

2010 MID-SOUTH PEACE AND JUSTICE CENTER PROGRAM REPORT





The Mid-South Peace and Justice Center is an organizing, strategizing, and action center that educates and trains new community leaders to drive campaigns for racial, economic, environmental, and social justice. We work to build the capacity of disenfranchised communities directly affected by injustice to organize movements that fundamentally shift power and dismantle oppression.

Founded in 1982, our mission is to engage, organize, and mobilize communities to realize social justice through nonviolent action. We are putting the power in the hands of those directly affected by injustice to correct it.



THE PROBLEM

There is an imbalance of power that tips toward those in society's upper classes. This inequity is manifested in a variety of ways—from the lack of real community issues addressed by those in power to the lack of a voice for our communities in the few conversations about these issues.

THE SOLUTION

Build a movement, led by people directly affected by injustice, that can shift power from corporate boardrooms to our communities. The first step in realizing this goal is to build the infrastructure for a broader movement. As of now, we are raining the organizers and building the alliances that will move our agenda forward. The next step is to helping communities realize their power to create change. Our communities must take hold of this power through grassroots community organizing campaigns to rebalance the power structure.

OUR OBJECTIVES

Engage Communities in Building Power

Grassroots leadership development and organizer training to rebuild the capacity of low income and marginalized communities to organize for peace, justice, and power.

Organize For Grassroots Change

Consistent, coordinated, and supported organizing that lifts up and brings together the grassroots voices of the community to work toward a vision of liberation and social justice.

Mobilize Our Power for Justice

Mobilizing our community to create positive change and win victories that are based upon the collective, organized power of those most affected by injustice.

WHO WE ARE

We are a multi-issue, cross-constituency, and membership-based organization working to fulfill our mission to educate, organize, and mobilize communities to realize social justice through nonviolent action. We engage and train new community leaders to organize campaigns for racial, economic, environmental, and social justice. Current programs serve the diverse needs of impoverished communities and address the root causes of injustice in Memphis and the Mid-South. We believe the most effective response to the challenge of violence and discrimination is to address the interrelated causes of injustice, such as poverty, racism, and unequal access to basic human needs. We have worked throughout our history to take such action on important issues deemed by our communities.

We do our work through two program focuses:

Training and Education

We seek to rebuild the capacity of communities and grassroots leaders to organize for positive change by providing training, popular education, and technical assistance to individuals, organizations, and communities working to address issues of social justice.

Grassroots Organizing

We organize groups of people and communities to lead campaigns of economic, racial, environmental, and social justice. In 2010, the work focused on jobs, housing, criminal justice reform, homelessness, protection of civil liberties, and ending U.S. wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.



TRAINING AND EDUCATION

Grassroots Organizers Training for Power (G.O.T. Power)

Training individuals and organizations in the skills of community organizing and developing grassroots leaders to make positive change in their communities. This is accomplished through the community organizer training program, the ongoing support and development of graduates, and our role as a training resource for the larger community.

- Four eight-week trainings graduated 80 new Community Organizers that worked with 55 organizations and groups in 2010.

G.O.T. Poder | G.O.T. Power translated and facilitated in Spanish

- One eight-week training was held, graduating 23 new Organizadores de la Comunidad that have already organized a May 1st immigration reform rally at the National Civil Rights Museum and helped to form new Latino organizing group - Comunidades Unidas en Una Voz.

Community Training Opportunities Offered

- Developed 'Intro to Nonviolence Training' for Memphis Gay and Lesbian Community Center
- Developed and facilitated 'Intro to Organizing' workshop for Westwood and Riverview Neighborhood Associations
- Hosted TN State RootsCamp - an unconference for organizers
 - Only southern host of 15 RootsCamps occurring nationally
 - One of the highest attendances nationally with over 100 registrants
 - Only RootsCamp that offered simultaneous Spanish translation
- Developed and facilitated a day-long food justice curriculum for the BRIDGES Summer Leadership Institute.
- Organized 20 Memphians to attend the U.S. Social Forum in Detroit along with 10,000 activists from across the country.



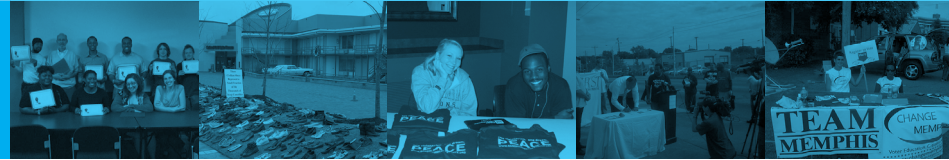
Gandhi-King Conference on Peacemaking

Gandhi-King Conference on Peacemaking

7th annual conference: A three-day conference bringing together modern visionaries on nonviolence and social change with community leaders, activists, academics and organizers to train, learn, plan, and organize to create a culture of liberation and justice for all. Speakers included Tim Wise, Jaribu Hill, Rev. Billy Kyles, and Spirit Trickey Rowan.

- Over 350 high school students attended the Gandhi-King PeaceJam Slam where 15 workshops were offered alongside a full day of dialogue and learning experiences. Forty-five teachers were trained and forty college mentors engaged students in community building, active learning, and intergenerational sharing.
- More than 250 adult attendees participated in three days of training, education, and action, including more than three dozen workshops, paper presentations, films, and panel discussions.





GRASSROOTS ORGANIZING

Homeless Organizing for Power and Equality (HOPE)

We worked with people experiencing homelessness to organize positive community action in and around issues connected with housing and police harassment, as well as local policy concerns of the unsheltered.

- Created and produced 6500 copies of the Memphis Survival Guide, the city's first comprehensive and user-friendly directory of all local homeless service providers and programs. The guide is used by The Shelby County Public Defender's Office, Shelby County Division of Corrections, Pre-Trial Services, Memphis Emergency Medical Services, Methodist Le Bonheur Healthcare, and American Red Cross, among other agencies.
- Worked as a member organization on Mayors Wharton and Luttrell's policy and planning committee called, the Ten Year Plan to End Homelessness in Memphis and Shelby County.
- Recruited over 80 community volunteers to assist the City of Memphis' point-in-time count of the homeless population in 2010-2011.
- Organized and educated in opposition to legislation that created unconstitutional "No-Panhandling Zones" within the Downtown Memphis area, passage of this law has led to increased police harassment and dispersal of the unsheltered.
- Successfully prevented passage of legislation aimed at preventing small businesses from selling single-serve alcohol in Downtown. This legislation would have had no effect on liquor stores or on major corporate chains stores in the area but would have unjustly targeted minority-owned small businesses.
- Worked with homeless individuals to find services and navigate the local criminal justice and legal systems.



JustPeace MEMPHIS - Alternatives to Incarceration & Criminal Justice Reform

Organized, educated, and lobbied the public and elected officials about the positive benefits of progressive reforms to our local criminal justice system.

- Served as a member organization of Mayor Joe Ford's Drug Court Task Force. This body was assigned to propose funding and operational recommendations to ensure the continued success of Memphis nationally recognized program for substance abuse treatment and diversion.
- Mobilized community support to ensure that the County Commission provided adequate funding for the 2011 Shelby County Drug Court operations.
- Proposed an alternative, treatment-based approach to curb aggressive panhandling and advocated for the designation of a single division of General Session Court for all homeless-related cases so that there would be consistent prosecution, as well as alternatives to treatment and supportive housing options.
- Worked with Congressman Steve Cohen (TN-9) to introduce the Restorative Justice in Schools Act.





Issues First - Electoral Organizing

Through community engagement, candidate education, and promotion of accountability in banks and predatory lenders who own blighted properties, we sought to link the social problems of homelessness, affordable housing, poverty, and privilege with the issues of predatory lending, home foreclosure, and blight.

- We confronted Wells Fargo for unethical lending practices and their negative effects on low-to-middle-income communities of color. We also organized public action to recover over \$65,000 in unpaid back taxes, code fines, and fees owed to local government by Wells Fargo and Wells Fargo servicers.
- We educated the community on the reality of blight and corporate negligence through the BlightWatch YouTube series: 21 videos viewed by 2813 people. The videos led to improved maintenance of properties in lower income areas and greater attention to the issue of blight by elected officials.
- We hosted the 2010 Community Action Summit, which was attended by representatives from over 35 neighborhood associations and community groups on issues of home foreclosures, fires in vacant properties, and the need for comprehensive code reform.
- We secured signed pledges of the 2010 MSPJC People's Agenda from all major candidates in the 2010 countywide elections, including current Shelby County Mayor Mark Luttrell. The People's Agenda focused on blight, affordable housing, criminal justice reform, and public health.
- Our GOTV efforts in the 2010 county elections included long-term targeted phone banking and door-to-door canvassing in three high foreclosure communities in County Commission district five. Voters contacted 2500 people.
- We worked with the Shelby County Register of Deeds, the Shelby County Trustee, and the City of Memphis Treasurer to ensure proper documentation of ownership of foreclosed properties.
- We uncovered unethical banking practices whereby banks and lending institutions hid their ownership of blighted properties and passed on the maintenance costs of their properties to the City of Memphis and Shelby County.



Immigration Reform

We worked in coordination with local, state, and national organizations to mobilize our communities in support of comprehensive immigration reform.

- We organized the Rally for Rights on May 1st in support of comprehensive immigration reform and in opposition to continued raids and harassment of immigrant populations. The Rally for Rights was attended by over 250 community members, organized by two dozen graduates of the G.O.T. Power Organizer Training. It resulted in the formation of a new immigrant organizing group, Comunidades Unidas en Una Voz.
- We educated and mobilized the Memphis community on ongoing immigration legislation at the local, state, and national level. We also participated in citizen lobby days in Washington, D.C. and in home offices on six occasions.
- Our partners included: Center for Community Change, Reform Immigration for America, Tennessee Immigrant and Refugee Rights Coalition, Workers Interfaith Network, Comunidades Unidas en Una Voz, Latino Memphis, CMIRA Memphis, and many more organizations.



End the Afghan and Iraq Wars

We organized ongoing protest and advocacy actions in opposition to the continued U.S. military presence in Afghanistan and Iraq.

- We organized street protests to mark six years of war in Iraq and nine years of war in Afghanistan.
- We facilitated citizen lobbying opportunities with Congressman Steve Cohen, resulting in Cohen consistently voting against funding for the wars.
- We provided consistent information and opportunities for action in order to connect our local community with national campaigns and actions.
- Our partners included: Veterans for Peace, Iraq Veterans Against the War, Pax Christi Memphis, Progressive Student Alliance at the University of Memphis, the National Civil Rights Museum, and many other organizations.



GrowMemphis

Creating thriving community food systems that eliminate hunger, promote health, and further social justice.

URBAN AND COMMUNITY GARDENING

- In 2010, GrowMemphis assisted the development of **eight new garden projects**: St. Jude Garden, Common Ground Community Garden (Linden and Lauderdale), MIFA Garden, Grow Where You are Planted (Park Ave.), Bethel Grove Community Garden, Girl's Inc. South Park Center, Eleanor Roosevelt Memorial Garden at Douglass High School, and Snowden School Garden.
- GrowMemphis managed a **cooperative farmers market booth** at the Cooper Young Community Farmers Market. Over the course of the season, five community gardens and two individual garden partners participated, earning approximately \$4,000.
- Gardeners worked collaboratively to start over 2,000 seedlings for our partner gardens. Extra plants were sold at the 2nd annual **plant sale** at Idlewild Presbyterian Church, earning \$1,250. The remainder was donated to the Memphis Urban Garden Project.
- Through support from the Junior League of Memphis, we established **Market in the Mound**, a youth apprentice program based in the Orange Mound Community Garden with a farm stand, children's activities, and nutrition education every Saturday.
- Two educational **workshops** were held. St. Patrick's Center hosted *Ready, Set . . . Preserve* with Terra Smith of the University of Memphis. The St. Augustine Parkway Garden hosted *Winter Growing* with Chris Cosby, a horticulturalist with the Botanic Garden.
- GrowMemphis has received \$8,550 from **Housing and Community Development (HCD)** to support new garden projects in HCD target neighborhoods.



FOOD POLICY

- Supported by the HEAL Initiative of the Community Foundation of Greater Memphis, GrowMemphis received a \$40,000 grant to create a Food Advisory Council for Memphis and Shelby County. The working group has been researching the best practices for implementation in Memphis and Shelby County.
- Memphis City Council and Shelby County Commission both passed favorable zoning ordinances pertaining to neighborhood gardens, backyard chickens, and farmers markets in the **Unified Development Code**. GrowMemphis and other food advocates worked with Planning and Development to write the ordinances.
- In partnership with Harvard Law School and the Shelby County Health Department, we began reviewing the **Food Ordinance Handbook** in order to recommend changes that will remove barriers, particularly to producers marketing directly to consumers in Shelby County.

OTHER ACTIVITIES

- In the spring, GrowMemphis hosted a **screening of the film Food, Inc.** at LeMoyné Owen College in South Memphis. Over 150 people attended the event, and 18 organizations were represented by information about accessing healthy food. A second screening at Cleburn Homes was attended by 30 residents.
- GrowMemphis assisted **three new farmers markets** in Memphis this year by researching implementation of SNAP at farmers markets and guiding them through the regulatory process for starting a farmers market in Shelby County.
- GrowMemphis received support from the **Hyde Family Foundations** for core operations and organizational development through 2013.

