

VIRGINIA ORGANIZING

News from the Grassroots

May 2023 Issue 126

A Day without Child Care Listening Sessions

In Newport News/Hampton and Wise County, members participated in listening sessions with people in the community about their difficulties getting or providing child care.

All over the United States, child care is unaffordable to many working people, and yet providers do not earn a living wage. In Wise County, a participant talked about how Headstart and school programs for aftercare are all full with waiting lists. No care is available during the summer for many parents.

The chapter is going to try to work locally on solutions, including pushing the county government to help with the cost of licensure for people who want to provide daycare.

In Newport News, Baxter Carter, a legislative aide from State Senator Monty Mason's office, attended the listening session. Members wrote letters to decision-makers to urge them to vote against cuts to child care programs.



Mothers and caregivers at the Wise County Listening Session



Newport News/Hampton: Baxter Carter (left) listens to community members about child care affordability.



Delegate Clinton "Clint" L. Jenki
District 76 (running for Senate District 17)

DelCJenki@house.virginia.gov

District Office

P.O. Box 4305
Suffolk, VA 23439
Office: (757) 809-0214

Session Office

Pocahontas Building
900 E. Main St.
Richmond, Virginia 23219
Office: (804) 698-1076
Room Number: W428

How Legislators Made the Grade:


Legislator Report Cards

The report cards for legislators in our chapter areas have been very popular with members! Each card evaluates a member of the General Assembly on how they voted on 19 bills that we cared about.

How did your state senator or delegate vote on education, housing, mental health, and energy burden?

The cards are available on our website in English and Spanish.

**JUNE'S CLASS
WORKSHOP:
REPRODUCTIVE
JUSTICE**



**Tuesday June 6,
2023**

7:00-8:30 pm

Register now!

**ASL and Spanish interpretation
will be provided**

Reproductive Justice

For our Community Learning and Strategy Session (CLASS) on June 6 at 7 p.m. on Zoom, we will be talking about Reproductive Justice.

Learn more about the history of reproductive justice and participate in a round table discussion about how the issue impacts your community and what you can do about it.

Closed captions, ASL, and Spanish interpretation will be provided. If you need ASL, please let us know ahead of time if possible.

Brave Souls on Fire | Featured Community Partner

Not all mental health care is created equal.

For Myra Anderson of Brave Souls on Fire, nothing underlines that statement more than the ways Black people have experienced marginalization and violence at the hands of the mental health establishment. The need for more mental health resources, and the use of mental health intervention as an alternative to police as crisis responders, has been front and center in conversations about policing in America in recent years. But simply replacing police with mental health workers won't fix the problem if the system does not address its underlying racism. Brave Souls on Fire seeks to change that.



Anderson points to the distrust many Black people have of mental health providers. It is a distrust rooted in history and personal experience.

"African Americans are at the highest risk of experiencing depression and other forms of mental health conditions, yet are least likely to see traditional mental health services for a number of reasons. These include interlinked levels of inequality, implicit bias, discrimination, lack of culturally competent providers, misdiagnosis, lack of access, and mistrust of providers due to historical harm.

Brave Souls on Fire, which has a joint plan of work with Virginia Organizing, is a peer-run organization dedicated to emotional wellness, culturally-affirming peer support, advocacy, and healing justice for African Americans. They are piloting unique programs to meet the needs of the Black community in the places people feel safest and most at home. That includes peer facilitated support groups that focus on mental health from a Black perspective and which center the ways racism affects mental health. They also provide one-to-one peer support for those who don't want a group setting.

"Peer Support is not therapy. It is a supportive relationship built common experience, mutuality, and trust," Anderson says.

Their most recent pilot program is called Beyond the Shop, which provides access to culturally affirming mental health support by establishing peer support groups in barbershops and beauty salons. They also reach beyond their own programs to connect people to healing resources throughout the community.

"There's more to mental health care than (just) a therapist and a psychiatrist. There's also acupuncture, meditation, yoga, aromatherapy etc.," she says. "Mental health is a jigsaw puzzle so people need help navigating it."



Brave Souls on Fire has taken on the role of advocacy, working with lawmakers and people creating programs in the community.

They work for cultural competency training for mental health providers, and push for the adoption of the Marcus Alert, which seeks to minimize the role of law enforcement in mental health crisis response. A big goal is to end the stigma attached to mental health by raising awareness and educating the community through public events.

For Anderson, the work is rooted in her own life story.

"This is who I am. I've struggled with my mental health for most of my life. Sometimes when you overcome something, your purpose becomes to support and encourage others in overcoming the same adversities," she says. "I know what it is like to experience more harm than good in mental health systems. Having experienced all these things is what fuels my work."

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 Open

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