Lifting up the wisdom of young people during the pandemic
The AFSC St. Louis newsletter for May includes an update on the #RonaResistance314 Youth Art Contest, with winning entries—including Graces’s, above—announced on Facebook. The newsletter also includes young people’s wisdom on safety during the coronavirus pandemic and this recap of St. Louis work in 2019, written by Jonathan Pulphus. AFSC in St. Louis is a part of a coalition of organizations calling for local and state officials to adopt certain Covid-19 related demands around protections for the working poor, the unhoused, and those caught up in the criminal legal system. AFSC co-signed this letter on the school-to-prison pipeline.

Making sure youth voices are heard in the Twin Cities
AFSC continues work with St. Paul Public Schools, holding virtual community-building circles and hosting implicit bias circles for one of the schools. Staff recently organized a Be Heard Townhall for youth to hear how they’re doing during this time and generate interest for the youth agenda organizing work that will happen later this year. AFSC continues to do coalition building with other organizations, as well. For lively updates and interviews, check out the YouthUndoingInstitutionalRacism-TwinCities page on Facebook.
Building support for Palestinian children detained by Israel
Jennifer Bing writes that interest is building for the No Way To Treat a Child (NWTC) campaign, which was buoyed recently by UNICEF’s call for the release of all Palestinian children held in Israeli detention. Jennifer Bing has been leading a number of webinars on NWTC, including one set for this Sunday, May 17 at 6 pm CT on how to advocate as faith-based advocates. Jehad Abusalim of AFSC joined Jennifer in organizing a three-part seminar on Gaza for students nationwide. Students had the chance to meet people on the ground in Palestine, learn about its history and acquire new advocacy skills. Click here to donate in support of elders in Gaza during the pandemic, and stay tuned for a June 1 Day of Action in support of health workers in Gaza.

Joining the call to #FreeThemAll in Chicago
Debbie Southorn and Mary Zerkel of AFSC helped organize a large rally to show the love to young people locked up at the Juvenile Temporary Detention Center in Chicago. More on Facebook. Earlier, Mary led a national webinar releasing a new report on Criminalizing Mental Health: A Report on Anti-terrorism Initiatives in Illinois. Mary wrote this blog on the Believers Bail Out and joined with Zareen Kamal to call for standing up to anti-Asian Racism. Debbie led this skills-building webinar for youth activists on how to use the Freedom Of Information Act (FOIA).
AFSC leads efforts in Iowa to protect immigrant workers
With thousands of immigrant workers in meatpacking plants having tested positive for COVID-19, and several already dead from the virus, AFSC has been leading a broad coalition from around Iowa to share worker stories with Iowa’s elected officials and urge them to commit to standing in solidarity with food processing workers. Erica Johnson of AFSC has organized teleconferences for essential workers and their families to detail how the industry failed to respond adequately to the COVID-19 pandemic and share their requests for continued protections and transparency. Media coverage includes these TV and public radio reports. Workplace safety videos are available in Spanish and English.

AFSC keeps focus on people incarcerated as the pandemic spreads
The AFSC Michigan Criminal Justice Program is keeping the pressure on state officials to act on behalf of thousands of people in Michigan prisons who face illness and possibly death because of the rapid spread of COVID-19. Natalie Holbrook of AFSC is quoted in these BuzzFeed and Michigan Daily articles, and she wrote this op-ed in the Detroit Free Press. Jacq Williams of AFSC partnered with “The 24-Hour Plays” on COVID and Incarceration, in which actors created monologues based on experiences shared by currently and formerly incarcerated people, their families, and the advocates supporting them in this pandemic.
Short takes
Sharon Goens-Bradley, Interim Regional Director of AFSC’s Midwest Region, has written this annual letter (as a webpage and as a PDF) to Friends and Yearly Meetings throughout the region. We look forward to connecting with Friends during their online YMs this summer….Shanene Herbert of the Twin Cities Healing Justice Program is one of several people featured in this blog about how AFSC staff are taking care of themselves during the pandemic….Check out this round-up of AFSC’s COVID-relief work and this video of an AFSC-led Meeting for Worship to #FreeThemAll….AFSC’s Spring Alumni newsletter is available here.

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