Greensboro Coalition Launches Worker Justice Center

On September 4, 2015, over 100 community members packed into the new Central Carolina Worker Justice Center for the launch of this exciting new community project.

For nearly one year, representatives of more than a dozen different labor and community organizations in Greensboro have engaged in conversations about creating place for low-wage workers to build power, take collective action, and work for racial and economic justice in Central North Carolina.

The American Friends Service Committee is one of these organizations and has been at the table since the beginning. AFSC interns also collected dozens of surveys from local workers about what they would like to see in a Worker Center and then compiled the data to inform the creation of the center.

Greensboro’s Interactive Resource Center (IRC), a day center for individuals dealing with homelessness, is another key organization working on this project. In fact, the IRC donated a back portion of its space for the Worker Center to call home.

On the day of the opening, five Greensboro City Council members were present to hear workers from many sectors speak out about challenges they face at work and what they would like to see changed.

Though it officially launched, the Worker Center is still just beginning. Programming is starting in the form of monthly worker meetings, Know Your Rights sessions, and film screenings. The Worker Center will also host meetings of unions and other community organizations.

The Worker Center is still an all-volunteer, collaborative effort at the moment. The Coalition is working hard to build capacity to be the best resource possible for low wage workers across the area.

—Lori Khamala, Immigrant Rights Program Director

“Never be afraid to raise your voice for honesty and truth and compassion against injustice and lying and greed. If people all over the world would do this, it would change the Earth.”

-William Faulkner
Congress Can End the Detention Bed Quota!

As part of our continued efforts to end immigration detention bed quotas we continue to arrange meetings with members of congress to educate them and urge them to vote against harmful bed quotas. On September 14, 2015, members of the Immigrant Rights Working Group of Guilford County (IRWG) met with Congressman Mark Walker to educate him on the Detention Bed Mandate, the congressional appropriation that requires 34,000 immigrant detention beds to be filled at all times.

We continue to highlight how this unusual mandate is costing taxpayers approximately $2 billion dollars a year to detain immigrants to fill a quota, a waste of our taxpayer money. Having such arbitrary quotas prevents Immigration and Custom Enforcement (ICE) officers from exercising discretion and creates an incentive to detain individuals who pose no risk to public safety and could be with their families while waiting for immigration court. During our meeting, Congressman Walker had the opportunity to meet a member of our community that could be detained for a minor violation of driving without a license. With no criminal record she could easily fall into this inhumane system that would break her family apart, prohibiting due process and the ability of properly arguing her case.

Interested in hearing from his constituents, Congressman Walker wanted to know the group's perspective on immigration reform. Starting with the end of detentions and deportations, the group seeks humane and inclusive measures that lead to permanent residence and citizenship for undocumented immigrants. He received AFSC’s policy document, A New Path Towards a Humane Immigration Policy (found online at www.afsc.org/newpath).

IRWG members were able to ask Congressman Walker to co-sponsor the Protecting Taxpayers and Communities from Local Detention Quotas Act (HR 2808), which would prohibit site-specific quotes in contracts between ICE and Private Operators and to vote for amendments sticking quota language in the 2016 Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Appropriations bill. The group will follow up with the Congressman to provide him additional information on the Detention Bed Mandate but also to continue the conversation.

For more information please visit www.afsc.org/endthequota.

—Leticia Benitez, Immigrant Rights Fellow

Muslim Festival Celebrates Peace Over Hate

In June, the Islamic Center of Greensboro (ICG) received a hate letter expressing many derogatory sentiments about the Muslim community in the city. Some groups may have justifiably responded angrily and lashed out at the xenophobic and anti-Muslim feeling. Other groups may have ignored the letter, preferring to keep their heads down and out of the limelight to avoid further attacks, also justifiably. The ICG did neither. They faced the negative sentiments head on, but responded with a twist: they organized a peace festival to bring diverse people together and also to lift up the beauty and strength of the Muslim community, so frequently maligned in our country.

AFSC was proud to be a part of the Peace Festival: AFSC staff helped at the beginning of the event to craft ribbons inscribed with visions of peace and also served as the last speaker during the organized program, closing out with a moment of silence. The event ended with a brief march through downtown Greensboro with participants releasing hundreds of balloons as prayers for peace.

The festival and the ICG response provided an model for all of us, both in our individual lives and as organizations. May we all seek to respond to hatred and hurtfulness with creative, positive, and peaceful actions.

— Lari Khamala, Immigrant Rights Program Director
Fall is finally here in Greensboro with lots and lots of rain. This past Saturday wrapped up peace week celebrations. A half dozen young high school and college age young people didn’t let a few clouds overcast their activism interest in attending the first meeting of AFSC’s Youth Justice Group.

The launch of a new youth group is very exciting! Leading AFSC’S Peace & Economic Justice program as fulltime staff for over 17 months, I’ve had the privilege to hear what is on the minds of local participants about youth programs.

A few young people shared that many community programs often forget to include their voice and valuable knowledge experience about their community. Other programs claim intergenerational exchange and youth leadership, yet they fall short on delivery to hear them tell it.

“What will keep you coming back to AFSC’S Youth Justice Group?” I asked the attendees. Each response was true and not canned. Young people, especially those of color, want an opportunity to take center stage, be heard, valued, respected and have a visible position to lead a movement that shapes significant change locally. This group’s interest is broad. From queer pride to supporting classmates who are African immigrants and won’t be eligible for instate tuition when they graduate from high school, despite attending North Carolina public schools for several years.

These young people are already plugged in on local policy issues such as the destructive North Carolina General Assembly Senate Bill—SB95 on “Achievement School The bill seeks support for funding charter schools over creative ways to improve our public schools and avoid shutdowns as seen in Philadelphia, Baltimore, and Chicago.

In addition to policy-focused work, young people enjoy events that combine activities and opportunities for service, for example, a neighborhood clean up day and voter education.

Our focus is open to creating space to include interest of young people, lift them up socially as leaders, enhance skills, create meaning, and sharpen their knowledge in systemic racism, organizing and advocacy.

To learn more contact Tetheridge@afsc.org.

—Toni Etheridge, Peace & Economic Justice Program Associate

The day before the NC legislature closed session, lawmakers suddenly heard and passed HB 318, a bill which restricts which identifications local municipalities can accept for a variety of services. In the final hour, an amendment passed which allowed an exemption for law enforcement in some cases.

This amendment came about only because of serious organizing by the immigrant and ally communities. That is one small positive aspect of a devastating bill. The bill also places restrictions on which citizens can receive SNAP (food assistance) benefits.

The NC General Assembly has passed the bill, but the governor has not yet signed it into law.

AFSC urges individuals to call the governor and urge him to veto this harmful bill:

1-844-899-9913

(NC AFL-CIO hotline to the governor’s office)

—Lori Khamala, Immigrant Rights Program Director

Seeking Veto on NC HB 318: Anti-immigrant, Anti-SNAP
**We are the Spices of Life**

“We need, in every community, a group of angelic troublemakers. Our power is in our ability to make things unworkable.” - Bayard Rustin.

We halt systems and make them unworkable when we disrupt the normality; the monotonous business as usual. Variety is the spice of life and in a world that has become tedious, bland, and white washed, we could use some angelic disruption to trouble our perspectives on peace, liberation, and resistance. LGBTQ Pride was a day to commemorate black, brown, trans, queer led resistance to police-state violence, to a day consumed by corporate sponsorships and a white-washing of our collective histories. The Quaker values, SPICES admonishes us to live a life of Simplicity, Peace, Integrity, Community, Equity, and Stewardship.

The Black Lives Matter movement, seeks to hold all sectors of our society accountable for their lack of care for black life, including the LGBTQ community. How can we live with simplicity when we don’t have access to basic needs like shelter and health care? How can we live in peace when trans women of color are experiencing a genocide? How can we live and move with integrity when we sit idly by as we hear transphobic, racist, and homophobic language that dehumanizes our comrades? How can we truly live in community when we don’t show up for neighbors whose voices and experiences are silenced? How are we creating equitable spaces when we're not leveraging our privilege and building outside of our identities to ensure collective liberation? How are we being good stewards of the earth when we are silent about the destruction of indigenous lands and the gentrification of communities? Let’s uphold the SPICES that hold us to greater level of accountability and community.

—Holden Cession, AFSC Intern

**Our AALBBA Kick-Off**

Cultural Educator Kali Ferguson and AFSC Fellow Leticia Benitez recently completed three presentations with college students from Guilford College and Johnson C. Smith University (JCSU) for AFSC’s new, highly anticipated African American and Latino Bridge Building & Awareness (AALBBA) Project.

The facilitators provided a space for young African Americans and Latinos to explore some of the tensions, struggles, and similarities between the two groups. Students came together and participated in a discussion, while learning some of each other’s history and contemporary movements for justice and equality. Interest to continue the discussion was sparked as the facilitators were approached at the end of each workshop and asked to return and continue the conversation.

The president of JCSU History Club stated “More students on campus need to have this discussion,” as well as other students stating on their evaluations they were not ready to go and would have liked having a longer session.

Based on all the positive feedback from participants, AFSC plans to take the workshop into high schools in the Greensboro and Charlotte area. If you would like more information on AALBBA, contact Leticia Benitez at lbenitez@afsc.org.

—Leticia Benitez, Immigrant Rights Fellow