



**American Friends
Service Committee**

Gender values in action

South Star

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“Give light and people will find the way.”
— ELLA BAKER



AFSC INTERNS LEAD NEXT GENERATION OF CHANGE



From the South Region’s northern-most office in Baltimore to its southern-most office in Miami, young activists are getting involved with their communities through internships with the American Friends Service Committee.

In 2015, two standout interns used their time with the AFSC to work with other young activists, get in touch with their communities and develop leadership and organizing skills.

In Baltimore, Meaca Downing (shown top right) has been working with Peace by Piece (PxP), a program that gives young people opportunities to promote justice, human rights, and peace on a local level while connecting issues to national policy opportunities.

As a public relations major, Downing said that she began to make connections between her work in school and her work with AFSC. “It has helped me with networking, and understanding resources—and how scarce those resources can be.”

Downing said that looking back

Images by AFSC and Orly Shuber

on her 2015 experience with PxP, one highlight was working with high school students during the Summer of Us Young Advocates Camp in Baltimore (documented in our [fall issue](#)). “The workshops that we held opened their eyes so much,” she recalled. Some participants had never been exposed to urban gardening, a concept that could help close the gap of food availability in the city.

Food deserts are one issue that require immediate action in Baltimore, and Meaca described that urgency when talking about her internship. “It makes me proud to be a part of it,” she said about AFSC assisting PxP program director Farajii Muhammad to provide direct support on short notice. “He’s out there to help, and that’s [Farajii’s] first goal ... Baltimore needs a lot of help.”

In addition to the Summer of Us freedom school, Downing regularly participated in numerous community events and actions including a march

on Maryland’s state capital of Annapolis on Martin Luther King, Jr.’s birthday when PxP and supporters demanded legislative action against perpetrators of police brutality as part of AFSC’s [SOAR](#) (South Organizing Against Racism) campaign.

Looking forward, Downing hopes to continue working with AFSC as she completes her undergraduate studies. Currently she is involved in a project that uses social media and open data analytics to analyze and monitor non-violent drug offenders during reentry from the Baltimore area correctional system.

In Miami, the American Friends Immigrant Services program hired Saul Aleman, an organizer from Homestead, FL, to help young people tell their stories about immigration. Originally from San Luis Potosi, Mexico, Aleman came to the United States at the age of 3 and became involved with the immigrant rights movement after high school when he realized that attending college was a

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A MESSAGE FROM THE REGIONAL DIRECTOR

2015 has been a year of great sadness and resilience across this country and in the South Region. From the terrorist attack on black churchgoers in Charleston, South Carolina and the underreported southern black church burnings that followed, to the killing of Freddie Gray and Baltimore's Uprising, to the dangerous demagogic language employed against immigrants and Muslims by leading "mainstream" presidential candidates, our communities have been scarred by violent words and actions.

Fortunately, there have been many enlightened voices to counter those destructive narratives. The circumstances of our time have turned those who care about their communities into activists, and those activists have made their voices heard in opposition of police brutality,



Photo by Shamica West

institutional racism and violence targeting LGBTQ individuals.

In these visceral post-recession times where vast wealth disparities have become the norm and civil and economic rights are only as good as what you can pay for, our organization and our partners in peace

still seek an alternative vision.

The American Friends Service Committee has a long history of supporting people and movements across the world and here in the south. We have played a needed role of stability and support for social change, justice and peace. Leading from behind, and at times from the front, has helped us nurture various constituencies, both locally and abroad in our national and international programs.

We can grow stronger with your support. We can continue in our role of linking movements and ideas and providing much needed resources to young people and disenfranchised communities.

Over the past few years our (your) work has taken on an ever-expanding urgency. We need your support to keep that work going.

— KAMAU FRANKLIN



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SOUTH REGION ONLINE



2015 AFIS intern Saul Aleman shares his story as an activist working to educate Florida youth on immigration in this "Lifting Voices" piece available on [AFSC's YouTube](#) channel.

Visit www.afsc.org for extended articles about the South Region

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END OF YEAR HIGHLIGHTS



Left: In Miami, American Friends Immigrant Services in November celebrated with graduates of Project Smart Vote, an initiative to educate Haitian immigrants who are pursuing their U.S. citizenship.

“This is more important, maybe sometimes, than the presidential election,” says Paul-Andre Mondesir,

who teaches local elections as a priority in the citizenship prep course. “I motivate them to vote ... by knowledge, to make sure their vote will be a smart vote.” Since 2011, the project has helped hundreds of Haitians attain their citizenship.

Read more in this [article](#) by the Public News Service.

Right: The NC Immigrant Rights Program recently published three more amazing digital stories made by young activists [Jorge](#) and [Maria](#) and Ending Detention and Deportation Fellow [Leticia Benitez](#). These very personal videos give participants a platform to share their experiences as undocumented individuals.

In addition, AFSC was involved in two major immigration related events in Greensboro. First, staff and supporters worked on a resolution to oppose [House Bill 318](#), an anti-



immigrant and anti-SNAP recipient bill in North Carolina. With the help of many, the Greensboro City Council voted to pass the resolution.

On November 23, Greensboro staff co-organized a press conference to



[welcome Syrian and other refugees](#).

About 350 people including elected officials, immigrants and aid workers also participated in a potluck-style meal where residents showed support for the city’s immigrants and refugees.

Images by Lori Fernald Khamala (above middle) and Jorge Gama



West Virginia’s Appalachian Center for Equality Program was proud to take part in West Virginia State University’s Taking Action for Racial Equality event, which attracted over 100 students, speakers and locals, including several AFSC participants.

ACE member Takeiya Smith (right) and others contributed to discussions on voter engagement, LGBT safety and advocacy, juvenile justice reinvestment

and the Second Chance Employment Act, among other issues related to racial inequality.

“People care, but many lack knowledge on how to make a difference,” said Smith about helping to organize the event and engage the community.

More on the event in this [write up](#) by the *Charleston Gazette*.

Photo by Chelsea Costello

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challenge for undocumented individuals.

After enrolling in college and becoming interested in the immigrant rights movement, Aleman co-founded Homestead Equal Rights for All (Homestead ERA), now the largest youth-led immigrant organization in Florida. With ERA and AFSC, he focuses on empowering immigrant youth so that their stories can reach the greater community.

“I’m proud of being able to train

leaders, being able to recruit leaders,” he says of identifying powerful voices in the youth in an [Acting in Faith interview](#) with AFSC.

With AFIS, Aleman is busy: he works to educate the public on eligibility for DACA (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals) and DAPA (Deferred Action for Parents Accountability), while also working to end the relationship between Immigration Customs Enforcement (ICE) and local police, to prevent raids that target upstanding members of

society who happen to be undocumented.

“I’m definitely going to be around in the community to support AFSC, and anyone who feels they need to have their voices heard,” states Aleman about his involvement, though his internship period with AFSC has concluded.

Interns like Saul and Meaca prove that the next generation of change lies in our youth—activists who are invested in their communities now and for years to come.



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