



## News from the Grassroots

December 2020 Issue 97

### Leadership Institute Graduation

At the end of November, 18 leaders from 12 Virginia Organizing chapters celebrated the successful conclusion of our six-week Leadership Institute. Participants learned many organizing skills to build power and win campaigns.

At the end of the program, Patrice Smallwood of the Norfolk Chapter gave the graduates their charge going forward, "Own our Voice in this World," which we have posted on Facebook.



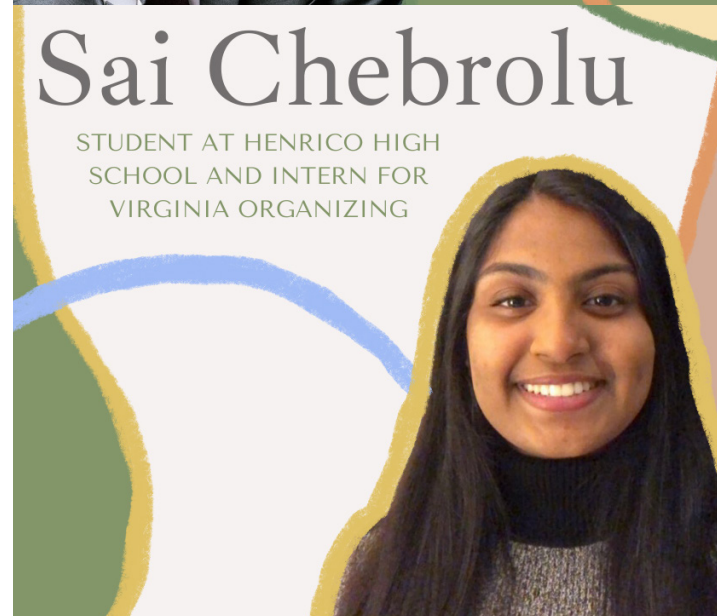
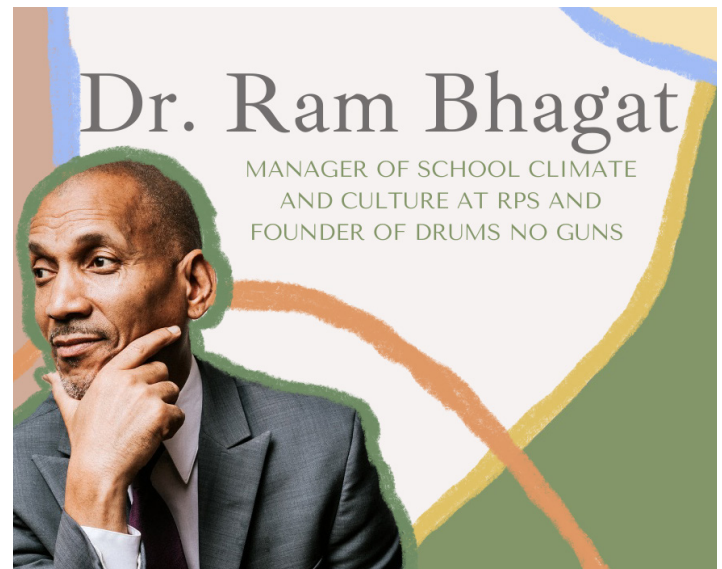
### Congratulations to the graduates!

Sai Chebrolu, Kiyanna Court, Karen Downing, Kimberly Dyke-Harsley, Gerie Fatundimu, Barbara Jefferson Harris, Christine King, Andrea Jackson, Briana Jones, Sarah Miller, Allison Powell, Natalie Romero, Julia Scheidemantel, Patrice Smallwood, Cornel Toyloy, Valerie Washington, and Dakota Ziegler

### Community Building and Community Healing at RPS

Dr. Ram Bhagat, the Manager of Culture and Climate at RICHmond Public Schools (RPS) and Sai Chebrolu, a high schooler at Henrico High and an intern with the Richmond Area Chapter, held a public, online conversation about Dr. Bhagat's work to transition in-school discipline at RPS from punitive to transformative on November 18.

After their conversation, 55 attendees shared ideas about how they can build community and healing at RPS. Many thanks to Sai, Dr. Bhagat, Performing Statistics, and Richmond Advocates for Youth for their work to facilitate this inspiring discussion.



## Meetings with Legislators

Ahead of the General Assembly session, chapters have held meetings with 11 state senators and delegates so far, including Senators Deeds, Hashmi, Lewis, Lucas, Mason, and Spruill, and Delegates Heretick, Hudson, Jones, Scott, and Simonds (with more to come!).

Leaders have been asking their legislators to support the Right to Vote Amendment, expungement access, fair energy bills and a Green New Deal, and better public transit, among other issues.

### Take action!

**Contact your legislators and urge them to support the Right to Vote Amendment!**

**Find your legislator at this link:**

<https://whosmy.viriniageneralassembly.gov/>.



Delegate Shelly Simonds meets with the Newport News Chapter



## Thanks for your support on Giving Tuesday!

Your generosity makes it possible for us to find grassroots leaders like Kiyanna Court of the Washington County Chapter. Kiyanna shared her powerful story of the night she became an activist and the work she's done for her chapter in order to build power for racial justice with Virginia Organizing. If you missed it, you can still read Kiyanna's story on the donate page of our website until December 7.



## Staff News

On November 25, Virginia Organizing's Founder, Joe Szakos, retired after 42 years of organizing in Chicago, Kentucky, and Virginia. Joe, we cannot thank you enough for all you have done to build power in Virginia! We will miss your stories, advice, and wisdom, but know you will not be too far away. Enjoy your well deserved retirement!

From Joe: "And the next phase? I'm working on a book about community organizing in small towns and rural areas, and helping with some local affordable housing projects, especially for those in the disability community. I'm also mentoring a group of young organizers and some other things."

To learn more about Joe's career, visit his Wikipedia page:

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Joe\\_Szakos](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Joe_Szakos)

New River Valley organizer Andrae Hash will take over the Lynchburg Chapter. To contact him, email [ahash@virginia-organizing.org](mailto:ahash@virginia-organizing.org) or call 540-320-7204.

## Local Chapters and Areas Served:

Charlottesville/Albemarle County, Danville, Eastern Shore, Harrisonburg/Rockingham County, Fredericksburg, Lee County, Lynchburg, Martinsville/Henry County, New River Valley, Newport News, Norfolk, Portsmouth, Staunton/Augusta County, Suffolk, Washington County, Waynesboro

On Campus: Virginia Highlands Community College, Emory and Henry, UVA Wise, JMU, EMU, UVA, NSU, ODU, VT, Radford, Virginia Wesleyan, TCC, UMW

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