

VIRGINIA **ORGANIZING**

News from the Grassroots

June 2023 Issue 127

A New Chapter in Wise County!

Wise County hit the ground running. As they developed over the past few months, they have worked on dismantling racism, affordable child care, infrastructure, and more.

After a blackface photo of a member of the school board surfaced, members called for the board to participate in a Dismantling Racism Workshop. So far, most of the board, school teachers in several districts, and faculty at two local colleges have all agreed to participate!

They also won their first campaign to get a drinking fountain in a local park. At the Big Stone Gap Juneteenth celebration they co-hosted, they signed their petition to the State Governing Board to become an official chapter with Virginia Organizing.

This is a powerful group of people! Let's all give them a warm welcome to Virginia Organizing.

More on Juneteenth

This year two supporters of the Wythe County Chapter made videos about what Juneteenth means to them.

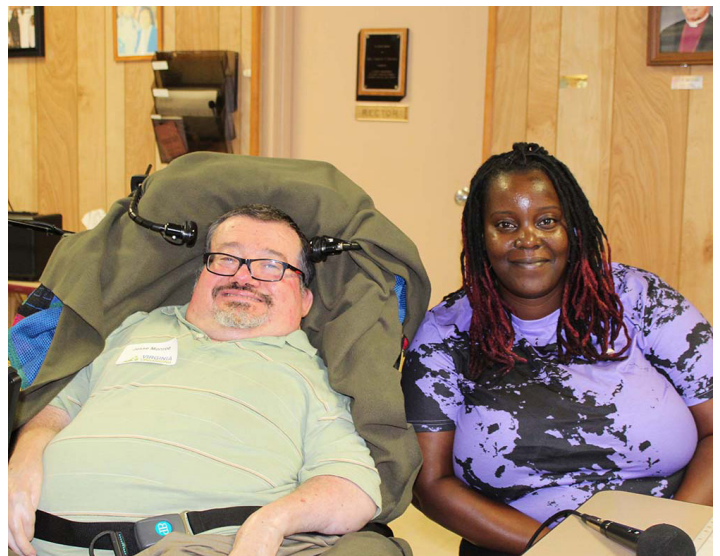
Rev. Mia Sloan explained that Juneteenth is a national independence day, and everyone should celebrate the history of the emancipation from slavery that the holiday commemorates. You can watch her video on our YouTube channel: VOPVideo.

Rakaya Nasir-Phillips said, "Juneteenth is all about remembering those who were enslaved and their dare to love us into a future where none of us will have to be in chains. It's a call to action to dare to dream of a future that you can impact and touch and feel and love and see your beautiful Black self in." Watch Rakaya's reel on our Instagram: vaorganizing.

Chapters around Virginia hosted or tabled at Juneteenth events throughout the weekend.



Kuumba Watoto Drum and Dance Ensemble at the Juneteenth celebration in Big Stone Gap. They are a "Drums Up Guns Down After School Program" from Knoxville.



Jesse Monroe (left) and Ashley Robinson

Regional Grassroots Gathering

The Portsmouth Chapter hosted a daylong workshop attended by members from Eastern Shore, Newport News/Hampton, Norfolk, and Suffolk on June 3.

In addition to skill-building workshops, members enjoyed a panel discussion about disability rights, mental health, and other issues we work on with Jesse Monroe of Hope House, Zakiya Hoyett of Eggleston, and Seneca Bock of the League of Women Voters.

Jesse Monroe was a leader in the Norfolk Chapter campaign that won major infrastructure improvements for people with disabilities in Norfolk.



Wise County Chapter members attended the ribbon cutting for the new water fountain in June. (Photo credit: Ked Meade)

Lilypads Housing Featured Community Partner

Shortly after Lily Koym was born in 2015 she was diagnosed with a rare, life-threatening congenital heart defect. After months of treatment, her doctors at the University of Virginia Medical Center said they wouldn't recommend additional treatment. They sent her home and advised her parents to prepare for the worst. But her parents, Jen and Todd Koym, would not give up, and they sought second and third opinions until they found a surgeon at Boston Children's Hospital who saved Lily's life.

Any family that has faced an adverse medical diagnosis that requires long-distance travel for treatment may understand the additional layers of stress and complexity the Koym's faced as they sought help for Lily: stresses like the expense of travel, lodging, and disruption to employment, as well as the isolation.

"In many ways, it was like COVID started in 2015 for us," Jen says. "We often had to isolate to prevent her from getting sick so she'd be ready for any necessary surgery."

The Koym's found their saving grace in Boston through an organization called Hospitality Homes. On two-days' notice the organization placed them with a host home where they could stay indefinitely while Lily was being treated at the hospital, and the host family helped with cooking, navigating public transportation, and orienting them to the neighborhood. The Koym's' positive experience with Hospitality Homes gave them the idea of replicating the model in Charlottesville, Virginia, where they live.

"We learned that families were coming to UVA and sleeping in their cars because there were no organizations offering what we experienced in Boston," Jen says. "That is why we decided to start our own." That is how Lilypads Housing came to be in 2017, under the fiscal sponsorship of Virginia Organizing's Joint Plan of Work program.

The first host family opened their home in 2019, and before the COVID-19 pandemic hit they had grown to 15-20 households hosting patient families at any given time. Referrals came through social workers at UVA. All of that came to a halt during the pandemic due to restrictions on visitors at the hospital, so fewer families were traveling. While most restrictions remain in place, Lilypads was able to open 6 standalone guest houses in December 2021 – a slight departure from the host family model, but still a critical resource for patients' families.

Jen gets her energy for this work from the supportive interactions she has with families who are going through the same ordeal she experienced with Lily.

"Families are often really thankful to be able to talk with someone who has also gone through a really challenging medical diagnosis for their child – the isolation, navigating difficult medical decisions, living away from home, etc. Many of the families we have helped have now become good friends," Jen says.



Right now their biggest need is for additional host homes, especially units that can be used for longer-term stays such as AirBNBs or detached apartments. It has proven too difficult to place long-term guests in shared spaces, so the detached units are the most sustainable and stable approach. Improving food access through gift cards to DoorDash or GrubHub is also a tremendous help for families who depend on the downsized options available at the hospital.

To learn more about their story, their host families, and their needs, visit the Lilypads Housing website at <https://www.lilypadshousing.org/>.

VIRGINIA ORGANIZING 2023 BEACH RAFFLE

One week in a 3-bedroom, oceanfront condo
on Hilton Head Island, South Carolina

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TICKETS:
1 FOR \$5
5 FOR \$20

*Winning ticket will be drawn at the Grassroots Gathering,
September 23, 2023. Winner will receive one week at a
3-bedroom, oceanfront condo on Hilton Head Island, SC. Week is
negotiable with owners and not all weeks will be available.
Winner does not need to be present to win.*



GG2023 Beach Raffle

Join us at the Grassroots Gathering in Richmond on September 23 this year! We will have a big action at the Capitol in the morning and workshops in the afternoon.

And...we will draw the winning ticket for our yearly beach raffle. Previous winners have reported they had a wonderfully relaxing week in a donor's oceanfront condo on Hilton Head Island in South Carolina. It's a great way to support Virginia Organizing.

Local Chapters and Areas Served:

Charlottesville/Albemarle County, Danville, Eastern Shore, Harrisonburg/Rockingham County, Fredericksburg Area, Lee County, Lynchburg, Martinsville/Henry County, New River Valley, Newport News/Hampton, Norfolk, Portsmouth, Pulaski, Richmond Area, Suffolk, Waynesboro, Wise County, Wythe County

Virginia Organizing
703 Concord Avenue
Charlottesville, VA 22903
434-984-4655
info@virginia-organizing.org
www.virginia-organizing.org