This summer, the American Friends Service Committee continued its tradition of engaging youth by sponsoring freedom schools in the South Region.

AFSC has a rich history of organizing alternative education dating back to the Civil Rights Movement, when volunteers helped to arrange placement for African American students who had been locked out of schools that refused to desegregate.

Warrenton, NC was the site of AFSC’s 1963 Citizenship Education Project, which offered over 30 workshops in four counties to provide the area’s African American population with information about voting procedures and registration.

This year, Peace by Piece (PxP) Baltimore partnered with several artists, activists and instructors for its first Summer of Us Young Advocates Camp at Mergenthaler Vocational-Technical High School (MERVO). While offering a wide range of lessons for youth, the camp was rooted in teaching social activism.

“I think the kids enjoyed the different dynamics that we brought to them,” expressed Meaca Downing, PxP Baltimore intern. Activities included a field trip to the American History Museum in Washington, D.C., a yoga class and a home gardening workshop as well as lectures and discussions on criminal justice, police relations, mental health and bullying.

Downing said that she fell in love with students’ excited reactions to a potting and planting exercise used to demonstrate sustainable living in a city faced with the issue of food deserts.

Nerra Muhammad, co-chair of the Education Committee for PxP, agreed that the versatility of the camp was important to its organizers. “We really wanted to give the students something that they do not receive throughout the year ... something that they had never been exposed to.”

Downing also worked with PxP program director Farajii Muhammad to develop a pledge for participants to sign at the end of the camp based on their commitment to community involvement. Muhammad has kept in touch with administrators who personally thanked PxP for facilitating Summer of Us, and is planning on returning to MERVO to further engage the students in a new after school program.

In West Virginia, the Appalachian Center for Equality sponsored the WV Freedom School, during which participants attended a walking tour of Charleston. Grace Bible Church Rev. J. Watts led the tour, giving youth an in-depth history of racial issues in the city including urban renewal that led to displacement of minorities in the 1960s and ’70s.

36 students from around the state took part in the three-day course of workshops focused on teaching strategies for youth organizing in the context of addressing structural racism.

With plans to nurture the seeds planted by each program, AFSC continues its deep tradition of educating with the freedom school model.
Dear Family, Friends & Supporters,

In our communities, organizations like the American Friends Services Committee are providing support to formerly incarcerated people and their families. In the South, AFSC is blessed to work with other organizations, faith-based groups, and individuals committed to improving opportunities for people in and out of prison.

In Baltimore, our Friend of a Friend program works in several prisons in Maryland, providing training to inmates on nonviolent conflict resolution while supporting an environment where they can study the causes and effects of mass incarceration and how they can participate to dismantle this system. After they’re released from prison, Friend of a Friend accompanies them as they transition back into the larger community, connecting them to ongoing community organizing work.

In Atlanta, we have started a restorative justice program that helps young people who’ve been charged with crimes get involved with real community work, such as designing programs to prevent their peers from walking down the same path, as an alternative to having a criminal offense on their record.

Programs like these help, one person at a time. But working toward policy changes that affect thousands remains critical. Advocates across the country continue to chip away at the problem of mass incarceration from different angles, whether calling for decreasing sentences, decriminalizing certain drugs offenses, and alternatives to incarceration programs, to name just a few.

As individuals, communities, and organizations come together to challenge the imprisonment of our brothers, sisters, and neighbors, we can’t ignore the central role that racism plays in our justice system.

Please visit the link below for AFSC’s healing justice issue of Quaker Action, which highlights the movement to end mass incarceration as an organizational priority, in the South Region and nationwide.

— KAMAU FRANKLIN

Note: the above was published as part of From slavery to mass incarceration, authored by Kamau Franklin for Grassroots Thinking and the Fall 2015 issue of Quaker Action.
In mathematics, the letter $x$ often represents an unidentified variable, the unknown. In Roman numerals, $x$ represents the number ten. In New Orleans, many remember it as the symbol first responders marked on the front of one’s home during Hurricane Katrina to signify how many were found dead or alive.

August 29, 2015 marked the 10th anniversary of Katrina’s landfall. In actuality, the hurricane itself caused very little damage to the city of New Orleans and surrounding areas. However, the levee breach that occurred hours after the storm, and the onslaught of privatization that followed, devastated the city and its people.

The hurricane triggered a mass exodus of the city for those with the means to get out in time. As journalist Naomi Klein points out, “It was taken for granted that the state—at least in a rich country—would come to the aid of the people during a cataclysmic event.” Many of the 120,000 New Orleanians without transportation waited for help that never arrived, while others were shipped out of the city without any knowledge about their final destinations or the whereabouts of their loved ones. In the weeks after the storm, the city became an empty and eerie place, a tabula rasa, or “an opportunity,” as economist Milton Friedman put it.

Friedman saw it as a chance to reinvent the public sphere, to make it private. His ideas were welcomed by the city, devoid of its people and its accountability base. The drastic change in the composition of the city following the storm has progressively gotten more distant from its pre-Katrina make-up.

According to the 2000 census, Orleans Parish’s population was nearly 500,000 people, with two of every three residents being black. In a special report from the Census Bureau

Above: Peace by Piece New Orleans intern Breial Kennedy.

in early 2006, the city’s population was only 158,400. Since 2006, the population has grown to 384,320 residents. However, in the new New Orleans, only three of every five citizens are black and the white population has increased by roughly six percent.

Demographics have not been the only thing to change substantially since the storm. In the wake of a tragedy, the new privatized city that Friedman dreamed of was finally born. The “shock doctrine” tactic of forcing disaster capitalism onto New Orleans affected everything from education to housing to culture. Unfortunately, Friedman died before he was able to see his handiwork.

The destruction of the city’s public education system came just months after the storm. The state-run Recovery School District took over the majority Orleans Parish public schools in November 2005; Orleans Parish Public School Board fired 7,500 experienced school personnel in December 2005; and all but a handful of the city’s traditional public schools were taken over by out-of-state charter organizations. 10 years later, most historic schools have been closed or chartered, schools named after black leaders have been renamed, and students are being taught by predominantly white fresh-out-of-college Teach for America teachers.

TFA teachers and other transplants sought housing in hip and affordable areas. Many took refuge in the Upper Ninth Ward (now known as the Bywater), the Irish Channel and Mid City, which have been predominantly black neighborhoods for the past few decades.

Gentrification and the lack of affordable housing continue to push New Orleans’ historic residents beyond the city limits, disconnecting them from their place-based identities. Concurrently, housing developments are being razed, having their names changed, or being converted into mixed income apartment complexes.

Between a lack of affordable housing, poor education, and a shortage of living-wage jobs, it is no wonder that so many of the city’s residents not returned. Peace by Piece (PxP) New Orleans intern Breial Kennedy collaborated with The Real News Network to collect stories of recovery by displaced New Orleanians. The compilation of survivor stories was made into a short documentary entitled Katrina X.

The success of Katrina X was made possible by the generosity of other groups in the Friends network, such as the Houston Meeting, who provided the film crew with lodging, as well as Baltimore’s Friend of a Friend program, who helped secure much needed resources—resources that would have been priceless during Hurricane Katrina.

While filming, Breial found that the overwhelming reason New
DC HUMAN RIGHTS SUMMIT OFFERS YOUTH ADVOCACY OPPORTUNITY

On June 22nd, 2015, a group of young people and AFSC staff from the DC Peace & Economic Justice Project and West Virginia’s Appalachian Center for Equality (ACE) gathered for a week in order to discuss human rights and prepare for a day of meeting with elected officials. The DC Youth Human Rights Summit, a weeklong event now in its third year, was supported by Bethesda Friends Meeting as well as the Barrett Foundation.

The summit served as a way to expand upon participants’ prior knowledge of human rights while challenging their thinking. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted by the United Nations in 1948, was the foundation for a week of discussion on issues of homelessness, police brutality, human trafficking and access to equitable education.

After completing workshops on community organizing and direct advocacy, participants with the help of Georgetown Law School interns addressed the judiciary committee of the D.C. City Council in support of anti-human trafficking legislation, with plans to push further to a wider audience.

Students are also preparing a human rights art exhibit to be displayed and presented to city officials and the community on December 10, 2015, International Human Rights Day. Titled “Human Rights in a Human Rights City: A Critical View from D.C. Youth,” the exhibit will be a continuation of the advocacy work from this year’s summit.

More highlights from AFSC’s 2015 DC Youth Human Rights Summit can be viewed and downloaded in PDF form here.

NORTH CAROLINA CHURCH FIRES: REBUILDING IN THE SPIRIT OF COMMUNITY

A string of half a dozen Southern Black churches burned days after nine African American worshippers were gunned down during bible service at Emmanuel A.M.E. Church in Charleston, South Carolina—a few of which were ruled arson after an investigation. One fire hit close to home: Briar Creek Road Baptist church in Charlotte, North Carolina.

In the early morning of June 24th, Briar Creek Baptist was ablaze. Several days later, a Charlotte Fire Department investigator determined the fire was set intentionally, but not classified as a hate crime. Reportedly, Briar Creek Road Baptist congregation is multicultural.

ASFC’s Greensboro staff got in touch with Briar Creek to offer help with debris clean up. Four weeks after the fire, Samaritan’s Purse volunteer coordinator Stephanie Ware called to say that cleanup was underway. Samaritan’s work in the U.S. provides emergency aid and relief after natural disasters such as hurricanes, floods and wild fires. Many times the volunteers stay behind to assist with restoration.

AFSC engaged Friends in NC-NAACP chapters, the Friends Disaster Service of NCYM-FUM (North Carolina Yearly Meeting), Guilford College Friends Center Campus Ministry Associate/Intern Gregory Woods and Facebook friends—each eager to roll up their sleeves.

Small teams reported to help from August 1st through the 5th. AFSC staff member Toni Etheridge manned the wash station, removing layers of soot debris from metal fold up chairs, pots, pans, trophies, plates and items the church wanted to salvage because of religious significance and memories. In the sanctuary, smoke caused most of the damage. Major property loss was in the rear of building near the children’s learning area and computer workstation.

“The destruction to the children’s area saddened me the most,” said Etheridge, who herself endured a home fire when she lived in Brooklyn, NY. “It’s uplifting to know the damage did not result in the loss of lives.”

Briar’s church members will find comfort as they move forward when they recall the many supporters from the community that arrived in their time of great need.

In the coming weeks, AFSC plans to gather volunteers that helped in order to create a meaningful reflection by unpacking shared experiences.

Briar Creek Baptist continues to welcome aid. To learn how you can help, view details here.

Photo by AFSC staff

TO READ THE EXTENDED VERSION OF THIS ARTICLE, VISIT AFSC.ORG
What happens to Turner Field once the Braves baseball franchise leaves is a hot topic in Atlanta. Will that land become a casino? Will a new stadium replace Turner Field? Or will the area be developed for retail, dining and condominiums like Atlantic Station?

One thing that’s for sure is that the communities surrounding Turner Field can’t afford another development project that benefits a few well-connected folks while further cutting off and displacing long-term residents who have lived near the field since before the area was ripe for such a land grab.

Atlanta needs strong, organized communities to make sure that development that happens in the area benefits those that have been holding down the community for years, but we also need to have time to relax and enjoy each other, to enjoy the community we love!

Building a movement takes a lot more than neighborhood meetings and strategy sessions. Active base-building should include cultural events, house parties and other social events that bring locals together.

In August, the Atlanta Economic Justice program had the opportunity to work with community partners to do just that. Community Day brought hundreds of residents together at Four Corners Park in the heart of beautiful Peoplestown. Though the event was hosted in Peoplestown, it was also a celebration of all the amazing Atlanta neighborhoods south of I-20. Families came out for an afternoon filled with music, entertainment, community education, and lots of giveaways.

With the help of the J Dilla Foundation and a ton of local businesses that volunteered to put out donation boxes, AFSC was able to give out close to 300 backpacks filled with school supplies and dental packs! We also had music all day, food for all, a slip-and-slide for the kids, free ice cream, and a whole lot more.

In an effort to bring more residents into the movement to protect, improve, and expand affordable housing, AFSC asked residents to sign a pledge to defend their homes and the homes of their neighbors. Hundreds signed the pledge! AFSC is excited to continue to work closely with the newly formed resident-led SMP Housing Justice Movement and Occupy Our Homes Atlanta as they lead the way in the fight to stop mass displacement in the Turner Field area.

Tim Franzen

Atlanta Economic Justice Program

Tim Franzen would like to thank the following organizations and businesses for their support:

- Peoplestown Revitalization Corporation
- Henry & June
- Ebrik Coffee Room
- Atlanta Friends Meeting House
- Hodge Podge Coffee
- Annie E. Casey Foundation
- Rise-Up Georgia
- ATL Raise Up
- Atlanta DSA
- Sam & Son Grocery Wholesale
- The Rick McDevitt Center
- Zulu Nation
- Youth on the Move
- Boynton Village Tenants Association
- McGruder Grocery
AFIS and Catholic Charities to Begin Immigration Sessions and Clinics

The American Friends Immigrant Services (AFIS) legal team and the Catholic Charities in Monroe County (CCMC) began a new adventure in 2015 to reach the most marginalized and vulnerable migrants in the cities of Marathon and Key West, Florida—the most southern cities in the U.S. with almost non-existent legal services.

Since the 2014 Executive Actions on Immigration, which are intended to protect nearly five million immigrants from deportation over the next three years, legal battles involving immigration fraud and scams have increased, leaving many migrants in rural communities confused and vulnerable.

During these visits, migrants told AFIS that some people have already traveled to Miami to apply for DACA+ and DAPA, as they were lured by unscrupulous public notaries. The damage notaries cause can be life-lasting, either because people cannot get their immigration status anymore, or they end up being removed from the U.S. The significance in bringing information and legal services to migrants is immeasurable—and smiling faces show how appreciative they are.

With the spirits to accomplish good work, the AFIS team traveled to Marathon and Key West in April, May, and July of 2015 to have community sessions on DACA, DACA+, and DAPA as well as provide legal consultations to assess particular cases. AFIS outreach work is generally divided into two steps: 1) the first to render sessions/presentations on particular immigration laws, programs, or initiatives; 2) the second to give legal consultations to each individual.

In July of 2015, AFIS visited Key West specifically to give individual immigration consultations.

One case that illustrates some of the troubles migrants go through involves an individual from the Atlantic part of Nicaragua, whose language is English. He came into the U.S. in 1998 with a visa to work on a ship (C-1D), then met his wife, who is a U.S. citizen. They have two children and live as a family in Key West. A lawyer filed a petition on his behalf knowing that he did not qualify for the petition because of the type of visa—most of the time a C-1D visa prevents individuals from getting a green card through marriage.

For many years, he wanted to consult with other lawyers but could not in Key West, which is 130 miles from the mainland. When asked why he did not apply for Temporary Protected Status (TPS) in 1999, he responded “I didn’t know, no one told.” Nicaragua was designated a TPS Country in 1999 and its citizens who applied at that time continue to have this benefit.

In collaboration with the Catholic Charities Director and Pastor at the Catholic Church in Key West, AFIS will be able to provide information and legal services to migrants who may not have access otherwise—to empower individuals and families to protect their legal status or lack thereof.

- Lucio Perez-Reynozo
AFSC Miami Area Director
In 1922, Friends Drew Pearson and Walter Abel visited West Virginia in response to appeals for emergency relief. AFSC was young—barely five years old—but it had already amassed an impressive record in relieving human suffering.

The results of their investigation were published in an AFSC pamphlet titled Personality and Coal in West Virginia. They reported that “We are satisfied by our investigations that there is widespread destitution, and much need of relief, among the families of the miners.”

The coalfields were undergoing a painful transition as demand for coal fell after World War I. The top priority was food, especially for children.

From 1922 through the next 10 years, AFSC’s relief efforts ramped up. By 1932, it reported that in one year:

- 22,441 children were fed one meal per day;
- 6,081 preschoolers, expectant and nursing moms were given milk rations;
- 2,670,230 meals and rations were served;
- 25.5 tons clothing and bedding and 24 tons of food and gifts sent to mining areas.

These efforts sometimes including working with local and state governments to provide assistance. By the time Franklin Roosevelt was elected and the New Deal ramped up, AFSC had experience on the ground to inform new public programs and even influence federal policies.

Fast forward nearly 100 years, and the coalfields are once again experiencing a painful transition as coal jobs decline due to market forces, diminished reserves, and regulations.

And child nutrition is still a focus of work.

Office of Child Nutrition to expand free school meals by encouraging counties to adopt the federal Community Eligibility Provision (CEP). CEP can provide free meals for all students in schools with high poverty rates. AFSC also published and updated a guide titled Food Matters to support advocacy efforts.

The state became eligible for CEP in the 2012-2013 school year, when 35 out of 55 counties participated, impacting 283 schools and over 90,000 children. The next year, numbers increased to 39 counties, 335 schools and over 110,000 students, thanks in part to advocacy efforts.

Last year the provision reached 40 counties, 17 of which provided free meals countywide. A total of 374 schools participated with 128,041 children.

Although numbers are not yet available for 2015, Wetzel County, which had not adopted the program, decided to provide free meals countywide to over 2,800 students. Harrison County will expand the program to over 3,500 additional students. AFSC helped persuade the county board to pilot the program at three schools last year.

“There’s a growing recognition that kids need good nutrition to learn and be able to succeed and is as basic a part of the school day as classroom instruction,” says AFSC West Virginia Economic Project director Rick Wilson. “Feeding all kids cuts paperwork and can save schools money while also removing stigma and giving a break to working families. Everybody wins.”

- RICK WILSON, WEST VIRGINIA ECONOMIC JUSTICE PROJECT DIRECTOR
Katrina X cont. from page 3

Orleanians did not return to the city was a “lack of resources and better opportunities.” The film underscores the struggles of displaced New Orleanians, as well as the shortcomings of local and federal governments following the storm. Youth were also a reoccurring theme in documentary interviews. Katrina survivor Chanel Shorts abandoned the home she bought only months before the storm because she felt that her children were getting a better caliber of education in Houston. Betty Carter said, “There were not enough services to meet the needs of [New Orleans’] children.” Attorney Carol Kolinchak pointed out that following the storm, New Orleans’ juvenile detention facility was rebuilt on a toxic brown field.

Given the grave effect that Katrina had on a generation of young people, it was only fitting that Breial take the lead on Katrina X. Her own experiences during the hurricane, as well as the knowledge she gained while filming, helped Breial to land a spot on a discussion panel following the film’s premiere.

Moreover, the documentary provides a counter-narrative to the city’s resilience charade. Are the people of New Orleans resilient? Yes, but the trauma is ongoing. 10 years after the storm, we have survived, but recovery remains a mystery to many.

- Tabitha Mustafa, Peace by Piece Program Associate, New Orleans

Click here to support Peace by Piece New Orleans’ latest initiatives, including paid youth internships and a new community activist space.