



VIRGINIA ORGANIZING

News from the Grassroots

August 2024 Issue 140

Central and Southwest Regional Grassroots Gatherings



Virginia Organizing has been continuing to connect our communities together as regions through regional gatherings around the state! At the end of July, our central region chapters gathered for a Regional Grassroots Gathering in Charlottesville. The event brought out members from the Waynesboro, Harrisonburg, South Boston, Richmond, Fredericksburg, and Charlottesville Chapters for a day of workshops, guest speakers, and strategies for building power in the central region of Virginia.

Similarly, last weekend, our southwest region also held a Regional Grassroots Gathering that brought our Wise County, Wythe County, Danville, and Halifax chapters together. At the virtual gathering, Josh Otsey, of the Wise County Chapter, facilitated a workshop on Organizing 101 and Brandy Faulkner, of New River Valley Chapter and the State Governing Board, facilitated the Overcoming Barriers of Community Organizing workshop.

Kathy Logan, of the Danville Chapter, shared her enjoyment of the gathering by stating that "everything they talked about...everything that [she] was in was amazing." She noted that she was pleased by the discussions and workshop groups, and that she is planning to attend the statewide gathering in person next month.

All of our regional gatherings have contributed to generating enthusiasm for our upcoming statewide Grassroots Gathering on September 21 in Richmond!

Call to Action: Require the FHFA to maintain up-to-date energy standards for new homes

We are joining the effort to put pressure on the Federal Housing Finance Agency (FHFA) to adopt up-to-date energy standards for new homes with mortgages backed by Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac. The current codes are costing many Virginians through high utility bills and inadequate housing. We want to see utility costs decrease and quality of living increase, that's why our statewide Housing Strategy Committee is supporting the Campaign to Lower Home Energy Costs.

In April, HUD and USDA settled on standards that will fulfill a requirement laid out in a 2007 law directing departments to adopt the most recently published energy-efficiency standards. Despite the benefit that the up-to-date energy codes would provide for homeowners, they are currently facing major opposition by the National Association of Home Builders (NAHB). Show your support for upholding these standards by signing this [petition](#).

[Click here](#) to read more about the campaign.

Norfolk Mindfulness Press Conference

In early August, our Virginia Organizing Norfolk Chapter held a press conference to update the public on the proposed Mindfulness Program for Norfolk Public Schools. They discussed the impact of mindfulness on stress reduction, promoting positive behavior and increasing academic performance.

Coach Jensen Baker, of Portsmouth, spoke about the platform for the pilot program stating that "with mindfulness, what we do is to develop a calmer atmosphere. Teachers cannot teach and children cannot learn unless they are in a calm atmosphere, and this is what we do with Inner Explorer."

The chapter also presented the 200 pledge cards that have been gathered so far in support of the program, with a goal to nudge NPS to implement the program in time for the upcoming school year.



We are Dismantling Racism Across the State!

As a core part of the work we do in our communities, we hold Dismantling Racism workshops to address the ways that we are all affected by racism in Virginia. These workshops enable participants to gain a better understanding of personal racism, cultural racism, and institutional racism.

These workshops are important opportunities for people of different races and ethnic backgrounds to reflect on personal experiences, discuss race-centered issues, explore theories in anti-racism work, and focus on how to build power to dismantle the racist systems we face in our local communities and on the state level.

This month, our Wise County Chapter held a Dismantling Racism workshop for Wise County teachers and school administrators, specifically to address concerns of systemic racism in the public school system. The workshop was rich with enthusiastic discussion, sharing personal experiences, and mutual respect amongst unlikely conversation partners.



Wise County Dismantling Racism Workshop
August 3, 2024

While the primary intention was to engage the members of the Wise County public school system, unfortunately only 1 of the 1,000+ school personnel across 11 schools attended the workshop. Despite this disappointing turnout from the school system, attendees still expressed the value of what was gained from the event, and what would have been a beneficial training to better the schools.

Participant, Leah Teasley, said that she "felt very welcomed, heard, and gained a lot from it. It was very informative and enlightening. It felt very nice to know that people from the community I've lived in my whole life actually cared about the racial conflicts in our area."



Richmond Dismantling Racism Workshop
August 10, 2024

The following weekend, our Richmond and Fredericksburg Chapters hosted a Dismantling Racism Workshop in Richmond. Chapter leaders Kathy Woodson and Nancy Carpenter co-facilitated the workshop alongside our organizers. Members from both chapters attended the workshop and shared about their personal experiences and perspectives.

Keep an eye out for upcoming Dismantling Racism workshops in your area. They are a great opportunity for anyone who wants to explore personal experiences with racism, gain a better understanding of racial problems in our communities, and generate ideas about how we can all actively work to dismantle racism, build power, and be committed to systemic change.

Local Chapters and Areas Served:

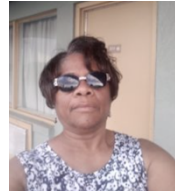
Charlottesville/Albemarle County, Danville, Eastern Shore, Fredericksburg Area, Harrisonburg/Rockingham County, Halifax County, Lee County, Lynchburg, Martinsville/Henry County, New River Valley, Newport News/Hampton, Norfolk, Portsmouth, Richmond Area, Suffolk, Waynesboro, Wise County, Wythe County

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

Featured Community Partner - Lending Hands

This month, we are highlighting Lending Hands as our Featured Partner. This article is a repost from May 2021, our first monthly feature! It comes as a timely mention, since as of this past week, Lending Hands has become its own 501(c)3 organization and is no longer one of our Joint Plans of Work (JPWs). We have been delighted to work with this organization and all that it has done to empower members of our community.

Cherry Henley, the founder and Director of Lending Hands in Charlottesville, has always found her energy in connecting people to resources to help them thrive. She launched Lending Hands in 2009 to be a network resource agency for those who are formerly incarcerated, and she assists people as they seek to obtain housing, employment, and other resources necessary to stabilizing their lives as they transition back into society.



Even while incarcerated Henley enjoyed helping others get access to resources, seeking to fill the gaps that made it harder for people to make it on the outside. After her incarceration she drove for the work release department at Albemarle-Charlottesville Regional Jail for over nine years while working out of her home office.

In addition to helping formerly incarcerated individuals navigate the system and find resources, Lending Hands provides its own temporary housing for people in transition. Henley says that "on a typical day I am responding to the needs of those who need housing, jobs, or advocacy help. Lending Hands tries to meet these needs by providing resources directly or by making connections to other organizations." She also works with other agencies in Charlottesville to challenge the systemic injustices that hold people back. The Lending Hands women's home has provided transitional housing for those re-entering back into society.

Henley gets her energy from watching people survive and thrive through community support. "I've seen people now [serve] on boards and commissions, go back to school, start businesses," she says. When asked what she needs from the community to make her work possible, she offered a list: "I need the community to be engaged, I need people not to stigmatize others without giving them a chance, I need accountability from legislators." She also repeatedly stressed the importance of community support, and the value of individuals and organizations who offer help. "I am honored to do the work of making lives better."

To learn more about Lending Hands you can visit their website at <https://lendinghandsnetwork.weebly.com>

VIRGINIA ORGANIZING 2024 BEACH RAFFLE

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

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

Winning ticket will be drawn at the Grassroots Gathering, September 21, 2024. 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.



2024 | VIRGINIA ORGANIZING Grassroots Gathering



Saturday, September 21, 2024
9:00 A.M. to 3:30 P.M.
St. Paul's Episcopal Church
815 E Grace St.
Richmond, VA 23219

Gather with chapter members from across Virginia for a day of workshops, guest speakers, and learning about how to build power!

Our gathering will highlight the work that we are doing toward restoration of rights and housing in Virginia.

REGISTER NOW
info@virginia-organizing.org
www.virginia-organizing.org

2024 Grassroots Gathering Raffle Tickets & Ad Book

As we prepare for the statewide Grassroots Gathering in September, we want to remind you that tickets for our annual Beach Week Raffle are already available! The winner will receive a one-week stay in a 3-bedroom condo in Hilton Head, SC. The winner will be announced on September 21 during the Grassroots Gathering event. This is a great way to enjoy a relaxing vacation and support Virginia Organizing at the same time!

Also, if you would like to advertise in the program book we give out to all of the participants at the gathering, please [fill out this form](#).