

AFSC update January 8, 2012

This report is from Brooke McDonald, Interim Regional Director – AFSC Middle Atlantic Region Presented by Cynthia Terrell

MAR's six programs are still active and vibrant.

1) The Pennsylvania State program in Pittsburgh, PA is currently in its second year of working with young people on racial equity initiatives. This past year, following in the footsteps of Washington DC, the youth group helped to get Pittsburgh declared the 5th Human Rights city in the US.

2) The DC program - For the past year the D.C. project operated with two full time staff members, Jean-Louis, the Director, and Sara Ramey, the Cary Fellow. Sara finished her time with us at the end of December but she left us with great bones of a new revised and updated curriculum. Going forward, in addition to Jean-Louis, we also have six interns working in three different schools – two public (Dunbar and Wilson) and one charter (Friendship). The interns work in teams so that they can support each other. We are having an additional training session for them on January 20th. The D.C. program is almost exclusively focused on the Human Rights Learning work in D.C. schools at this point. Recent successes include: establishing firm partnerships with schools and teachers that have lasted from year to year, a pipeline of interns from area law schools that are very interested in the work, and a revised curriculum that will ensure that all of our classes are learning about the same topics and using the same measurement tools. The curriculum is still in a draft form because we want to test it this semester and leave room for improvement, but it clearly lays out movement from learning about human rights to taking action in the community – something that we have struggled with in the past. It also has lessons dedicated exclusively to learning about social action – again something new to the program. Looking forward we hope that after this semester we will have a final version of the curriculum that we can present to the DC school system. They have expressed interest in using it to create an elective for the entire system.

In addition to the Human Rights Learning, Jean-Louis does participate in a coalition dedicated to workers rights that is using a Human Rights framework to try to get more desirable legislation passed and he works with the Steering Committee of DC HUMAN RIGHTS PEOPLE'S MOVEMENT, a group of people dedicated to seeing D.C. become more actualized as a human rights city. Attached is a detailed report.

3) The Youth Empowerment program in Baltimore, Maryland is currently working with a new public school to set up a mediation system based on the Help Increase the Peace program.

4) The Friend of a Friend program in Baltimore, Maryland has just expanded its prison conflict resolution mentoring project into a fifth prison. This is exciting because the warden actually approached us and asked for the program. The two Baltimore programs are also partnering together to start a Freedom School, launching on Martin Luther King Day, which will be a place for young people (ages 12-16) to learn about peace and justice in a way that is relevant to their own lives. The school will be recruiting young people who are the children of incarcerated parents in our prison program.

5) The West Virginia Economic Justice program continues to focus considerable attention on mine safety and other issues relevant to conditions in the Southern Coalfields of West Virginia. AFSC's Beth Spence was the lead writer for the independent investigation report on the 2010 disaster in the Upper Big Branch Mine (Massey Energy), and is currently working on a safety manual with clear protocols to follow in an emergency.

6) The Appalachian Center for Equality in Logan, West Virginia is undergoing a bit of a transformation. Lida Shepherd joined AFSC's staff as the new director this January. She will be continuing the youth mentoring project in Logan but she will also be expanding the project into surrounding counties and hopes to bring young people from throughout the coalfields together for activities and summits.

In other news, the move to our new location in Baltimore has been a success. The space is bright and the layout encourages interaction. We were a little bit worried that we might not have as much access to public transportation but we were wrong – our partners and project participants are not having trouble getting to us and everyone likes the building. As a side note, some graduates of the Friend of a Friend prison program are going to be setting up a snack and beverage cart in the new building at the request of the management – it is great to be in a location that supports nonprofit activity! MAR Staff count: 10 (this includes our new administrative assistant, welcome Bryan Vana!). MAR Intern count: 15

The new address is:

American Friends Service Committee (AFSC)

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And this from Lucy Duncan - Friends Liaison

Dear Yearly Meeting Clerks, and Editors of US Quaker Journals,

You may have heard that the American Friends Service Committee's board recently approved a new regional structure to support programs in the US, moving from nine to four regions, the Northeast, Midwest, South, and West. As we go through the transition over the next few months, I want to be sure you have a good, solid contact at AFSC. If you have questions or concerns and are not sure where to go, feel free to contact me. I serve as AFSC's Friends Liaison and my role is to be a point of contact for Friends and meetings in the interest of strengthening connections between AFSC and Friends. I will be sending additional information as the restructure proceeds, but wanted to let you know a few key points.

- Our best work arises from the grass roots, from listening to our constituencies and meeting their needs in partnership. That work can be most effective when it is part of something larger, and this new structure is intended to retain grassroots program work while extending opportunities to coordinate, collaborate and replicate work.*
- We estimate that this change will free up nearly half a million dollars to support direct program work.*
- The change will be implemented over time, with careful consideration of regional committee structures – we hope to have all four new regional directors in place by May, 2012.*
- We do not plan to close any programs or offices in this restructure, but some regional administrative offices will no longer host a regional administrative director. It will be important for all of our area offices to reach out to Friends and area Quaker meetings and churches.*
- As important as it is to reduce administrative costs, the most exciting aspect of the new structure is the opportunity to revitalize our ways of working together as corporation, board, committees, staff, volunteers, Friends meetings and churches, and community partners.*

Please let me know if you have questions or concerns. I expect to provide a fuller report in January after a few critical decisions about the restructure are made. Feel free to circulate this message widely among Friends – send it to your monthly meetings, publish in your newsletters, publish in Quaker journals, etc.