

# MARStar

Fall  
2010

Newsletter of the Middle Atlantic Region, American Friends Service Committee

*"Let us put our minds together and see what life we can make for our children."* – SITTING BULL

## Fulfilling a purpose in the community

BY BROOKE McDONALD



Omari Williams and son, Nyjae

Omari Williams was only 19 when he was handed his first prison sentence. After his release at 21, he became part of a dauntingly high recidivism rate and returned to prison for a second time.

This summer, nearly two decades after he first entered the system, Omari once more found himself a free man after he was released from the Maryland Correctional Training Center (MCTC) in Hagerstown, Maryland. He is absolutely certain that he will not be returning for a third time, and one of the reasons is his involvement with AFSC's Friend of a Friend project.

Omari would be the first to admit that, as a young man, he turned to the streets instead of looking for positive role models. He had limited goals – living only for the day-to-day. It was not until he became a mentee in the Friend of a Friend program that he realized his life experiences were not unique. Most of his fellow mentees had never known a father figure and did not have a positive support structure at home.

When he joined Friend of a Friend, a project of the Maryland Peace with Justice Program, Omari started learning new skills to help him deal with anger, express himself and communicate more effectively. He began to learn how to productively socialize with other men in a chaotic environment. And, perhaps most importantly, he began to deal with issues related to his family. Week after week, the mentors and mentees shared stories about the past. Mentors encouraged mentees to deal with their emotions – a new reality for young men who had been taught never to cry. Over time, though this intensive support system, a new “family” emerged among a group of men who shared common experiences and found strength in each other.

Eventually Omari graduated from the Friend of a Friend project and became a mentor. He became dedicated to teaching conflict resolution skills to other young men in order to minimize violence within MCTC. It was a delicate process, and Omari spent a lot of time trying to hone his techniques so that the young men he worked with, young men who had been through what he had been through, did not shut down and turn away from the group. It was hard, but it was also rewarding. As the mentors worked together to create “a model process for creating better men,” Omari recognized that the men’s creative force was “in itself a beautiful thing.”

*please turn to page two*

# Join us in encouraging a new generation of leaders

Dear Friends,

*"Young people should be at the forefront of global change and innovation. Empowered, they can be key agents for development and peace. If, however, they are left on society's margins, all of us will be impoverished."*

These words, spoken by Kofi Annan, are the constant thoughts of every staff member and volunteer of the American Friends Service Committee – at least in essence. Young adults have been the backbone of AFSC's cutting edge work throughout its history and their courage to object to war gave birth to the organization. Youthful energy, ideas, and passion for making the world a better place has informed and often driven the organization.



*A crew of seven interns has started working in Washington for the fall school semester, teaching human rights learning classes in D.C. public schools. They are shown with MAR staff members and volunteers.*

Today, AFSC continues to empower young people to shape a secure future for themselves and their communities. (You can read the story of one recent intern's experience with the D.C. Peace and Economic Justice Program on page three of this newsletter.) We are working to increase the number of young people who are actively involved in the organization but we need your help!

I invite you to consider a donation to one of the Middle Atlantic Region programs that are fostering a new generation of young people to become agents for peace and social justice. **With a \$60 contribution** you can fund one week of travel and food stipends for an intern in Baltimore, MD, or Washington, D.C. **A \$100 contribution** to the Maryland Peace

with Justice Program can directly support Nick Brady, a Johns Hopkins University intern who is developing a debate project in a Jessup correctional facility. **Or a \$200 investment in the Empowering Voices for Peace and Justice Program** in Pennsylvania will bolster the funds that are necessary to keep an intern working on a new Racial Equity through Human Rights project.

Please join us as we work with a future generation of leaders. If you are able to make a contribution of any size, please do so using the enclosed envelope.

*Peace,  
Brooke McDonald*  
Interim Associate  
Regional Director

## Fulfilling a purpose ...

Today Omar is tackling new obstacles as a part-time employee of the Maryland Peace with Justice Program. He is on a mission to prove through his own work that formerly incarcerated men constitute the effective workforce that our communities need in order to change the prison system for good. He is creating an extension of the Friend of a Friend project for the formerly incarcerated, focusing on young adults.

During the next few months Omari will be talking to young people throughout Baltimore City – recruiting them for his new project. When he goes to a new school or community center, the speech may change but the theme is always the same. He tells the youths, "I know you think no one wants to hear you, and that you don't have a voice, but I am here to listen. If you are hanging with guys who don't have your best interest in mind, I am here to help. Come, be a friend of a friend."

## The MARStar

published by the  
Middle Atlantic Region,  
American Friends  
Service  
Committee

4806 York Road  
Baltimore, MD 21211  
Phone: 410-363-1200  
mail: mar@afsc.org  
[www.afsc.org/midatlantic/](http://www.afsc.org/midatlantic/)

Interim Regional  
Director  
Nina Laboy

Editorial Committee  
Brooke McDonald  
Beth Spence  
Nina Laboy

Design by Beth Spence

Please direct comments  
or questions to  
Brooke McDonald  
at [bmcdonald@afsc.org](mailto:bmcdonald@afsc.org)

## What \$1 trillion can buy

The money that is being spent on the U.S. wars in Iraq and Afghanistan reached \$1 trillion on May 30, 2010. The American Friends Service Committee is engaging young people in video projects in which they can talk about what they would do – for themselves, their families and their communities – with the money that has been spent on war. In Pittsburgh, youths used jars and pennies to identify personal spending priorities for tax dollars as they prepared to enter the “If I had a Trillion Dollars” video competition. The videos will be on line in December at [afsc.org](http://afsc.org).



## An intern reports on worker justice in D.C.

BY SARAH RUTHERFORD

It's early on Tuesday morning, and dozens of Latino men are gathered outside of the Home Depot on Rhode Island Avenue.

A pickup truck slows to a stop in the parking lot, and the men swarm around it, negotiating frantically with the driver. The driver motions for two of them to get in and the men speed away. The rest shuffle back to the shade of the trees and wait for the next truck to appear.

It's a typical morning for day-laborers. Boasting of skills in masonry, plumbing, and electrical work, the men wait to be hired for the day, or if they're lucky, for the week. But the work is scarce, and most men wait for hours with little luck.

On Tuesday and Saturday mornings, volunteers approach the day-laborers with offers of English lessons.

As a summer intern for AFSC, I spent most of my time planning a year-long internship project, but I also had the opportunity to spend these mornings working with D.C. Jobs With Justice, an initiative

supported by a coalition of groups in the D.C. area.

We start the class by passing out small booklets and encouraging the men to form a circle.

“Cuando nos pagan?” Candace, another volunteer, begins. “In English, When do we get paid?”

The workers’ faces light up. They eagerly repeat the phrase. They explain, in Spanish, that they are often underpaid for their work. Sometimes their employers don’t pay them at all. This is the English that they want to know.

We continue with the lesson, asking each worker “What type of work can you do” and having them repeat phrases like “Do you need me to work tomorrow?”

As the hour reaches its end, we

ask the workers what else they want to learn. One man wants to recite numbers, another wants to practice greetings. By this time, most of the workers barely flinch when a truck rolls by.

“I need to learn English,” a middle-aged worker explains to me.

Most of the workers have been in DC for years, but they still speak the language that is native to their homes in El Salvador and Guatemala. They struggle with the harsh “Rs” and “Ks” in the English phrases, but they keep practicing, and we remain patient.

When the class ends, the men resume their look-out. All of those workers waiting in the notorious D.C. heat. “It’d be nice if they had water and access to bathrooms,” said Mackenzie Baris, lead organizer for D.C. Jobs With Justice.

I’m optimistic. The classes are effective, and I’m hopeful that more will be done to help the workers in the future.



(Sarah Rutherford, a junior at Brown University, just completed an internship with AFSC’s D.C. Peace and Economic Justice Program.)



4806 York Road  
Baltimore, MD 21212  
Email address: mar@afsc.org

Nonprofit Org.  
U.S. Postage  
PAID  
Baltimore, MD  
Permit No. 4984

*Visit our website at <http://www.afsc.org/midatlantic>*

## *Followup on racial equity*

The May edition of the MARStar featured a piece on racial equity, which generated a great deal of feedback.

Among those who responded was Carolyn Byerly, a professor at Howard University and a member of the Bethesda Friends Meeting.

Professor Byerly maintains that one barrier to a national dialogue about race (and gender) relations is that people of color and women have almost no control of media companies.

Please read “Federal Communication Policy and the Case for Quaker Action” online at <http://afsc.org/story/federal-communication-policy-and-case-quaker-action> or contact us at mar@afsc.org if you would like to be part of the ongoing discussion about racial equity.



*In July members of the male mentoring group in Logan, West Virginia, went on a camping and fishing trip on the New River. Lead mentor Rickey French, shown above with a member of the mentoring group, taught the young men how to set up a tent, bait a fishing line and start a camp fire.*