

# To All Friends in the Midwest

*From Brant Rosen, Regional Director, AFSC Midwest Region*



*Brant Rosen*

Dear Friends,

Warm greetings from AFSC Midwest staff and volunteers. May our time together at Yearly Meetings bolster our spirits and strengthen our resolve to put the values we share into action.

Thank you, as always, for your longstanding support of AFSC.

Friends gave birth to AFSC 102 years ago and remain our loyal partners. Please know how grateful we are, and please be in touch with me [directly](#) if you have any questions, comments, concerns or suggestions.

Cornel West writes, “Hope looks at the evidence and says, ‘It doesn't look good at all. Doesn't look good at all. Gonna go beyond the evidence to create new possibilities based on visions that become contagious to allow people to engage in heroic actions always against the odds, no guarantee whatsoever.’ That's hope. I'm a prisoner of hope.”

I hope the following selection of stories from AFSC's work throughout the Midwest Region over the past year will



*In Madison, Palestinian writer Ahmed Abu Artema talks with Louise Lund, a Friend who visited Gaza in 1946.*

give you some measure of hope—and encourage you in further acts of peace and justice.

AFSC staff in Chicago continue to play a key role in advocating for justice and human rights for Palestinians. Recently we hosted a nationwide speaking tour of Ahmed Abu Artema, the writer who envisioned the Great March of Return in Gaza. Ahmed's powerful [stories](#) of resistance in the face of brutal oppression motivated everyone who heard him.

Other highlights include a Gaza [essay contest](#) for youth and building support for our [No Way to Treat a Child Campaign](#). Please urge your member of Congress to support HR 2407, “Promoting Human Rights for Palestinian Children Living Under Israeli Military Occupation Act.” We're planning an advocacy conference around this legislation for September. AFSC works in partnership with the [Quaker Palestine Israel Network](#) (QPIN).

AFSC is building [Communities Against Islamophobia](#) (CAI) and opposing a racist program known as Countering Violent Extremism (CVE). We've been training teachers in Chicago on our curriculum for



*Communities Against Islamophobia co-trainer Zareen Kamal leading a discussion on surveillance.*



AFSC interns and staff in Chicago

countering Islamophobia in the classroom, and we continue to conduct bystander intervention trainings. Our staff co-authored a widely heralded report on CVE entitled *Suspected and Surveilled*. Check out [creatingculturalcompetencies.com](http://creatingculturalcompetencies.com) and [stopcve.com](http://stopcve.com) for more information.

AFSC staff helped organize [#NoCopAcademy](https://www.instagram.com/nocopacademy/), a dynamic campaign in Chicago led by youth of color in opposition to a \$95 million police training academy. By going door-to-door in neighborhoods and showing up in large numbers at city hall, we made it loud and clear that Chicagoans want support for our youth and communities instead of further racism and



AFSC Indiana is grateful to be in partnership with five young Muslim women who are organizing and building leadership in their communities.

oppression. We're now working with young people to make the connections between the militarism of their communities and that of our foreign policy.

Our program in Indiana has a similar focus in supporting youth of color building Communities Against Islamophobia and advocating for the human rights of children in Palestine. Supported by AFSC, the [Muslim Youth Collective](http://www.muslimyouthcollective.org/) (MYC) hosted an exhibit entitled "Muslim Youth Aren't Interested in Being Afraid." After the Christchurch massacre, the MYC hosted a workshop for local mosques to develop safety protocols that do not rely upon law enforcement.

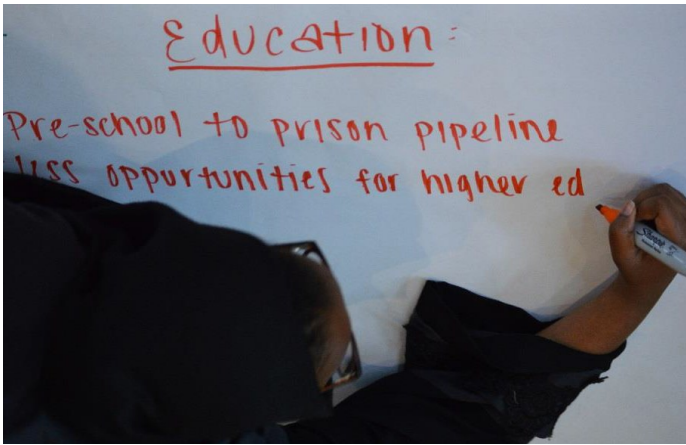
For many years, the Indiana program has been supported by Friends who serve on the local advisory committee. You may have the good fortune of seeing Tom Roberts, a Friend and Midwest Executive Committee member, at your Yearly Meeting.



Toni Bunton's story is one of many featured in AFSC Michigan's report on "Ending Perpetual Punishment."

In Michigan, AFSC's [Good Neighbor Project](http://www.afsc.org/good-neighbor-project/) is connecting more co-mentors inside and outside of prison. The reciprocal relationship provides an opportunity for both free-world and incarcerated individuals to grow and learn from each other.

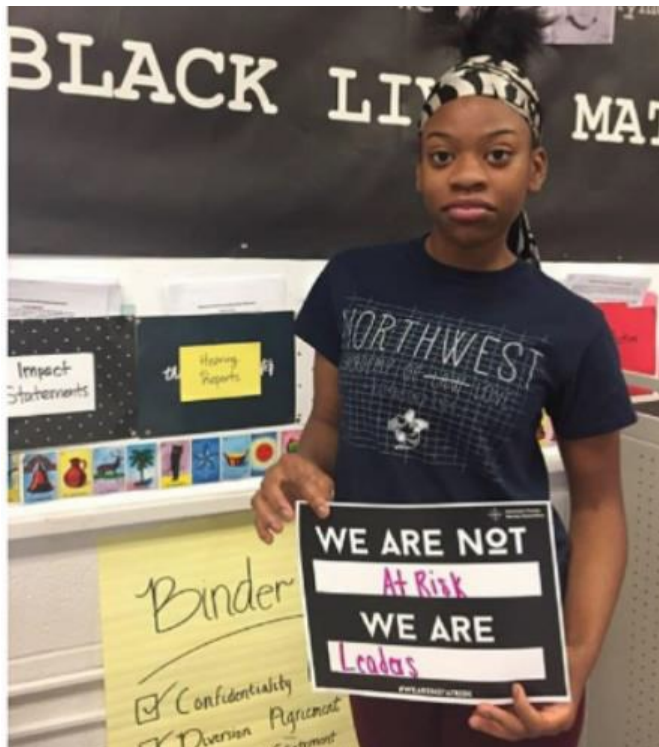
The program works diligently to track and respond to the needs of thousands of prisoners, reduce the number of people behind bars, and change the narrative around people serving long sentences. Check out our new report, [Ending Perpetual Punishment](http://www.afsc.org/ending-perpetual-punishment/), and stay tuned for a July convening addressing people serving life and long sentences.



*The AFSC Twin Cities Freedom School addresses many issues of structural racism, including the school-to-prison pipeline.*

Supporting the organizing work of youth of color is the focus of AFSC in the [Twin Cities](#) and [St. Louis](#). Both programs offer multi-day Freedom Schools, which deepen young people’s understanding of systems of oppression and how to confront them. Both programs host Youth Undoing Institutional Racism (YUIR) groups in which young people choose their focus for organizing. Both programs have enjoyed the support of local Friends meetings as hosts for Freedom School.

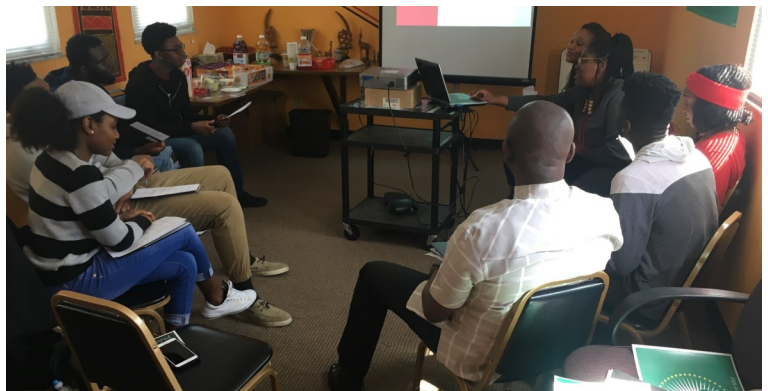
In St. Paul, AFSC has partnered with public schools to pilot restorative justice projects, focusing on



*AFSC St. Louis works with an amazing group of young people at Northwest Academy of Law.*

repairing harm to relationships instead of assigning blame and dispensing punishment between students and teachers. We’re pleased to be in close partnership with a young Friend who will be representing the program at Northern Yearly Meeting this year.

In St. Louis, youth [met](#) recently with county officials and school board members to build relationships and promote policies that move toward equity and away from punishment. The young people recognize that so-called “broken” systems are working exactly as intended—a key takeaway analysis from Freedom School.



*The Pan African Youth Alliance, a project of AFSC, meets in Dayton.*

In Ohio, AFSC has been engaging a core group of 15 visionary youth leaders who are excited about their collective power to challenge economic and social inequality among people of African descent in Ohio. These youth leaders have taken the first courageous action by creating the AFSC-sponsored [Pan-African Youth Alliance](#) (PAYA) that is largely composed of African Student Association leaders from colleges in western Ohio.

PAYA’s mission is to empower and inspire young people of African descent to become transformational leaders who can lift up their collective voices for equal opportunities that would foster economic and social mobility in their communities. PAYA’s strategy includes building alliances with over 30 African Student Associations representing over 6,000 college students.

[AFSC in Iowa](#) remains the statewide hub for organizing in support of immigrant rights. After the

2018 passage of an extreme anti-immigrant measure in the state legislature, AFSC redoubled its efforts to monitor Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) activity on the streets and in county jails. AFSC hosts an ICE hotline, organizes accompaniment for immigrants facing ICE check-ins, provides technical support for community raid response teams, and coordinates the [Iowa Sanctuary Movement](#), a statewide network of congregations working to support immigrants.

AFSC Iowa's low-cost Legal Services Program continues to serve hundreds of immigrants and refugees each year, and staff travel the state to share "Immigration 101" and "Know Your Rights" workshops with allies and immigrants. We work closely with young immigrants and were pleased to [support](#) two Dreamers who took part in FCNL's spring advocacy days in Washington, DC.

All of AFSC's work in the Midwest is closely connected with the organization's broader efforts through networks of support in healing justice, anti-Islamophobia, youth, Palestine-Israel and immigrant rights. Sometimes our work makes headlines, but more often our long history of accompaniment is what leads to lasting change.

Like Cornel West, I'm a prisoner of hope. I hope this brief tour of AFSC's work across the Midwest has conveyed the clear message that AFSC, supported by F/friends, is creating "new possibilities based on contagious visions"—visions that will inspire us to create new ways of living together.



*Former AFSC Iowa intern Cece Martinez speaks at the Iowa statehouse.*

Whether Friends are serving on staff, volunteering on a governance or advisory committee, showing up at a rally or donating monthly, you provide a crucial bedrock of energy and spirit. I encourage you to visit [afsc.org/Friends](http://afsc.org/Friends) to check out the many ways that you and your meeting or church can be involved.

Thank you again for your support. I invite you to stay connected with AFSC's Midwest Region by subscribing to our monthly e-newsletter, the Midwest Digest (at [tinyurl.com/MidwestDigest](http://tinyurl.com/MidwestDigest)). I encourage you to contact me directly at 312-427-2533 or [BRosen@afsc.org](mailto:BRosen@afsc.org). Please connect with me on Twitter [@RabbiBrant](https://twitter.com/RabbiBrant) and on [Facebook](https://www.facebook.com/).

Shalom, Salaam and Peace,

*Brant Rosen*



*For Women's History Month in March, AFSC General Secretary Joyce Ajlouny (fourth from left) offered a keynote address to hundreds of people, including several Bloomington, Indiana Friends.*



**American Friends  
Service Committee**