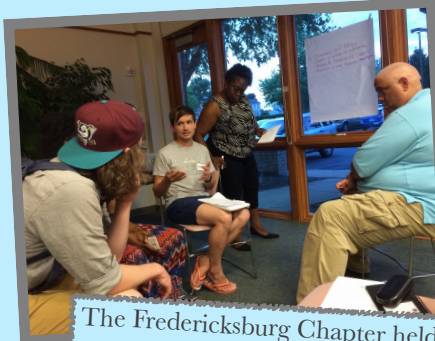


The Petersburg Chapter held the 2nd Annual Green Walk on May 31 to kick off and raise awareness for their local campaign on addressing food insecurity in the city. Participants used a map to identify grocery stores in relation to their homes.



The Fredericksburg Chapter held a community meeting to discuss concerns about local school punishment policies that has been deemed the "school-to-prison pipeline."



The South Hampton Roads Chapter received a 20th anniversary proclamation honoring Virginia Organizing's work in Chesapeake in June.

News From the Grassroots

Local Campaigns Mean More Victories for Chapters

Last year, Virginia Organizing Board members, Chapter leaders and staff met at the annual power analysis to discuss the political landscape in Virginia. From that weekend, the State Governing Board shifted focus from national and state campaigns to more local and Chapter-level campaigns. The Board's goal was to work toward changes that were feasible and achievable in this political moment.

Local Chapters took this shift in focus well and ramped up organizing efforts on important issues for their communities. Some of these efforts were coordinated across the state, others were strictly local.

Because of this shift, Virginia Organizing has had a lot of victories for communities to celebrate! In addition, leaders have learned new skills and have led issue campaigns from start to finish.

In the last year, Virginia Organizing has worked with other groups to ban the criminal history question on city, county, and state job applications in Virginia. Chapter leaders, including many directly affected leaders who were formerly

incarcerated, took the lead to speak out at local government meetings, have conversations with policymakers and other public officials, and write letters to the editor and op-eds.

In Fredericksburg, the Chapter became aware that their local schools were some of the worst in the state for expulsions and suspensions of students and wanted to disrupt the "school-to-prison pipeline" that plagued the system. The Chapter has been meeting with parents and other people in the community to discuss their options and make campaign plans.

Petersburg Chapter leaders discovered that many people in their city lack access to healthy, fresh foods and grocery stores. Because many people use corner markets and convenience stores for shopping due to lack of transportation and no major grocers in the area, the Chapter is planning to work with smaller stores and a new indoor farm project of Virginia State University to help residents get healthy foods to feed their families.

The South Hampton Roads Chapter is addressing climate change and sea level rise and received the Virginia Coastal Climate Champions Awards from the Chesapeake Climate Action Network at the first annual Safe Coast Celebration

on May 27. Local flooding due to climate change is a big concern for the local residents.

The Washington County Chapter worked this month on water testing before hydrofracking begins. In Lee County, the Chapter attending Hospital Authority meetings to gain access to health care facilities in the area. Danville Chapter leaders participated in a community forum about the Dan River coal ash spill — their opinions were well-represented in media coverage of the event.

While all the Chapters are organizing campaigns on local issues, Virginia Organizing is still involved in important state and federal issues. For example, the Charlottesville Chapter hosted ranking U.S. Senate Finance Committee member Bernie Sanders for a budget discussion. Middle school student Zyahna Bryant shared her passion for education and asked that Congress ensure opportunity for low-income students.

None of this work would be possible without the dedicated effort of so many Chapter leaders! Each campaign and each action at the local level means more victories and more development opportunities for our leaders!

Real people. Real change.

Waiting on U.S. Supreme Court Decisions

It's June! While that usually means the end of school, barbecues, summer vacations, and baseball, for some, it means watching the U.S. Supreme Court decisions from cases argued in earlier in the year.

This year, Virginia Organizing is watching several court cases. As we explained in the last newsletter, one case, *King v. Burwell* will have consequences for the Affordable Care Act (ACA) and will determine if people in states using the federal Health Insurance Marketplace (like Virginia) are allowed to access tax subsidies that make health care more affordable.

The Court is also hearing marriage equality cases from four states to determine if a marriage in a state where same-sex marriage is legal is enforceable in states where it is not. If the Court rules in favor of marriage equality, two people who are married in any state will have the same rights of marriage no matter where they live. This would include rights like legal next of kin, adoption rights, and other rights given to heterosexual married couples that same-sex couples are often denied.

Be sure to sign up for Virginia Organizing's email alerts at www.vaorg.org so you can get the latest information and action alerts!

Grassroots Gathering is Quickly Approaching!

Are you ready to join with Virginia Organizing leaders across the state for our annual Grassroots Gathering? This is a very special event where we will celebrate our 20th anniversary as a statewide organization! The Grassroots Gathering will be in Blackstone, Va. – about one hour

west of Petersburg – at the Blackstone Conference and Retreat Center, October 9-11, 2015. We will have a big celebration dinner on Saturday, October 10!

The cost for the full weekend is \$120 and includes all meals and training activities and a chance to be in the room with policymakers. We are asking that every person pay what they can – if you can pay more than your share, we will use the additional support to cover those who cannot afford to pay to attend. If you cannot afford to pay for your registration, or if you would just like to help us raise money for this event, you can sell ads for our program book!

To register for the Grassroots Gathering, please visit gg2015.eventbrite.com. Anyone that registers between June 1 and July 31 will receive a free Virginia Organizing water bottle! If you have questions, contact Nik Belanger at nik.belanger@virginia-organizing.org or 434-709-4953.

Long Time Organizer Cathy Woodson Retired

Cathy Woodson, a Virginia Organizing organizer for 17 years, retired on June 1. We want to say a special thank you to Cathy for all her many years of service! Cathy was instrumental in our dismantling racism work and developed much of the program currently in use by Virginia Organizing. To honor her legacy, we're collecting donations to support dismantling racism work. If you'd like to make a donation to this fund, please make your check payable to "The Fund for the Virginia Organizing Project" and mail it to 703 Concord Avenue, Charlottesville, VA 22903. If you have questions, please contact Joe Szakos at 434-984-4655 ext. 222 or szakos@virginia-organizing.org.

Leader of the Month Ayu Yifru



Ayu Yifru first became involved in the Harrisonburg Chapter of Virginia Organizing when she saw that changes were needed in her community and she wanted to raise her voice. "Virginia Organizing helps to raise the voices of traditionally silenced people – and that's me!" said Ayu. She is particularly interested in immigration and diversity issues.

Ayu graduated high school this year and will be a pre-med student in the fall. Her views on immigration reform were shaped by her own experience as an undocumented person (until recently) and another experience she had with an immigrant youth in her community.

"A young lady had a miscarriage and did not seek medical attention until very late in the process. She suffered through a lot of pain that she wouldn't have if she had gone to the hospital. When I asked her why she didn't go to the hospital, she told me it was because she was undocumented and was afraid she'd be reported and deported."

Ayu has written letters to the editor, participated in immigration reform activities in the local Chapter, and was involved in the work of the diversity in hiring practices local campaign in Harrisonburg.

"I'm so grateful to Virginia Organizing for working to constantly improve our communities and asking people what we want to change and work on. I'm grateful Virginia Organizing gave me a chance to raise my voice," said Ayu.

Thank you, Ayu, for raising your voice and helping your community!

VIRGINIA ORGANIZING

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Local Chapters and Areas Served

Augusta/Staunton/Waynesboro
Charlottesville/Albemarle County
Danville
Harrisonburg/Rockingham County
Fredericksburg
Lee County
Lynchburg
Martinsville/Henry County
Richmond
Roanoke
South Hampton Roads
Tri-Cities/Petersburg
Washington County
On Campus: UMW, VSU, CNU, UVA, E&H,
U of R, ODU, NSU, RU, TCC, VCU, JMU,
EMU, MBC



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News in Brief

- The South Hampton Roads Chapter worked hard to get funding for light rail in their local community. Congratulations on this victory!
- The Richmond Chapter is working on transportation issues in their community and organizing to make Richmond buses more accessible and reliable for all people.
- We're publishing a book on our 20 year history! Books will be ready in October 2015. Pre-order today at <http://bit.ly/vaorgbook>. You can also order at the Grassroots Gathering October 9-11 in Blackstone, Virginia. Register at gg2015.eventbrite.com.
- The Washington County Chapter held a local power analysis with several other local groups and set up goals and ways to work together moving forward.
- The Charlottesville office got new solar panels on the roof and a new energy efficient heat pump! Do you want to see how much solar power we're producing? Just visit <http://bit.ly/vaorgsolar> to view our energy generation. If you'd like to make a special donation to help us pay for these energy efficient upgrades, please visit <http://bit.ly/vaorganizingdonate> or contact Michele Mattioli at 434-984-4655 ext. 223 or mattioli@virginia-organizing.org.

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