Working nonstop to save the lives of people incarcerated

Even before COVID-19 became the overriding concern for everyone in the US, the staff of the Michigan Criminal Justice Program were sounding the alarm about the life-threatening danger the coronavirus poses to people in prisons, jails and detention centers. Working closely with partners and family members, AFSC has been a leader in calling upon the governor to release people and for corrections staff to protect everyone. Most recent media include articles in the Detroit Free Press and the Detroit News. AFSC staff continue to work with advocates and state legislators (photo below) to improve standards of care and conditions for pregnant prisoners.
Solidarity takes many forms as Chicagoans step up
Debbie Southorn of AFSC played a major role in a recent solidarity caravan outside jails in Chicago. (The New York Times reports that the Cook County Jail is the largest known source of the coronavirus in the US.) Colleague Mary Zerkel offers these blog posts on how to make a cloth mask, how to start a mutual aid network, and how we can still care for each other across distance.

Do you have current or former youth in your network who could benefit from training on filing a FOIA? The Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) law requires government agencies to share information with the public when requested. Anyone can use FOIA to get information; it’s easier than you might think, and this research can help when you’re organizing a campaign. On Wednesday, April 29 at 8 pm CT, Debbie and Citlali Perez will lead a webinar on how to use FOIA to work for justice. The webinar is intended for youth under 35 and will last 30 minutes. (Older participants are welcomed but asked to hang back.) The registration page is here.
Iowa launches Immigrant Emergency Fund

The Iowa Immigrant Rights Program is trying to get 100 people to donate at least 10% of their stimulus check to undocumented families and individuals. Erica Johnson, who directs the program, is conducting this workplace survey regarding COVID-19. She writes: “We’re calling together all of the community response teams that exist around the state and inviting other allies/immigrants’ rights advocates and community leaders to share reports and resources for how to best respond to needs in our communities in this moment. The safety networks (like community response teams, the ICE statewide reporting hotline and the Iowa Sanctuary Movement) we’ve been building for the last three years were originally designed to respond to attacks from ICE and the Trump administration. We think that there is a role for these teams to play as we respond to this global COVID-19 pandemic.”

AFSC co-signed a letter with ACLU Iowa to the governor regarding COVID-19 and prisons and jails and has joined with others in petitioning the US Supreme Court to delay its decision on DACA. Stay in touch on Facebook.
Lifting up people in Palestine as the pandemic threatens lives
AFSC is urging everyone to sign this petition demanding that Israel release all Palestinian child detainees amid the COVID-19 pandemic. Early in this crisis, Jehad Abusalim of AFSC expressed these concerns about the potential impacts of the virus in Gaza. His colleague, Jennifer Bing, was recently joined by great Chicago volunteers Joyce Cassel and Paula Roderick for a Zoom reading of prayers for Good Friday. (The accompanying prayer booklet lists Palestine as the Sixth Station of the Cross.) Jennifer blogs about celebrating Passover and Easter online.

Can the Coronavirus cure white supremacy?
That’s one of many provocative questions raised by the Twin Cities Healing Justice Program. “It took a global pandemic and hundreds of years of asking for basic human rights for people of color for the country to pass legislation to boost struggling families and businesses. pulling trillions of dollars out from under the rug, money that has been there all along, to do this. And it only took one month. The difference? This pandemic is also affecting white, privileged people.” Engage this conversation on the Youth Undoing Institutional Racism Facebook page.
Youth art contest asks: how can the community provide support?

Jonathan Pulphus of AFSC writes on Instagram that St. Louis Program “is hosting a #RonaResistance314 challenge around the coronavirus. Youth can submit entries for five spots worth $100 each by posting a video of visual art, poetry, rap, skit, etc., around the prompt. Winners will be announced on Wednesday, April 29. Use the #RonaResistance314 hashtag and tag @yuir_stl or @YUIRSTL. Lift up youth voices around this pandemic!” Also note that AFSC St. Louis is searching for a half-time Potts Intern. The application deadline is May 10.

Learn more and help out

Check out AFSC’s COVID-19 resource page and help impacted communities….See why using war metaphors in relation to COVID-19 is unhelpful.

Grateful for your support

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