AFSC shares new focus for North Carolina

AFSC has had a presence in North Carolina for decades, working on school desegregation, emergency assistance, fairness for women and Black workers, peace, storytelling, state policy, and of course immigrant rights. We are so grateful to YOU and the entire community for steadfastly supporting AFSC’s work for peace and justice over the years.

This year, as we celebrate AFSC’s 100 years of peacemaking, we have experienced many changes in our local Greensboro office, both sad changes—our Peace & Economic Justice program was laid down—and happy ones—our office moved into New Garden Friends Meeting! With new regional and national leadership in the organization and a new political climate in the state and country, we have taken the opportunity to re-evaluate our focus in the NC Immigrant Rights Program and our niche in immigrant rights work.

Therefore, I am excited to announce that we are shifting our work to more intensely focus on local community organizing and leadership development of undocumented immigrants in the Triad. This work includes:

- Developing undocumented leadership by supporting small groups of immigrants meeting to identify their own issues and plan how to address them
- Holding direct actions on issues identified by undocumented immigrants
- Expanding political education of immigrant communities
- Connecting local undocumented leaders to the immigrant rights movement statewide and nationally
- Supporting needs of immigrant families facing detention and deportation and organizing public campaigns to stop deportations
- Developing Latinx Solidarity with Black and Muslim communities
- Building non-immigrant support for immigrant-led campaigns
- Supporting Sanctuary congregations

We deeply value the strong relationships we have built over our many years, and we are committed to continuing to build on those relationships, though AFSC might now relate to your group in a slightly different way than before.

Organizations and individuals each play a distinct and necessary role in our local immigrant rights work, and we honor each of those roles. AFSC’s role is shifting from policy advocacy and working with allies to resisting deportations and developing undocumented leadership in a deeper way that we have seen locally.

This shift means we will be pulling back from some of our other work, in particular coalitions and some of our state policy work, so that we can more strategically focus on local organizing. It will take time for us to settle into new patterns and priorities, but we are looking forward to continuing the journey and finding new ways to collaborate.

Many of you already know our lead community organizer Andrew Willis Garcés, who comes to us following successfully organizing immigrant communities in Texas, Oregon and Washington, DC. I am also very excited to announce that our office has been awarded a Community Organizing Fellow for our 2017-2018 year. We are proud to welcome Laura Garduño Garcia, an undocumented mother who has been volunteering with AFSC for the last several months, who will officially come on board on October 1. I will continue to direct our NC office and will still liaise with local Quaker meetings, but I will be less involved with local work, as I’ve taken on a new role as interim coordinator for AFSC’s national Sanctuary Everywhere project. In addition, our office has joined AFSC’s Communities Against Islamophobia project and we will have an intern developing local programming for this project.

We are excited about the coming year!

-Lori Khamala, AFSC Program Director
In early September, days following Labor Day weekend, Attorney General Sessions announced what many people speculated. The Trump administration declared that Deferred Action for Childhood arrivals (DACA) would be phased out within the next six months, with work permits expiring as early as March of 2018. This announcement leaves 800,000 undocumented youth without protection from deportation or a work permit.

With this reversal in policy, DACA recipients may still renew their permit for another two years before October 5th but some people’s permits could expire in less than six months. The Trump administration announced that he would be leaving it up to Congress to pass permanent legislation for undocumented immigrants that benefited from DACA. Communities have begun to organize as the six month deadline approaches and the need for congressional action becomes even more crucial. Advocates around the nation have started pushing for a clean DREAM Act—HB 3440 and SB 1615, reintroduced by Senator Graham and Senator Durbin.

North Carolina Senator Thom Tillis announced his proposal called the SUCCESS Act, a proposal that is far more restrictive and would require a voluntary self deportation agreement for those eligible, making it hard for advocates to support. Amidst this debate, North Carolina continues to mobilize for DACA and permanent legislation before the March deadline. AFSC helped organize a beautiful march in Greensboro led by DACA recipients. You can support immigrant youth by calling your representatives and asking them to cosponsor a clean version of the DREAM Act.

Minerva Cisneros Garcia has been granted a stay of removal for her deportation by a federal judge. After three months in Sanctuary at the United Congregation of Christ in Greensboro, Minerva has rejoined her family outside the church and returned to her home. This was a great victory for the Sanctuary movement in North Carolina and for Minerva who has been here for more than 15 years.

To announce her release from sanctuary, Minerva spoke at a press conference in front of the church where she expressed gratitude to supporters, the church that offered her sanctuary, and the dedication of Reverend Julie Peeples.

Her first stop out of sanctuary was to visit Juana Tobar Ortega to show her solidarity and lift her spirits. Juana has been in sanctuary for four months at the St. Barnabas Episcopal Church in Greensboro. Every immigration case is so different, and Juana does not have all the same options for relief that Minerva had. However, advocates continue to work on Juana’s case., hopeful that she, too, will be free soon.

Minerva’s victory couldn’t have happened without the support of the community. This past summer, fundraisers were held in support of the two women who were in sanctuary to help their families with costs and the loss of income in their households. To continue to offer support for other families torn apart by ICE, AFSC has established a Crisis Fund with the Interactive Resource Center to help immigrant families in the Triad. If you wish to support families through the Crisis Fund you can do so by donating to the Interactive Resource Center at gsodaycenter.org and including “Immigrant Crisis Fund” as the Tribute.
On August 12th, groups of white nationalists, white supremacists, and neo-Nazis came together in Charlottesville rallying around the confederate statue of General Robert E. Lee. In anticipation of this rally, groups of counter protestors planned a rally, clashing with white supremacists.

Counter protestors were there to show their opposition to fascism, racism, and bigotry perpetrated by white supremacists. The clashes ended with violence, chaos, and pandemonium that set the nation in motion for unsettling conversation about white supremacy. Many counter protestors were attacked and assaulted by white nationalists. During the protest, a car ran into a crowd of the counter protestors, killing one person and injuring many others.

This incident headlined national and international news for weeks, and brought the words “white supremacy” out of the mouths of many people who had refused to acknowledge it. This subject is something that groups like Black Lives Matter have talked about for years and the incident in Charlottesville brought it to a national dialogue. While the President initially refused to condemn white supremacists and later on blamed both sides, many have seen this terrible incident and the uprisin of hate groups as an opportunity to address racism and white supremacy head on and start to focus on how we can work to dismantle the influence it has in our society and institutions.

In North Carolina, a few days after the incident, protestors in Durham toppled a confederate statue during a protest and demanded the removal of confederate statues. Activists expressed that many that are a constant reminder of white supremacy, slavery, and glorification of racists in our culture and history. This toppling although it brought about many arrests, also encouraged places like Baltimore and New Orleans to remove some of the Confederate monuments. In the case of Durham, hundreds turned out to show their solidarity with those arrested and turned themselves in for the toppling of the monument. In Chapel Hill students continue to protest for the removal of “Silent Sam” a confederate statue that resides on UNC Chapel Hill’s campus.

Days after the deadly incident, Greensboro’s community members held a vigil in the Government Plaza. Community leaders and concerned members had an opportunity to speak and took this moment to mourn the death of Heather Heyer, the protestor who was killed by a white nationalist during the protest.

A day later, in the Beloved Community Center discussions were held about the parallels of this racial violence with the Greensboro Massacre that occurred decades ago in Greensboro. Reverend Nelson Johnson and Joyce Johnson shared their painful testimonies when white supremacists attacked them and killed several others in Greensboro. They expressed their views in how similar both Charlottesville and Greensboro’s response was to white supremacist violence. In that same month, Greensboro City Council made a formal apology for the Greensboro Massacre.

As we try to move forward, we see the need to hold more conversations on how to dismantle the white supremacist culture that exists and the racism that is very well alive in our country today, now more than ever.

NORTH CAROLINA ISN’T IMMUNE TO WHITE SUPREMACY

WAGING PEACE EXHIBIT STILL OPEN: SEPT. 15TH—NOV. 4TH

This exhibition celebrates the centennial fo the American Friends Service Committee and demonstrates the effectiveness of nonviolence to build justice, overcome oppression, and prevent violence—as told through the powerful stories of those who have confronted injustice over the past century. See what courage and love can do!

Location: Guilford College Art Gallery, Hege Library, 5800 W Friendly Ave. Greensboro NC, 27410
Exhibit Hours: Mon-Sat 9 am—5 pm and Sundays 2 pm—5 pm
At the end of September, North Carolina had three known sanctuary cases, two in Greensboro and one in Durham. AFSC, along with the NC NAACP and other activists, brought attention to the inhumanity of deportations by staging a memorial service for those who have died after being deported back to their home countries.

So far this year, the Trump Administration has increased deportations by forty percent. At an ICE substation in a discreet Greensboro office park, groups came together to ask ICE to stop the deportations and separation of families. With banners and tomb props, immigrant rights supporters stood, dressed in black in the evening sun as people read the names of the people whose lives were lost because of their deportation to some of the most violent countries in the world.

Supporters spoke about the two women in Greensboro who are in sanctuary, prior to the cancelation of Minerva’s Cisneros’ deportation order. In Durham, activists staged a die in and spoke alongside the NAACP to bring light to the many of immigrants who live in fear, including the family of Jose Chicas, who continues to reside in sanctuary. In Winston-Salem, where Minerva lived before Sanctuary, the day ended with a march for the end to deportations and support those in sanctuary.

October began with a Civil Rights Tour of Greensboro sponsored by AFSC and the Beloved Community Center (BCC). As part of our Centennial celebrations, we partnered with BCC to provide a tour of Downtown Greensboro and some of the historical parts of Greensboro including the Confederate monuments, East Greensboro, the old East Market District, A&T College and Dudley High School. Lewis Brandon served as the tour guide and historian for the tour, giving a group of at least fifty people, some historical context on the Greensboro Massacre, A&T’s National Guard takeover, and the fight to keep Dudley High School open.

The tour ended with a brief panel that included former AFSC staff and volunteers who shared their time and experiences while working with AFSC during the Civil Rights Era and how AFSC was involved during the movement during their time. We are grateful to be able to celebrate a century’s worth of human rights and peace work with the community and we hope to continue the work in North Carolina.