



Quaker Action

What does a just world look like?



**American
Friends
Service
Committee**

Ending ICE detention
in New Jersey
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Healing and resilience
in Africa
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Working for economic
justice in West Virginia
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Spring 2022 Volume 103 Number 1

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West Virginians demonstrate for the
child tax credit in Washington, D.C.
PHOTO: MARK STORY PHOTOS



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Quaker Action

Published by the
American Friends
Service Committee

Who we are

The American Friends Service Committee (AFSC) promotes a world free of violence, inequality, and oppression.

Guided by the Quaker belief in the divine light within each person, we nurture the seeds of change and the respect for human life to fundamentally transform our societies and institutions.

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Cover photo

In Little Haiti in Miami, Florida, community members protested the detention and deportation of Haitian refugees and all migrants in the U.S. Yoana (pictured) is a leader with Seeds of Resistance, AFSC's youth program in Florida.

Photo: Adam Barkan



Letter from our general secretary

FOR CENTURIES, people of conscience have confronted injustice and built conditions for peace. Imagine our world today if peace processes were not furthered to resolve conflicts, if people didn't challenge authoritarian rulers, and if human rights violations and racism remained unchecked.

The AFSC legacy rooted in Quaker approaches and values ensures we can continue supporting communities challenging oppression around the world. That's what you do through support of AFSC. Not just in the moment, but on the long journey toward greater justice and peace.

Through these pages, you'll find inspiring examples of how AFSC supports societies that divest from harmful systems of violence and invest in alternatives that enable sustainable peace, transformation, and healing. In New Jersey, people have been organizing to end immigrant detention—and winning! In West Virginia, communities are celebrating 100 years of work for economic justice, each generation standing on the shoulders of those who came before. And in Africa, people are healing from decades of conflict and building shared, sustainable peace for all. Thank you for helping us respond to the challenges of our day, and for joining us in courageous work for a future where all people can thrive.

In peace,



Joyce Ajlouny
General Secretary



In Chicago, community members show



Photo: Armando Carrada Photography

Support courageous work for peace and justice today!

When you donate to AFSC, your gift goes the distance—helping people around the world work for peace, justice, and equity in their communities.

We are grateful that you share AFSC's vision of a future with lasting peace, where all people are treated with dignity. Can you make a gift today to support long-term work for change, and meet pressing needs in the communities we serve?

Visit afsc.org/QAmonthly or call our Donor Services Team at 888-588-2372 to start your gift today.

Get Alumni Network updates
and join our Facebook group!

afsc.org/alumni



Tonya Histan

Director of Public Engagement

Lee Hang-woo, a Korean-American Quaker, spent his life working to promote peace between North Korea and South Korea. He founded a Quaker Meeting in Seoul and visited North Korea as an AFSC delegate multiple times. Lee passed away on Oct. 16.

Kay Whitlock served as a regional director and the national representative for LGBT issues at AFSC. She wrote a new book “Carceral Con: The Deceptive Terrain of Criminal Justice Reform.” It examines how contemporary criminal justice reforms expand—rather than shrink—structurally violent systems of policing, surveillance, and carceral control in the United States.

AFSC alum **Don Bustos** (below right) was honored at the 11th Annual Organic Pioneer Awards, which recognizes leaders changing the landscape of regenerative organic agriculture for the better. Don served as AFSC New Mexico’s program director and was one of the first farmers in New Mexico to receive organic certification.



Photo: AFSC

ALUMNI SPOTLIGHT



David Hartsough

Former AFSC staffer

David Hartsough, who worked for AFSC for 18 years, was honored with the Clarence B. Jones Award for Kingian Nonviolence. The award honors the life’s work and social impact of a major activist.

Photo: James Wasserman

Phyllis Kotite died at the age of 91. Phyllis went to Belgium with AFSC in 1953, working in a town with a refugee camp for Russians. She became one of the first Lebanese women to work at the United Nations in New York, and then at UNESCO in Paris. Throughout her career, she served as a consultant and contributor to peacebuilding and nonviolence education as well as conflict prevention programs.

Wayne Newell has a long history with AFSC. He was one of the founders of AFSC’s Third World Coalition and a member of the Northeast Region Wabanaki Committee. Wayne passed away on Dec. 23.

Gordon Carey is described as an “unsung hero” of the Civil Rights movement. After participating in an AFSC workcamp in Mexico, he played important roles in two far-reaching events: the 1960 lunch-counter sit-ins and the 1961 Freedom Rides. Gordon died in November.

Do you have news or stories to share? Email us at alumni@afsc.org



Cleanup and recovery efforts in New Orleans after Hurricane Ida. Photo: Cfreedom Photography

NEW ORLEANS

Helping people in New Orleans recover from Hurricane Ida

On Aug. 29, Hurricane Ida made landfall in Louisiana—16 years to the day that Hurricane Katrina struck the state. Ida brought winds of 150 miles per hour, leaving more than one million people without power.

Weeks later, New Orleans residents were still trying to repair damaged homes and clean up debris.

Thanks to supporters like you, AFSC and partner Hollygrove Neighbors Association, Inc. were able to help. Together, we organized food distribution events and

community cleanup days. At one event, volunteers filled eight trucks with thousands of pounds of trash!

Community events like these promote and support Black sustainability and resilience. They're not only critical after devastating events like Hurricane Ida. They also help us demonstrate how communities can help solve longstanding problems with greater investment of city resources. •

Thank you for supporting our efforts!



Dee Dee Green

New Orleans Peace by Piece Program Director



In Michigan, community members demonstrate for the release of people from prison.
Photo: Mary Buchanan

GLOBAL

Divest for immigrant justice!

AFSC has a long history of organizing alongside communities for migrant justice. We have opposed the militarization of the U.S.-Mexico border and worked to stop the surveillance and criminalization of immigrant communities. Last year, we amended our investment policy to exclude companies that profit from these harmful activities. Now you can join us in asking your university, city, or faith organization to divest.

In October, our Investigate project launched the first-ever divestment list designed to promote immigrant justice. We have identified and profiled more than 60 companies with significant involvement in the border and surveillance industries, some for the first time.

Visit investigate.info/borders

to explore our research and resources. If you're part of an organization or campaign that could use support using our data, please let us know! We can help you build a powerful campaign or design an ethical investment policy. •



Dov Baum

Economic Activism
Program Director



Natalie Holbrook

Michigan Criminal Justice
Program Director

More afsc.org/kites

MICHIGAN

Improving conditions for pregnant people in prison

Siwatu-Salama Ra gave birth while incarcerated in Michigan. She spoke out about the obstacles she faced while pregnant, birthing, and attempting to breastfeed. Her story is one of many people in prison who lack access to maternal and postpartum health care and support.

Siwatu's story was shared through a years-long multimedia campaign supported by organizations, including AFSC and Siwatu Freedom Team. And policymakers took notice.

In October, Michigan expanded access to maternal and postpartum health care. In addition, limits were placed on the use of restraints on pregnant people, and parents were allowed more time with newborns.

We applaud these improved standards. We also urge the state to do more. Support breastfeeding. Eliminate shackles. Relieve overcrowding. Establish oversight. Free mothers and parents now.

Prisons have never been conducive to healing or transformation. Ultimately, we need new responses to harm that are rooted in community care. •

Building more inclusive organizations

An interview with **Raquel Saraswati**, AFSC's senior director of diversity, equity, and inclusion

Q: Why is AFSC working to ensure diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI)?

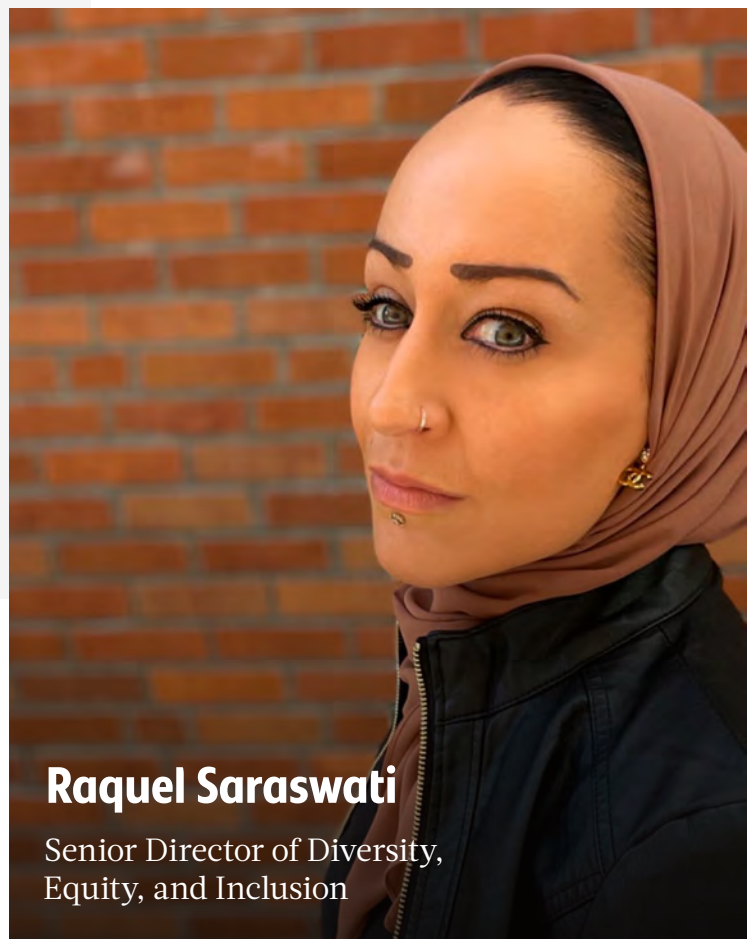
A: At AFSC, this work is an essential part of carrying out our mission with integrity and in keeping with our values. Racism, white supremacy, xenophobia, homophobia and transphobia, anti-Muslim hate, antisemitism, and other forms of hatred and oppression are violent and lead to violence. We cannot really meet the needs of our communities without fostering meaningful inclusivity and challenging the root causes of oppression that lead to suffering.

Q: What does it take to create more inclusive, accountable, and just policies and practices?

A: Transformative DEI work is about relationships. It's about the real, difficult, and sometimes emotional work of not just seeing the divine complexity in others, but also seeing it in ourselves. Before diversity trainings and guides, it's important to explore the intersectional attributes, beliefs, and behaviors we bring to the workplace and our communities. That helps establish deeper bonds, ease conflicts where they exist, and create deeper opportunities for engagement.

Q: What are the challenges you face in your role?

A: The challenges we face in this work also happen to be our greatest strengths. AFSC operates in over a dozen countries and across the United States. We are also an "organization of organizers," with the most brilliant, dedicated, and deeply thoughtful staff, volunteers, and partners. Balancing many priorities and needs across so many contexts is a challenge I could not be more blessed to assume. I am proud and excited to say that my office is doing this work from a truly global perspective, and does not hesitate to stand, always, with the most marginalized among us.



Raquel Saraswati

Senior Director of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

“Transformative DEI work is about relationships. It’s about the real, difficult, and sometimes emotional work of not just seeing the divine complexity in others, but also seeing it in ourselves.”

Q: What guidance would you offer groups working on DEI?

A: As Dr. Muna Abdi says, “it’s not inclusion if you invite people into a space you are unwilling to change.” Be honest and transparent about your commitment to DEI, and about where you are in your process. If you are sincere about creating a healthier workplace and an organization that engages its communities with true consideration and care, you must resource the work. You must also be committed to listening to the expert you’ve hired to lead you in this work—especially when it is challenging or uncomfortable to do so. •

WHAT WILL IT TAKE TO STOP ICE?



Community organizers in New Jersey lead the way in ending inhumane immigrant detention policies.

BY NICOLE MILLER AND CHIA-CHIA WANG



Immigrants, families, and community members have organized actions in front of ICE offices and detention centers.

Photos (clockwise top left to bottom): Chia-Chia Wang /AFSC, Ester Jove Soligue, Chia-Chia Wang /AFSC, Madeline Medina/AFSC

Every day, Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) jails thousands of immigrants in the United States. Those detained face dangerous, unsanitary conditions. They lack access to adequate health care. Since 2004, more than 200 people in ICE custody have died.

For the past 25 years, AFSC has provided free legal representation to immigrants in New Jersey. Our legal services

team includes over 40 attorneys and legal staff. In 2021, we represented more than 1,700 immigrants, including people in detention. We helped community members achieve permanent status and safety, reunite with family members, obtain work permits, and more. We also helped win the release of 120 immigrants from detention.

The pandemic fueled the urgency to get people out of detention. Many didn't

even have soap or masks. They were eating and sleeping in close quarters. Not surprisingly, detention centers became tinderboxes for COVID-19.

Our staff worked round the clock to free people as quickly as possible. But that's a short-term solution. That's why we also ramped up our efforts to end ICE detention altogether.



Last fall, people from across the country gathered in Washington, D.C. to urge the Biden administration to shut down ICE facilities.
PHOTO: MATTHEW PAUL D AGOSTINO

Communities organize to stop ICE

The U.S. needs a more just, humane approach to immigration that doesn't jail people. In a national poll, AFSC and partners found that most people agree: We should fund community-based alternatives that allow people to stay with family or friends. These programs can also help people access legal representation and vital support services.

"Every single day, the impacts of this cruel system are felt by community members in New Jersey," says AFSC attorney Joelle Lingat. "Any delay in getting people out of detention is another hour, day, month, year that families are separated and people's lives are put to the side."

People affected by ICE detention are at the forefront in working to end it. AFSC supports their efforts in several ways: media trainings, legislative lobby days, and helping them connect with others who share their experiences and are advocating for change.

Just months into the pandemic, we supported several people detained at Elizabeth Detention Center in filing a class-action lawsuit. They demanded the immediate release of all immigrants at the facility. The suit, which is ongoing, was filed by AFSC, the Immigrant Defense Project, and NYU School of Law Immigrant Rights Clinic. In sharing their stories, the plaintiffs helped highlight the dangers of detention.

"These people put their names and faces on the front lines on working to shut down a facility that systematically tries to strip away their humanity," Joelle says. "They emerged with dignity and fighting spirit, not just for themselves but for the entire population of the detention center."

More recently, Black immigrants detained in New Jersey played a key role in organizing a rally in downtown Newark, with assistance from AFSC. From the detention centers where they were held, immigrants called the cell phone of AFSC organizer Serges Demefack, who was at the rally. He held up his phone to a loudspeaker, so everyone in the outdoor crowd could hear them speak. Their purpose? To urge President Biden to stop detaining and

deporting immigrants, including Haitian refugees.

"During this time of COVID, even from behind the bars, they were engaged in that rally," Serges says. "It was moving. For them to have that energy, it reminded us of why we are part of this movement for immigrant justice and why we must keep going."

Throughout the pandemic, community members organized to help expose the inhumanity and injustice of ICE detention. They held car rallies and outdoor protests to attract media attention. They sent countless emails. They made phone calls. They took part in virtual lobby visits to persuade legislators.

And in the end, they accomplished what at one time seemed impossible.

A commitment to end ICE detention in New Jersey

Detainees courageously shared their stories. Community members organized tirelessly. AFSC and coalition partners provided support. And public officials listened.

In 2021, three New Jersey counties announced they would stop detaining immigrants for ICE. What's more, the governor signed a law that bans all future contracts with ICE, including contract renewals. Under the new law, the last remaining ICE detention center in the state—run by for-profit prison corporation CoreCivic—will be forced to shut down next year.

That means that by the end of 2023, New Jersey will have eliminated ICE detention completely.

This is a win for the human rights and dignity of immigrants and all community members. And it's a direct result of years of organizing and advocacy led by people most affected by this injustice.

Noemi Peña was among many excited



AFSC's Serges Demefack speaks out against immigrant detention and deportation. Photo: Nicole Miller/AFSC

to hear the news. She's a mother of two who experienced the deportations of both her husband and son. Today she continues to advocate for others. "I wish my husband and son could be with me to rejoice, but I ... am still really happy that I was part of the community that made this happen. I pray that this means only good things are to come for other immigrant families like mine in the state of New Jersey."

The challenges ahead

But the victory has not meant only good things. When ICE detention ends, immigrants should be released to their families and communities. Instead, many people in New Jersey have been transferred out of state as far Florida, Louisiana, and Nevada—often with little or no warning. ICE also continues to arrest immigrants and transfer them out of state for detention. Today our attorneys are helping families locate their loved ones and bring them back home.

These challenges remind us that immigrant detention won't end until we stop ICE in every state. But we know it is possible. The past year has shown us the power of communities coming together to protect the rights and dignity of all. Our office has already heard from organizations in other states that want to replicate the success we've had in New Jersey.

We're looking forward to helping them make that happen. •

STORIES OF HEALING AND RESILIENCE

How communities are cultivating peace in Africa

AFSC started working in Africa in 1958, providing aid to refugees from the Algerian War. That work shifted from emergency relief to long term support for community led projects.

Since then, AFSC has joined with nomadic communities in Mali, religious peacebuilders in Angola, rural villagers in Mozambique, and more. Today we have active programs in Burundi, Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia, South Sudan, and Zimbabwe. Through our Dialogue and Exchange Program, we extend the impact of this work to 25 additional African countries.

After decades of conflict, the people of Africa are reknitting the fabric of resilient and thriving societies. They are healing from the trauma of violence. They are developing self employment skills. And they are rebuilding a sense of community. Here are a few of their stories.

In Zimbabwe, community members learn peacebuilding skills as well as trades to boost their income. *Photo: Jaraad Hassim*





In Zimbabwe, community members receive certificates for participating the peacebuilding program. Photo: AFSC/Zimbabwe

ZIMBABWE

Tarisai* is a 33-year-old mother who lives in a settlement on the outskirts of Harare, Zimbabwe. Like many young people, she grew up amid intense political violence. At that time, many were indoctrinated to hate or fear people who belonged to opposition parties. Neighbors—even family members—often could not trust or help each other.

But Tarisai's life today is far different than it was just a few years ago. In 2018, Tarisai took part in conflict transformation trainings offered by AFSC and local partners. These trainings were open to all regardless of political affiliation.

Over the past three years, nearly 2,000 people from three districts of Zimbabwe took part as well. In addition to peacebuilding skills, they learned carpentry, welding, fence making, and other trades. These skills helped them earn enough money to support themselves and their families. Some have even started businesses of their own. Tarisai chairs the community's food processing enterprise group, which allows her to support her three children.

Participants also learned how to work with government agencies to meet community needs. Since then, community members have formed local peace committees. These committees are non-political and inclusive. Young people, women, and people with disabilities are encouraged to participate. These are groups that have historically been left out of political processes.

Tarisai serves on the Caledonia Peace Committee. The committee successfully advocated for the government to improve access to clean water. During the pandemic, members also stepped up to promote public health. They created a WhatsApp group so residents could report cases and share accurate public health information. And like other peace committees, their membership continues to grow. Together, they are improving everyday life for people in their district. And they are helping to build a safer, healthier future for all.

—Nthabiseng Nkomo, country representative, Zimbabwe

*Names are pseudonyms.

“I was surprised to see even those who used to be my enemies present in the first [peacebuilding workshops].

I started building confidence to find ways of reconnecting and forgiving my neighbors and finally managed to say sorry to them. When they accepted me, I felt so relieved.”

—TARISAI, PROJECT PARTICIPANT

Alice* is a peacebuilder in the Dinka community of South Sudan. She helps community members heal from the trauma of war, violence, and loss. She also helps resolve conflicts among family members, clans, and tribes.

But like many peacebuilders, Alice struggles with trauma of her own. Her husband was killed in the South Sudan civil war. Now she is raising their children on her own, and she faces stigma for being a widow at such a young age.

Alice's personal trauma has made it harder for her to help people. She has felt angry and suspicious of others. And that has limited her ability to carry out her work.

In 2020, AFSC launched a trauma healing program in South Sudan to help peacebuilders like Alice get the support they need. During that first year, eight local organizations trained 36 peacebuilders on trauma healing. Those trained

also learned how to train others. That ripple effect has since reached nearly 600 peacebuilders throughout the country. AFSC also helped the organizations create workplace policies to support trauma healing long-term.

When Alice attended her first workshop, she was unfamiliar with concepts like primary and secondary trauma. The training helped her share her story and face her pain and grief. She started counseling. And although she has only begun her journey, she says she already feels so much relief. Now she can listen to others' experiences without applying the lens of her own wounds. That makes it easier for her to help people. Other workshop participants have shared similar experiences.

Today more peacebuilders are receiving the support they need—and the benefits extend to many others.

—Zaina Kisongoa, county representative, Somalia and South Sudan

“Peacebuilding before trauma healing training felt like flying with one wheel. Now I feel like I am going to go far, flying with two wheels.”

—TRAUMA HEALING PROGRAM PARTICIPANT

Peacebuilding workshop in Burundi.
Photo: AFSC/Burundi





Itangishaka (left) has expanded her small business after taking part in an AFSC-supported peacebuilding program. Photo: AFSC/Burundi

BURUNDI

In an open-air market in Burundi, Itangishaka sells mukeke. It's a local fish that can only be found in Lake Tanganyika.

Itangishaka and her family were among the hundreds of thousands of people forced to flee their homes during Burundi's civil war. Now they are among the many who have returned. Like others, they are seeking to improve their living conditions, regain their dignity and contribute to lasting peace.

Itangishaka started her mukeke business while participating in a peacebuilding project supported by AFSC and Cord and funded by the Belgian government. Over the past two years, the project has helped 1,750 Burundians to learn trades, start businesses, and support their families.

Beyond improving individual livelihoods, community members strengthen social cohesion. This is particularly critical in places that have seen an influx of returnees. Through the project, community

members work together. They form community savings and loan groups (called "Self-Help Groups") to support each other's work. They develop peacebuilding skills to prevent and resolve conflicts. And they work with community leaders to find lasting solutions to issues they face.

When Itangishaka joined a Self-Help Group in 2019, she received a small loan of 50,000 Burundian Francs (about \$25 USD) to start her mukeke business. Soon she was able to pay off that loan and take out a second loan of 100,000 Burundian francs (about \$50 USD) to expand. Today Itangishaka can cover household expenses and send her children to school. She plans to buy a refrigerator to store and sell more fish and expand her business. Her life has been transformed and she now serves as a role model to others.

After years of war, many community members like Itangishaka report an improved climate of trust and tolerance. They are fostering reconciliation by

building economic resilience for all. And they are creating conditions for lasting peace in Burundi. •

—AFSC Burundi Program

LOOKING AHEAD

Africa Action Hub

AFSC is launching a research and advocacy hub in the Horn of Africa. Together with partners, we are opening a new peacebuilding center.

The center will convene, train, and mobilize civil society to help support peace in the region.

More afsc.org/AfricaAction



Top left: West Virginia moms advocate for the child tax credit in Washington, D.C. Photo: Mark Story Photos

Top right: Child feeding program in the 1930s.

Photo: AFSC Archives **Below:** AFSC's Lida Shepherd and Rick Wilson facilitate an economic justice workshop. Photo: James Wasserman



Above left: Eleanor Roosevelt (left) visits West Virginia families in 1934. Photo: AFSC Archives. **Above right:** Women's sewing project in 1933. Photo: AFSC Archives.



Left: Demonstrating in Washington D.C. earlier this year. Photo: Mark Story Photos

Above right: Protesting police violence on Racial Harmony, Action and Peace Day in 1991. Photo: Terry Foss

100 years of working for economic justice in West Virginia

IT WAS 1922 IN WEST VIRGINIA.

Coal mining was the state's leading industry. Jobs peaked during World War I but collapsed in its aftermath, leaving many families stranded and suffering. Even in "good" times, West Virginians saw little of the profits reaped by companies. Workers labored in dangerous conditions—risking health and lives—and paid a pittance for each ton of coal. Many lived in crowded, unsanitary company-owned coal camps and struggled to put food on the table.

When coal operators cut pay and resisted unionization, miners would strike, with mixed results. Employers used hunger, evictions, intimidation by armed mine guards, and the power of the state to keep miners down. In 1921, the "mine wars" culminated in "the Battle of Blair Mountain," the largest workers' uprising in U.S. history. It wasn't until the New Deal of the 1930s that miners would secure organizing rights.

That's when Quakers and AFSC stepped in. We had fed children in Europe during and after World War I. Here, we started with a program to provide food for around 400 children. When the Great Depression hit, thousands more miners faced unemployment. In 1931, President Herbert Hoover asked AFSC to expand our program. Soon, we were helping feed more than 22,000 children a day, while also influencing federal relief policies and improving access to shelter, sanitation, and health care.

Relief was only part of the equation. Communities needed alternatives to coal mining. In 1932, AFSC helped establish the Mountaineer's Craftsmen Cooperative Association to support people in transitioning to furniture making and other trades.

Craftsman Bob Godlove trained miners in furniture making techniques. The community established a workshop. And AFSC staffer Edith Maul logged more than

100,000 miles driving truckloads full of furniture through Pennsylvania and West Virginia to find buyers. It was one of several efforts to develop alternative sources of income.

In the 1970s, AFSC's New Employment for Women (NEW) program offered the first classes to train women for work in the mines. Later, NEW became a community resource for African Americans, women, and low-income people in the coalfields.

This year marks 100 years of AFSC working in solidarity with West Virginians for a better future. As we commemorate this anniversary, we look at how this history informs our work today.

Standing in solidarity with workers

Rick Wilson, director of AFSC's West Virginia Economic Justice Project (WVEJP) since 1989, said "A lot of our work has been in solidarity with people working in, living with, or harmed by extractive industries," he says. "We try to influence laws and policies to ensure they serve the interests of working-class and low-income people."

In 1989, miners working for Pittston Coal went on strike to preserve benefits for retirees and their families. AFSC staff walked picket lines, provided media support, and arranged speaking venues for miners and their families. We provided families with clothing and other material aid, assisted a support group for miners' spouses, and led a Christmas toy drive for the children. Eventually, the union won a settlement, helping many retirees and their survivors over the years.

In 2010, AFSC played a key role in calling for corporate accountability after 29 miners were killed at the Upper Big Branch coal mine. The mine was owned by Massey Energy, which had a long history of safety issues. WVEJP coordinator Beth Spence served as lead writer on an independent panel established by



“..You shouldn’t need to rely on luck or wealth to maintain your family’s stability or the dignity of your own work.”

—JOANNA VANCE, AFSC FELLOW (LEFT)

then-Gov. Joe Manchin to investigate. They found the explosion was the result of Massey’s failure to maintain basic safety procedures. The report drew national media coverage and fueled advocacy for mine safety. In 2015, the company’s former CEO was convicted of conspiring to evade federal safety standards, a first in U.S. history.

Strengthening the social safety net

Advocacy with people in poverty is still key to our work in West Virginia. “Not many organizations work with impacted people to organize like AFSC does,” says JoAnna Vance, who joined AFSC’s West Virginia program as a fellow in 2021.

“There’s still such a need to address hunger and malnutrition in the state,” adds Lida Shepherd, youth and economic justice program director. “But we have gained some ground.”

In the 1990s, AFSC supported the creation and expansion of the Children’s Health Insurance Program and improvements in welfare policies. In 2013, we pushed for legislation to eventually provide free meals and out-of-school feeding for all West Virginia’s children, while also encouraging counties to expand food programs. For the past seven years, the state has led the nation in school breakfast participation. These programs have been

especially crucial for families during the pandemic.

Since 2009, AFSC and allies supported the Affordable Care Act and the expansion of Medicaid in the state, resulting in one of the nation’s largest declines in uninsured residents. We also worked to defend these programs from threats at the state and federal level.

In 2019, we campaigned to eliminate barriers to food assistance and employment for people released from prison, including an end to the ban on Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits for people with drug felony convictions.

In 2021 and 2022, we helped people across the state advocate for the child tax credit, climate legislation, and other social investments. Many shared personal stories. JoAnna was one, speaking with representatives and staff, the media, and participating in a march organized by the Poor People’s Campaign in Washington. For here, it was personal: The expanded child tax credit had helped her family pay medical bills and other expenses.

Creating a prosperous future

West Virginians are making a painful economic transition—and working toward a more just, prosperous, sustainable future for all.

One priority is ending mass incarceration. We support efforts to reform bail and probation, promote reentry, reduce the prison population, and more. “People in West Virginia and around the U.S. are reflecting deeply on the real costs of incarceration—in terms of taxpayer dollars, the loss in human potential, and the trauma on children and families,” Lida says. “We must create a system that is safe, just, and more beneficial to individuals and society.”

We also support organizing and advocacy efforts by young people. Since 2012, around 450 young people have participated in the activities of our youth leadership program, the Appalachian Center for Equality. Headed by Youth Director Liz Brunello, the center helps participants develop skills and lead campaigns to demand policy change. And we are still working tirelessly for economic justice.

“Whether you work in the field picking vegetables, in a plant packing meat, in a mine digging coal, or in a city typing at a desk, you shouldn’t need to rely on luck or wealth to maintain your family’s stability or the dignity of your own work,” JoAnna says.

Rick says, “Decisions about distribution of resources are made at different levels. Our history has shown that it’s possible to influence many of them—and sometimes make progress even in tough situations.” •

Program spotlight

Celebrating 50 years of working for healing justice

IN 1971,

Bonnie Kerness joined AFSC as a community organizer in New Jersey. Since then, she has worked alongside incarcerated people and their families to end human rights violations in U.S. prisons. Bonnie heads AFSC's Prison Watch Program, which annually responds to over 1,000 letters and calls from incarcerated people and produces publications featuring their words and art. Bonnie has helped bring about policy changes to protect the lives and rights of those behind bars. That includes a state law to limit solitary confinement in New Jersey prisons.

Bonnie is part of the movement to abolish prisons, and her work has drawn national and international attention to the urgency of rethinking how society responds to harm and facilitates healing.

Congratulations and thank you to Bonnie on her 50-year anniversary with AFSC!



Bonnie Kerness (front row, second from left) in 1976.
PHOTO: AFSC ARCHIVES

“Today, there’s a wider public understanding of alternatives to prisons as we know them. As a society, we can envision a system without torture, cruelty, brutality. We can envision one with compassion where we value every person as a human being.”

— BONNIE KERNESS
Director, AFSC Prison Watch Program, New Jersey

Find more events and actions at afsc.org/getinvolved

JOIN US ONLINE

Special presentation:
Winona LaDuke

APRIL 3-9 | Native American land rights activist, environmentalist, economist, politician, and author Winona LaDuke will deliver the plenary session of this year's AFSC Corporation Meeting. Join us online for her presentation as well as workshops led by AFSC staff, partners, and community members. We'll explore how people around the world are working for social change. afsc.org/corporation2022

SAVE THE DATE

No Way to Treat a Child webinar

APRIL 12 | Support is growing in the U.S. for our campaign to end the Israeli detention of Palestinian children. Join AFSC and Defense for Children International-Palestine for our monthly webinars to learn more. afsc.org/nowaywebinar

LEARN MORE

Community Safety Beyond Policing

Across the U.S., communities are organizing to create a future where we rely less on police—and ensure community safety for all.

Sign up for our bimonthly webinars to learn how policing impacts communities and consider what alternatives could look like. afsc.org/csbp



Quaker action for a just world

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Spring 2022 Volume 103 Number 1

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