

frontlines

FROM THE

the Bread & Roses community fund newsletter | 2016 | Issue 1



Residents expose toxic drinking water in Flint and Camden

International attention is focused on the dangerously high levels of lead in Flint, Mich., tap water. But Flint is far from the only American city where residents live with serious environmental hazards. Flint's water crisis made headlines because residents aggressively advocated for their own health and safety. "If it weren't for a few dozen residents and a handful of crusading experts who pushed back against the official narrative, we still wouldn't know the truth," Anna Maria Barry-Jester wrote in a January 2016 article about the crisis for the *FiveThirtyEight* blog.

National Institute for Healthy Human Spaces (NIHHS), a *Racial & Economic Justice Fund* grantee based in Camden, N.J., is a watchdog and advocate for a wide range of environmental justice issues. Just as Flint residents aimed a spotlight on their lead-poisoned water supply, NIHHS worked in the early 2000s to document and publicize the lead levels in Camden's public schools. The school district refused to turn over documentation about lead levels, and NIHHS had to obtain a federal court order. When they finally received the data, they discovered that "the lead levels were astronomical," NIHHS executive director Roy Jones said.

Armed with this information, NIHHS leaders held several town meetings to let the public know that children were getting lead poisoning



ELAINE ASHTON

“Utilities and government are supposed to be in the business of protecting us, but they don’t do anything until we bring it to their attention.”

NIHHS executive director Roy Jones

from drinking tap water at school. “Because of our work, the state had to intervene and address the issue,” Jones said. “Today, all of the kids in the district drink bottled water as a result of our advocacy work.” It has already

been more than a decade since NIHHS and their allies secured this victory for Camden’s children, and water coolers and drinking cups are still a \$75,000 line item in the school district’s budget.

To fix toxic drinking water problems for the long term, Camden and other cities need to “literally rebuild all of the infrastructure,”

Jones said. In January Philadelphia Councilwoman Helen Gym called for hearings on Philadelphia’s water supply and noted that the city’s aging infrastructure deserves extra monitoring.

Environmental health hazards such as lead in drinking water disproportionately

affect communities of color and low-income communities. According to the CDC, African American children are three times more likely than white children to have elevated levels of lead in their blood.

NIHHS is now turning its focus to Philadelphia and Chester and will start demanding water quality reports from those school districts. Jones noted that community-based organizing is important locally and in Flint. “Flint’s attention came from environmental justice people, concerned citizens, and a couple of legislators dealing with water quality issue,” he said. “Utilities and the government are supposed to be in the business of protecting us, but they don’t do anything until we bring it to their attention.” 

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LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Dear friends,

Our last newsletter featured a cover story on the launch of our Giving Project. It's a cross-class, cross-race, intergenerational team of 20 people training together to fundraise and move money to grassroots

movements for racial and economic justice.

I am thrilled to report that the Giving Project is going very well so far! The participants range in age from 23 to 80. In February the group completed an intensive training exploring race and class in the U.S. In March they each decided how much they were going to personally give, and in early April they completed a fundraising skills training.

The group is doing profound, emotional work. Each participant has gained an understanding of how experiences of race and class affect our relationships to money and giving. They have been telling me that the Giving Project has been

providing a safe space for them to explore these personal and political topics. Perhaps most importantly, in each meeting the participants have deepened their sense of trust and community with each other.

I'm convinced that models like the Giving Project are the future of social justice philanthropy. This is a pilot program at Bread & Roses, but it feels surprisingly familiar. The Giving Project combines political education, donor organizing, and transparent and democratic grantmaking — all practices woven into the fabric of our organization. Personally, I have been incredibly energized by the Giving Project. I can't wait to open it up for more people to participate in it!

Sincerely,

Casey Cook
 executive director

DONOR PROFILE

Change Ride to benefit Bread & Roses takes place Sept. 17

Jill Feldstein and Jeni Mattingly were on their bikes when the idea for the Change Ride was born. They wanted to organize a bike ride that brought people together to raise money for social justice. Bread & Roses quickly came to mind.

“Bread & Roses’ clear focus on racial and economic justice and supporting movement building is very important to me, and that’s what made me want to be a donor initially,” Feldstein said. After nearly 10 years as a Bread & Roses donor, Feldstein increased her involvement by joining the board in 2015.

Feldstein and Mattingly are planning the Change Ride, which will take place Sept. 17, to be a “cycling adventure” through Philadelphia. The goals are to raise funds for Bread & Roses and to increase the visibility of social justice organizing. Riders will visit locations throughout the city that have significance to Bread & Roses’ grantees and their movements for change. Organizers and activists from each grantee group will be on site to share the history of that place throughout the morning. Mattingly, an artist, is creating a map that will link the stories into a larger picture of how organizing and resistance have shaped the city.



Jill Feldstein, far left, and Jeni Mattingly, far right, with their cycling group last summer.

Feldstein sees the Change Ride as a good fit with Bread & Roses’ expertise in convening: “Building community feels important because social change work is often done in silos. Bread & Roses is a really strong convener of people and organizations in the city.”

The Change Ride will take place Saturday, Sept. 17. For information: bikebreadandroses@gmail.com.

Philadelphia Coalition for Affordable Communities

There's only one dedicated pot of money for affordable housing in Philadelphia: the Housing Trust Fund. The money in this fund comes from mortgage and deed recording fees. According to Christi Clark, lead organizer of the Philadelphia Coalition for Affordable Communities (PCAC), this is not a secure or adequate source of revenue. In 2015, the fund was valued at \$11.7 million. In its new campaign, Development without Displacement, PCAC aims to increase the fund's value to at least \$20 million by getting a series of bills passed that will add stable resources to the Housing Trust Fund.

PCAC, formerly the Campaign to Take Back Vacant Land, is a coalition of community organizations that share this vision of accessible, affordable housing and green space in the Philadelphia region. In 2014 the Campaign to Take Back Vacant Land, with support from Bread & Roses, achieved its goal of establishing a land bank. PCAC is now organizing to make sure the land bank and the Housing Trust Fund have enough resources to meet the city's growing need for affordable housing.



Philadelphia Coalition for Affordable Communities members gather at City Hall in November before a land bank hearing.

In 2015 PCAC grew from 20 organizations to 40, building more power to deliver on their shared vision. PCAC is pressuring City Council to adopt policies that will capture the benefits of new real estate development in order to ensure that people of all incomes can afford to stay in Philadelphia, and in their communities, for decades to come.

The issues are serious, but the tactics are sometimes playful. PCAC members attend City Council meetings wearing their PCAC

T-shirts and sporting vegetable-themed hats to represent their urban gardens. "We have fun with it," Clark said.

Most recently, PCAC secured the support of City Council member Kenyatta Johnson. Johnson gave the organization a list of publicly held vacant land in his district and made a commitment to supporting PCAC in reserving this land for affordable housing and green space. 

Roots Town Hall participants connect environmental justice and gentrification

On February 25, 170 community members gathered at the Friends Center for Roots Town Hall: Challenging Displacement and Environmental Devastation. Bread & Roses partnered with Food & Water Watch and a committee of grassroots groups to plan the town hall. The meeting explored how profit-driven development practices are rooted in

our nation's history of land grabbing from indigenous peoples and displacement of poor and working-class communities.

The evening kicked off with a performance by Universal African Dance and Drum Ensemble, who invited participants to connect with their hearts, bodies, and each other through music and dance. Ron Whyte, an activist with the Philadelphia Coalition for R.E.A.L. Justice, a *Future Fund* grantee, followed with a presentation using maps to show the history of environmental disasters impacting low-income communities and communities of color.

In a panel discussion, people from across the region shared their own struggles with displacement. Jasmine Hamilton, an urban farmer and member of SOIL Generation, a *Future Fund* grantee, had to move with her children three times to find

affordable housing in West Philadelphia.

"I didn't realize gentrification was happening until it had already happened to me," Hamilton said.

Participants spent time in small groups discussing the changes taking place in their own neighborhoods and considering what has been lost and what has been gained. One participant later reflected, "I felt refreshed talking to people who didn't necessarily look like me but understood the issues I was talking about."

Four organizers then shared stories from their efforts to slow the tide of unchecked real estate development by pressuring public officials to work with communities to redistribute land, repair the environment, and amplify marginalized community voices in development conversations.

As the town hall closed, participants learned how to get involved in movements to root our region in an ethic of caring, community preservation, and environmental health. 



Participants at February's Roots Town Hall work together to identify changing neighborhoods on a map.

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Resources for Racial Justice in Philly and Ferguson grantee **Organization for Black Struggle (OBS)** was able to hire full-time staff with Bread & Roses' financial support this year. Recently, OBS organized public support and won a consent decree—an important amendment between the city and the Department of Justice that will help to ensure the fair treatment of citizens by police.

The **Black Radical Organizing Collective** received an *Opportunity Fund* grant for their inaugural Black Radical Tradition Conference, which was held in January at Temple University. The conference, which was free and open to the public, featured speakers including Angela Davis and Cornel West.

X-Offenders for Community Empowerment, a *Phoebus Criminal Justice Initiative* grantee, successfully lobbied to amend Philadelphia's 2011 "Ban the Box" legislation. The new amendment, passed in December 2015, prohibits employers from conducting criminal background checks before making offers of employment and limits employers to accessing only the past seven years of an applicant's criminal history.



Black Radical Tradition Conference participants walk down Broad Street in the March for Our Future in January.

Future Fund grantee **Sisterly L.O.V.E.** hosted a workshop, Keeping Our Sisters Safe, that allowed trans women to share and learn new strategies for keeping their community safe in Philadelphia. The workshop focused on avoiding police harassment.

In January, *Racial & Economic Justice* grantee **ACT UP Philadelphia** published two reports aimed at providing fair housing for people living with HIV and AIDS. The reports are available on the ACT UP Philadelphia website.

