at <http://afsc.org/office/washington-dc>*

*Photos: Brooke McDonald, AFSC*

## Catching up with D. J. Jones ...



This past May, *MARStar* staff sat down with 20-year-old D.J. Jones just a few days after he was released from prison. During his five years at the Maryland Correctional Training Center, D.J. had participated in AFSC's Maryland Peace with Justice Program through the Friend of a Friend mentoring project.

D.J. believes the mentoring project opened up opportunities for him and encouraged him to take steps toward building a promising future for himself. Several months later, D.J. is moving forward with the same determination that he expressed last spring. "My long term goal is to take care of myself and my family," he said. "I say myself first because I'm starting to realize that without me being healthy, I can't help [anyone] else."

D. J. has drawn up a blueprint for the business he hopes to start and is exchanging ideas with an insurance agent who is prepared to help him on his journey. In the meantime, his connections to AFSC helped him to get a job as an assistant program coordinator for YouthWorks, a Baltimore city program that helps young people to develop essential job skills. D.J.'s responsibilities ranged from managing employees' timesheets to organizing lunches for the students in the program. This temporary job provided enough financial support to help him get by, and D.J. is already looking for another job that will allow him to continue working while he takes the next step toward starting his own business in food services.

## ... and Shawnica Tolliver



A story in the Fall 2008 issue of the *MARStar* related the story of Shawnica Tolliver and her mother, Sabrina Osborne.

At the time Shawnica, a member of a mentoring group sponsored by AFSC in Logan, West Virginia, was entering Southern West Virginia Community and Technical College with the intention of getting a two-year degree in occupational therapy. As she began her college classes, she carried not only her own dreams but those of her mother, Sabrina, who was determined for her daughter to get the education she was not able to get for herself.

This summer we caught up once more with Shawnica, who has married and now has a young daughter of her own. She still is taking classes at Southern, now with the intention of becoming a dental technician. Four other members of the mentoring group of 2008 also are still in college.

In a meeting with AFSC staff members Brooke McDonald and Beth Spence, Shawnica and other members of the mentoring group of 2008 spoke warmly of their experiences. "We learned that we could depend on each other and our leader," one said. "That helped us make good choices with our lives."

*Photo of D. J. Jones: Brooke McDonald, AFSC  
Photo of Shawnica Tolliver: Beth Spence, AFSC*

# Peaceful communities

*continued from page one*

interests such as those of environmental and workers' rights groups is often necessary. The assurance that everyone's voice will be heard allows Rick to use mediation techniques that reflect fundamental aspects of AFSC's values and in particular, the value of listening. Similarly, staff member Beth Spence affirmed that AFSC provides a model of listening which proved to be very helpful in her work with the independent panel selected to investigate West Virginia's Upper Big Branch Mine Disaster. This panel listened to the stories of the members of the families of the miners who were killed and of the miners who survived the explosion – creating the narrative for the published report.

Listening ultimately generates respect for others which, in turn, lays the foundation for their empowerment. And empowerment is clearly evident in the youth programs across the Middle Atlantic Region.

D.C. Peace and Economic Justice Program director, Jean-Louis Peta Ikambana, uses an empowerment method in his program. "It helps young people shape a secure future for themselves and their communities, by helping them to become successful, self-reliant, and socially conscious of their human rights," he said. His approach attempts to create healthy, holistic debate among his program participants, and to actively engage them in the community.

Scilla Wahrhaftig also aims to involve and empower her young program participants through her work with Pennsylvania's Empowering Voices for Peace and Justice Program. Interacting with adolescents who are at a time in their lives when it's most tempting to rebel against authority, she sees how respect changes her students' attitudes. As they learn to respect themselves, they gain the confidence and skills to work through problems more effectively. Their perspective changes from thinking about themselves primarily to understanding that they can contribute to solving the problems in the wider population, and they develop incentive to create a positive community.

The degree to which Scilla's students begin taking their progress within the program into their own hands stems from the concept of 'popular education.' Popular education allows the youths to choose the activities they engage in, and to determine how they move forward within the program. As a form of empowerment, popular education is also used in other facets of AFSC's work.

Another program that uses the popular education model is the Maryland Peace with Justice Program. Director Dominique Stevenson has found popular education to be one of the most effective methods for communities who want to create change. Her Friend of a



*AFSC's West Virginia Economic Justice Project works with progressive coalitions on activities such as this call for support for the American Jobs Act. Photo: Rick Wilson, AFSC*

Friend mentoring project works in four different Maryland prisons, where men with leadership ability and skills are recruited and trained so that they can, in effect, run their own program. This establishes a dynamic in which those who are affected by the issues are doing the educating. Dominique considers an environment like this to be ideal. Through AFSC, she is able to work with individuals and communities using methods that allow them to create change for themselves.

AFSC's drive to create change in communities is fueled by the sense of what is possible and positive in their communities. When asked what he learned during his time at AFSC, Youth Empowerment apprentice Baye Parker stated "you can do two things with your time. You can spend it and you can waste it." His work with AFSC has reinforced the idea that "you must have something to show for your time that's being spent." Baye's comments give insight into what may be one of the most important factors that mold AFSC's work: impact. These sentiments are echoed in the ambitions of staff members throughout the Middle Atlantic Region.

"We try to make a change that you can count in real time," said director Rick Wilson of the West Virginia Economic Justice project. His goal is to modify laws and policies so that they help individuals get the best deal out of the current system, and like so many other AFSC programs, the impact is evident in the results.

As these results are measured, AFSC staff members look at the impact of their projects and react to it. "The best way to ensure success is to constantly re-evaluate our methods to adapt them to new circumstances," said Jean-Louis Peta Ikambana. It is this kind of mindset that sets AFSC apart from other nonprofits. Quaker values guide AFSC's focus on listening, empowerment and impact as staff members work within communities to create change, and AFSC's attention to the effectiveness of its methods allows the organization to accomplish its goals.



**American Friends  
Service Committee**

**MIDDLE  
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REGION**



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