

Stronger Together

Virginia Organizing Mid-year Report 2023



Jesse Monroe
Our Voices/Hope House

 VIRGINIA
ORGANIZING

Virginia Organizing is unique. We're the most diverse non-partisan organization in Virginia. Because of that strength, we call for and win better local and state government in communities from Eastern Shore in the east to Lee County in the west.

That's why so many people find belonging to a chapter empowering and transformative.

For people who face poverty and discrimination, participating with such a diverse group working for justice and sharing power can be healing of deep wounds. For someone like me, a history teacher and a white woman from Danville, my years of participation are satisfying my need to do something about the injustices in our country and our state that have threatened to tear us apart since the colonial era.

We are stronger together. If all of us join in, we can accomplish so much more than any of us alone. Everyone affected by a government policy should have a seat at the table and be heard by people in power.



This year, Jesse Monroe—a leader in the Norfolk Chapter whose picture is on the cover of this report—helped to win a comprehensive upgrade of infrastructure in Norfolk so that the city would be more accessible to people with disabilities. He spoke about the chapter's work at a regional Grassroots Gathering in Norfolk in June along with board member Jay Johnson, who lives in Newport News. Jay has been a member of the board for decades and gives the most inspiring speeches of anyone I know. Jay and Jesse represent the best of who we are and what we do.

I'm proud of the workshops we offer yearlong on topics like Reproductive Justice, Housing, and Why We Vote. We provide Spanish and ASL interpretation whenever they are needed. We offer free three-day workshops on Dismantling Racism and Gender Justice that open hearts and minds.

We continue to focus on Education, Housing, Mental Health, and Environmental Justice in our statewide work, and this summer and fall we will concentrate on civic engagement. The elections in November demand everyone's wholehearted effort to protect our rights and the gains that people of color, immigrants, and LGBTQ+ people have won in recent years.

So far, 2023 has been the hottest year in recorded history, and we understand that the climate crisis calls for action. Our members worked on energy burden, regulation of utilities, and a just transition to renewable energy in the General Assembly. I'm proud to know that we also provide administrative support for more than 50 joint plans of work, including POWHR and ARTivism that are working to stop the Mountain Valley Pipeline, and On the Level that brings more people into the climate movement.

Please give what you can to keep Virginia moving forwards, and thank you for supporting this crucial, transformative work.

Lily



Chiquita Hubbard led the child care listening session in Newport News. “Raising children is a joint effort of the community. Neighbors, schools, doctors and child care centers all play their role. The biggest challenge being a mother to children living with disabilities is finding a child care center that’s willing to be that resource to my family. When we understand the benefits of working together all families will soar. That is why I am grateful to be a part of Virginia Organizing, an organization that cares enough to advocate for our community, educating and encouraging all to use their voice and to stand up for what’s right.”



In March or April every year, chapters hold their annual meetings, where they celebrate their victories, take stock of all the work they’ve done, plan for the future, and just enjoy being together. Portsmouth may win the prize for the biggest annual meeting ever!



Never did I think for one second attending a holiday party would result in my joining Virginia Organizing at the start of 2023, BUT here I am.

During my first meeting with the Norfolk Chapter, I was elated to learn they were wrapping up a campaign for disability rights, as I am disabled. The primary focus of the campaign was to improve living conditions for people with disabilities living in Norfolk, including things like more frequent bus stops and fixing all of the sidewalks and curb cuts. City Council has agreed to work on these things.

Additionally, I learned a fellow member was newly appointed to the Norfolk Commission for Persons with Disabilities and members were already deciding on the next campaign. (Affordable housing won by majority vote). We are currently getting started on our campaign to go to City Council to ask that they make housing more affordable and accessible for folks who cannot afford rent or are on vouchers, including people with disabilities.

It should be noted Virginia Organizing invests its energy into improving the quality of life for **EVERYONE**. As a result all are welcomed. As a member you are encouraged to find what works for you on your schedule. What we do hardly feels like work.

If you're interested in finding out more about us, visit virginia-organizing.org to locate a chapter in your area or receive information.

Virginia Organizing's focus is on Real People, Real Change, because this organization is the Real Deal.

Kenya Bacon, Norfolk



A small group discussion at the Hampton Roads Dismantling Racism Workshop in March



In January, Waynesboro held a vigil for affordable housing and tenant rights. The chapter continues to push city council to create a rental inspection program so that tenants whose homes are unsafe will be able to make landlords obey the law without fear of retribution.



Members from the Wythe County Chapter and organizers met with Senator Bill Stanley (second from left) during the 2023 General Assembly session. Every chapter sent members to meet with legislators to urge them to support our priorities.

2023 Summer Interns

Anyue Ai is a rising junior at Yale College majoring in Ethnicity, Race, and Migration. Outside of class, she is involved in on-campus organizing, from reproductive justice to workers' rights. She is passionate about racial justice and grassroots organizing.

"Virginia Organizing organizes around the principle that the people closest to the problem are closest to the solution. As a college student interning for the summer, I have loved working with Virginia Organizing. It focuses on building people power, and its model of democratic decision making really centers community members. From 1:1 conversations to member-led chapter meetings, Virginia Organizing understands that community change is most effective when it is grassroots."



Gabi Harris is a rising second year at Spelman College from Richmond, Virginia. She is majoring in Comparative Women's Studies and Political Science, and is interested in public policy research and development.

"While interning at Virginia Organizing, I learned the power of base building. I have learned that a critical way to develop a strong base is to care for members and build a reliable, supportive community where people feel empowered to share their experiences and ideas."

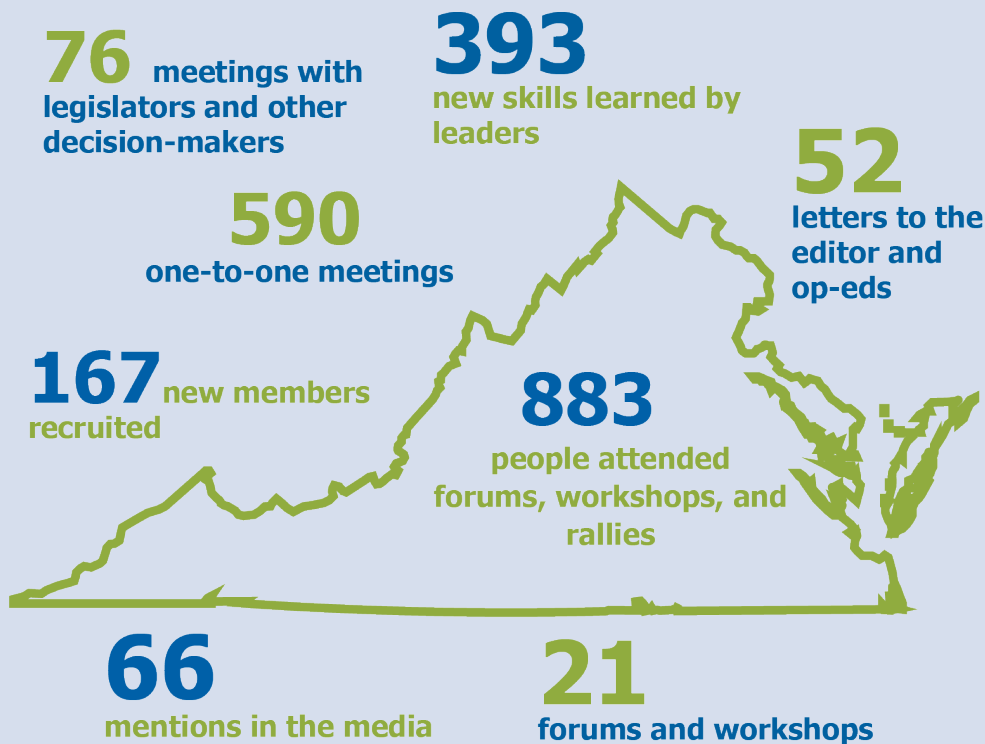
"The organization welcomes new and long-time organizers and fosters collaboration within and between chapters. My internship experience reaffirmed the significance of community involvement in policy development and implementation."

Brook Smith hails from Floyd, Virginia and is a rising junior at Yale University double majoring in Political Science and Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies.

"My work with Virginia Organizing has shown me the value of banding together as a community and organizing for a better future. Virginia Organizing embodies the spirit of true community collaboration, taking every voice into account and acting based on the collective wants of each chapter. They truly listen to what problems are facing communities and encourage members to work together for their own liberation."

"Working with Virginia Organizing is a life-changing experience, both in terms of changing policy and in terms of changing your view of the world!"





A New Chapter in Wise County!

They 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.

They have already held actions on affordable childcare, racism on the school board, environmental justice, and more.





VIRGINIA ORGANIZING

Chapters 2023



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