



South Star

Newsletter of the South Region, American Friends Service Committee • Winter 2014

"I have no idea if world peace is attainable. But aiming for it is."

- STOCKARD CHANNING

Parading for peace in New Orleans

For the past three years, New Orleans has seen a decline in the city's murder rate for the first time in almost 30 years. Sources credit social programs, changes in emergency room procedures, a gang task force, effective prosecutions and a variety of other factors for the three-year decline. Despite the dip, the city's murder rate still remains above the national average according to nola.com.

Since 2010, Peace by Piece has been working to do its relatively small part (amidst countless local efforts) to reduce the incidence of crime in the city. Facilitating conflict resolution workshops for youth; hosting community events that give young people artistic outlets as alternatives to violence; and organizing the Transforming Oppression Fashion Show, a platform for young people to creatively write their own narrative about injustice and its impact on their lives, collectively represent our traditional approach to promoting peace building and nonviolence.

One event that attempts to rally the community around peace and nonviolence is the Peace is Power Parade. On Saturday, September 20, 2014, Peace by Piece hosted its third annual parade. The event featured a parade through Central City (one of New Orleans' most affected crime areas) and a youth talent showcase in a park next to City Hall. The parade is a community-wide event and a public pledge to make New Orleans safer for its young people.

The fall event commemorates International Day of Peace in September. International Day of Peace was established by the United Nations in 1981 to strengthen the ideals of peace around the world. In 2001, a resolution declared it an annual day of cease-fire and non-violence.

With the annual event, Peace by Piece intends to bring people together as a call to end the violence that affects the entire city, especially young people.

This year's goal was to have 500 people pledge their commitment to a safer New Orleans. New Orleans is a city that rallies around its sports teams, cultural traditions and rich heritage. The parade and youth showcase are efforts to rally our community in the same spirit around peace and nonviolence.

Thanks to incredible weather, some willing community organizations, a host

please turn to page 8



DEE DEE GREEN
AREA PROGRAM DIRECTOR

AFSC SOAR Day Against Police Violence and Militarism

See page 2 or visit www.soar.afsc.org for more details

A message from the regional director

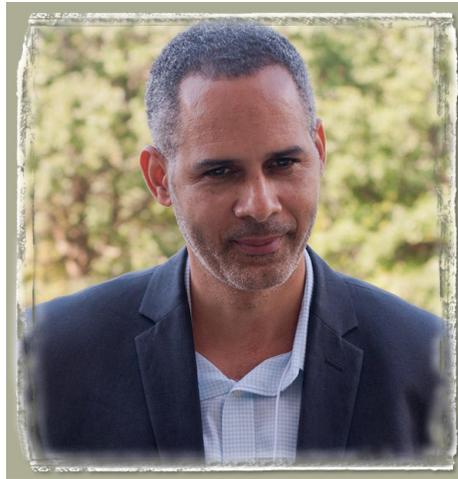
Dear Family, Friends and Supporters,

On January 15th (Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s actual birthday), our South Region-based youth programs will come together under the banner of SOAR (South Organizing Against Racism—soar.afsc.org) to organize a “Day Against Police Violence and Militarization in the Community.”

Youth-led groups primarily in AFSC's South Region, but also across the U.S., will come together to demand an end to police violence in our communities.

We will use the day to strategize on how to confront the ongoing attacks against black and brown youth by the police.

Young people are targeted by illegal stops, arrests and convictions that leave them and us scarred for life and



Kamau Franklin

decrease their abilities to seek jobs, education and opportunities to become valuable members of our community.

They are looked upon as threats that need to be treated as war combatants. So much so that the U.S. military is supplying equipment meant for war to local police departments that patrol our communities.

We must continue to stand, as young people and others have stood up in Ferguson, against such actions in order

to find solutions to these issues.

On January 15, 2015, join us as we demonstrate and strategize on the issue of police violence and militarization in our communities. (See schedule of activities below.)

As we close out the year, the South Region of AFSC is celebrating new beginnings. Our work has become more relevant than ever in the communities we serve. We have become integral community advocates on immigration policy, economic justice campaigns, to youth organizing. Our recent SOAR project is just one way we are collaborating within our programs and with the larger community to bring social justice and peace.

It is with this sentiment that we ask you to support our work with a donation. With your support we can win these struggles together and create a world where people are respected and their worth is valued.

Kamau Franklin



**American Friends
Service Committee**

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Day of Activities

- 9:00 AM – 5:00 PM: Anytime between these hours, groups should schedule an action that symbolizes opposition to police violence and militarization. The actions should be public and visual so that they lend to posting on social media.
- 5:30 – 6:00 PM EST: Panel discussion—a national panel discussion will be had on police violence in the community.
- 6:30 – 8:00 PM: Each program should host a local panel and/or teach-in. This program should be videotaped (as well as pictures taken) for future airing.

**Please visit www.afsc.org
for more information about SOAR
and for extended articles
about the South Region.**

Introducing Farajii Muhammad

Since 1999, Farajii Muhammad has been working in the youth development field.

As co-founder, president and spokesman for the youth-governed organization, New Light Leadership Coalition (now New Learning Leadership Center) he often worked to develop young leaders, connect youth to resources, and bridge the gap between youth and local government. Plus, as a social entrepreneur, Farajii has used his passion for young people to stand as a voice for youth, advocate for their concerns, and an example of a



leader and community servant.

This work has led him to serve in many avenues including speaking at community and national events, presenting workshops at conferences across the country, and consulting with community organizers, young leaders, and political figures.

Finally, since 2005, Farajii has been making his mark in broadcasting by using his radio show “Listen Up!”

that airs on public radio 88.9 WEAA FM (Morgan State University), as a medium to empower, inform and uplift the consciousness of the next generation of leaders.

Presently, Farajii joined the AFSC team in August 2014 to serve as the Youth Empowerment Coordinator for Baltimore.

He has already started using all of his experiences, skills and resources to develop the Young Leaders for Peace (YLP) coalition. YLP will serve as a means and platform that will encourage the mobilizing and organizing of young leaders to strategically address pressing social justice issues facing themselves, their peers and their communities. Farajii Muhammad can be reached by phone at (240) 707-0384 and by email at fmuhammad@afsc.org.



Yvette's story

**GRACE SLAWSKI
AFIS INTERN**

Yvette meets with me during her lunch break to tell me about her journey as an American citizen.

We sit at a table in the Swap Shop—a flea market complex in Ft. Lauderdale where Yvette works—and I step into her shoes to learn about the struggles that she has overcome.

Yvette lived a humble and quiet life in Haiti. Growing up, she was well aware of Haiti's unstable political, economic and social situation. Yvette feared the daily kidnappings and murders in the streets.

However, Yvette's calling to migrate to the United States was to care for her grandchildren. Yvette's daughter—who already migrated to the United States and had enlisted in the US Army—was moving around a lot and was deployed to Iraq in 2010.

Yvette's daughter petitioned for four of her family members to live in the US, but Yvette was the only one to gain residency. She arrived in the US on February 27, 2007.

From the moment that Yvette arrived onto American soil, she felt determined to work hard and gain American citizenship. Her goal was, and continues to be, to petition for her four children to come live with her in the US.

She has worked at the Swap Shop for much of her time since living the US, but the work taxes both her mind

and body. The hours are long, grueling and exhausting, and consequently she failed her first attempt at the citizenship exam. When she walked into Paul Mondesir's citizenship class for the first time, it was after this failed attempt.

Paul was able to work alongside Yvette to help her understand the format of the citizenship test and ultimately, reclaim faith in her capabilities. After one year of studying, she passed the exam on her second attempt. She said it would have been impossible without the help of Paul's sessions in Fort Lauderdale.

To this day, Yvette feels immense joy about gaining her American citizenship. She yells in glee “Congratulations!” to herself as she retells the story to me.

Her self-confidence has reached what she considers a “high dimension” because she feels that she has privilege as an American citizen and can “sit at the same table” with American citizens as equals. Yvette loves knowing that she has the power to vote and to impact other people's lives.

A welcoming resolution in Greensboro

LORI FERNALD KHAMALA
DIRECTOR, NORTH CAROLINA
IMMIGRANT RIGHTS PROGRAM

Since fall of 2013, AFSC's North Carolina office has worked with diverse immigrant communities across Greensboro on a project to make the city more welcoming and inclusive. One year later, challenges persist, but the grassroots work

is paying off and we are seeing progress: the city unanimously passed a Welcoming Greensboro resolution in April 2014, the Human Relations Commission appointed an immigrant member in October 2014, and an AFSC staff member is chairing a working group to re-develop the city's International Advisory Committee.

Beginning last fall, AFSC staff and members of the Welcoming Greensboro Committee (community leaders representing 13 different countries and immigrant advocates) organized a series of discussions with immigrants and refugees in Greensboro.

During 16 community conversations, we met with over 200 people representing a variety of immigration statuses from 23 different countries. Participants discussed what they like about Greensboro, the daily challenges they face as immigrant residents of Greensboro, and what changes could improve their lives and integration.

These discussions revealed the specific challenges with regard to transportation, lack of access to drivers' licenses, discrimination, language barriers, education, access to health care and social services, housing, and safety and security. The final report from this project, including all recommendations, was released in June 2014 and can be read at <http://tinyurl.com/WGIreport>.

Following the passage of the Welcoming Greensboro resolution, the city launched its International Advisory Committee (IAC), though it was heavily criticized during a re-organization in September following the appointment of a majority non-immigrant leadership team.

The Welcoming Greensboro Committee pushed the city to prioritize immigrant leadership and after persistent activism, the original leadership team with dismissed. AFSC staff Adamou Mohamed, a native of Niger, was nominated to head a working committee to devise a more inclusive structure and leadership team for the IAC.

These are significant achievements for this mid-sized city, and we are confident that the strong and diverse Welcoming Greensboro Committee will ensure that immigrant needs are prioritized in the city. Through the IAC, we want to ensure that the huge leaps forward taken by the city of Greensboro on April 15, 2015, in their path to welcoming immigrants, are not just symbolic gestures, but a shift in policies that will tangibly improve the lives of immigrants.





Youth gathering in Atlanta

In October, youths from all over the region gathered with staff at AFSC's Atlanta office for workshops on how to better advocate for social justice within their communities.

AFSC Greensboro's Toni Etheridge, who has helped the South Region roll out its new regional youth work project, says that the North Carolina office has been gaining interest from young people.

"This is an exciting time for me as a staff member with American Friends Service Committee," Toni said.

"My program work focus is peace and economic justice. Interns from the Greensboro office jumped at the chance to be on the ground floor to help shape

this new burgeoning work with me."

As youth involvement is also one of the central missions in AFSC's national and international programs, South Region staff members have been able to share the goals of the project at organization-wide events such as Chicago's Wage Peace campaign this year.

"The concept is pretty simple: link the seven AFSC South Region office locations those with program youth work," Toni explains.

"Intentionally, thread oppressive conditions that plague communities of young people of color. Collectively, present the existence of unjust social conditions of economic

oppression, meaning issues with police brutality, racial profiling and voter suppression, to name a few, and raise regional awareness with the strength in numbers from young people [to lead] this movement. One hope is to create, amend or change legislation."

South Region staff members are looking forward to nurturing the project as more youths continue to become involved with AFSC.

"New faces attend our weekly Thursday meetings at Guilford College. Interns Holden Cession and Lek Siu lead the gathering," Toni says. "We have been experiencing incremental growth."



Eddie Conway and friends cut the ribbon at the opening of the Connexions library

Connexions Academy Library Opening

an interview with Principal Kia Harper

by Friend of a Friend Program Director Dominique Stevenson

In October 2014, AFSC’s Friend of a Friend program organized a book drive to support the opening of a library at ConneXions Academy in Baltimore. Led by Friend of a Friend associate Marshall “Eddie” Conway, the drive brought in thousands of books to fill the empty shelves, which were unveiled in a public ceremony featuring activist artist Emory Douglas.

Dominique Stevenson: How did ConneXions [Community Leadership Academy] become involved with AFSC?

Kia Harper: The relationship between AFSC and ConneXions is probably one of the most serendipitous experiences. Our newly formed spoken word team performed at the Louder Than a Bomb competition shortly after Mr. [Edward] Conway had been released from prison and he happened to have been in the audience as an honorary guest. One of our teachers who was there for support thought that it would be a great idea for Mr. Conway to come and speak to our students, considering his contribution to the history of civil rights. However, the teacher was too timid to approach him as the announcement was made that he was exiting the building.

After getting the nerve, we went outside and ran after him figuring the worst that he could say was no, introduced ourselves, and asked him if he would come to the school.

He said that he would love to and that was the beginning...

DS: How did the idea come about for the new library, and how did the school reach out for assistance?

KH: Interestingly enough, Mr. Eddie (as he was endearingly termed) began having his community meetings at the school and we would tell him that he should have his meetings in the library. And he was... having his meetings for about a month in the shell of a newly renovated space with completely empty and mobile shelves. One day Mr. Eddie asked if they were going to get to see the library. We responded to him saying that he was *in* the library and in fact, the space had just been renovated. We seemed so proud and didn’t realize how desensitized we were once Mr. Eddie replied, “Where are all the books?” We let him know that it was the school’s responsibility to supply the library and due to budget constraints, the library never seemed to make the priority list. Mr. Eddie was appalled and began making phone calls, rallying volunteers, collecting thousands of books, making double dozens of visits and in October, kept his word by hosting the grand opening of the library for the school and the community. We will always be grateful to AFSC, Mr. Eddie, Ms. Dominique, Ms. LaKeyma [Pennyamon] and the dozens of volunteers who made it possible.

WV Child Poverty Campaign gains momentum



Rick Wilson at the Our Children Our Future symposium

Our Children Our Future, West Virginia’s campaign to end child poverty, is gearing up for the 2015 legislative session. This coalition of coalitions, of which AFSC is an active member, has won more than a dozen policy victories over the last two years, including prison reform, Medicaid expansion, raising the minimum wage, and restoring funding for family programs. While most of these victories take place at the capitol in Charleston during the 60-day legislative sessions that typically last from January to March, the campaign works statewide and year-round to build momentum.

This summer, the campaign held four regional workshops in different parts of the state, each of which drew more than 100 participants. These included presentations by AFSC WV Economic Justice Project director Rick Wilson on how policy change happens. In September, more than 400 people attended a policy symposium in Charleston where groups refined policy proposals for the coming year. Speakers included Senate President Jeff Kessler, House Speaker Tim Miley, a representative of Gov. Tomblin, and several legislators. During October, the campaign held candidate forums around the state.

Young people from the AFSC Appalachian Center for Equality (ACE), directed by Lida Shepherd, have been active in the program throughout the year and have been instrumental in several victories. The campaign honored young people from ACE’s Logan program with a special award for civic engagement in November. The students have organized forums, participated in workshops, met with legislators, and testified on issues in Logan, at the capitol and around the state.

In December, the campaign voted on its top ten priorities for the 2015 legislative session. The top five include protecting funding streams for programs that protect children and families, expanding early childhood education, juvenile justice reform, protecting Medicaid and CHIP (Children’s Health Insurance Program), and protecting drinking water. These will be advocated for at the capitol and at regional forums around the state. Other issues that gained support included raising the tobacco tax, stopping meth labs, preventing childhood sexual assault and providing earned sick days for workers. The 2015 legislative session convenes on January 14, 2015.

DS: How will the new library impact the students and staff at the school?

KH: Honestly, I think that it’s a resource that we have to get used to. It’s unfortunate, but not having a functional library for so long has immunized students and teachers from its value and usefulness. It’s sickening that our children’s reality does not include the standards by which many schools in suburban America take for granted. To be fair, you do see many libraries in the elementary schools that are vibrant and full of literary options. And yet, in many of the secondary level schools that are not considered “elite,” you have situations like ours. And, when many of our student’s reading levels are so far behind, having a library in urban schools should absolutely be the priority in every school, not let to whether or not the school’s budget can support it or not.

I think that the impact will be monumental not only for students, but for teachers and parents. I think that it symbolizes the rejuvenation of a community when adults who span generations unite and rally for the cause of education in the name of future generations.

I think that it was important for our young people to see this in action, to see folks who did not know them, care and invest their personal time and energy to ensure that there was some sense of adequacy in the school where they spend so much time.

I think that reading uncovers truths. I think that reading offers choice. I think that reading changes lives. And having the library has allowed our students and teachers the ability for school to finally “feel real.”



**American Friends
Service Committee**

SOUTH REGION

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Parading for peace ...

of volunteers and several committed residents of New Orleans, the parade was a moderately successful feat full of learning opportunities for next year. Working with organizations like Cease Fire, Families and Friends of Louisiana's Incarcerated Children (FFLIC), Break Out, Grow Dat!, Rethink, Dillard and Tulane University students and The Center for Ethical Living and Social Justice Renewal, will inevitably broaden the reach of the parade, increasing turn out in the future.

Tragedy surrounds our city daily, sometimes several times a day. A month after the event, the youth activist community lost a young comrade to gun violence. The body

of 15-year-old parade participant George Carter was found just blocks away from his home near Sampson Park where Peace by Piece interns work with youth from the Desire community. George's death and the insufferable deaths of so many African American boys and men speak to the needs of a demographic that is figuratively and literally dying.

Inevitably, Peace by Piece won't facilitate, program or parade an end to violence, but will leverage opportunities like the Peace Parade to raise awareness, organize and influence local policies to create a safer New Orleans where young people don't simply survive, they thrive.

Honoring George

I recently lost a friend, an ally and a fellow organizer due to senseless violence. George Carter was a great youth community activist, and I worked with him closely as a member of PIYA (People's Institute Youth Agenda).

Now (violence) is not normal anymore because I was directly affected by it. Now I know by losing him what it felt like to be on the short end of the stick.

I was at a loss and the only thing going through my mind was that George was gone, and I wanted to know who did it. I just began to wonder why I wanted to know. What would I have done once I came face to face with the perpetrator?

Taking action into my own hands would not have brought George back. So I realized that retaliation was not the answer. It may seem like the next best thing to do after the loss of a loved one or friend, but it's that same retaliation mentality that leads us to burying our loved ones in the first place.

Austin Smith
Peace by Piece intern