

# Mid-South Peace and Justice Center



**2008 - 2009 Annual Report**

# &Peace justice

Mid-South Peace & Justice Center

**A multi-issue, inclusive, community organizing group in the mid-south working with oppressed communities for liberation and social change.**

Founded in 1982, the Mid-South Peace and Justice Center is a multi-issue, multi-race organization whose mission is to educate, organize, and mobilize communities to realize social justice through nonviolent action. Our existence has been prompted by the chronic problems of social and economic injustice prevalent in the Delta South and especially in Memphis.

For over 28 years, the Mid-South Peace and Justice Center has worked to educate and train new community leaders to lead campaigns for racial, economic, environmental and social justice. Current programs of the Mid South Peace and Justice Center work to assist the diverse needs of impoverished communities and address the root causes of injustice in Memphis. We believe the response to the challenge of violence can only be found by addressing inter-related causes of injustice such as poverty, racism, and unequal access to resources necessary to meet basic human

needs. We have worked throughout our history to take action on important issues identified by our community.

We work to educate, organize and mobilize our community through a three-pronged approach:

- base and power building through issue-based electoral campaigns;
- leadership development and organizer training to rebuild the grassroots capacity to organize;
- continuous focus on grassroots, issue-based organizing campaigns based on needs identified by our community and built upon their collective, organized power.

## **Focus Areas:**

Focus Area 1: Education & Training

Focus Area 2: Community Organizing

Focus Area 3: GrowMemphis





Our analysis is that the root causes of injustice are found in the unequal balance of power that tips towards those in the upper classes of American society. This is manifested in a variety of ways; from the lack of real community issues being addressed by those in power, to the lack of a voice for our communities in these conversations when they happen.

We believe that our vision of a community where social justice is the norm is only attainable if we work to build a movement, led by people directly affected by injustice, that can fundamentally shift power from corporate board rooms back to our streets. We see the first step in realizing this dream to be building the infrastructure for a broader movement. We must train the organizers and build the alliance that will move our agenda. G.O.T. Power, our grassroots organizer training program, is doing that in the Mid-South, with over 120 graduates already organizing in our communities.

The next step is showing our communities that they have the power to create change. Once apathy is broken, we can really mobilize their power, and hold our leaders accountable to the best interests of our communities. We show people their power through organizing.

The need to take action against injustice in our community is great and there exists a strong history of resistance to oppression in Memphis and the Mid-South. But our communities have lost volume with their voices in the halls of power, but they can easily adjust this. Given that, our communities have one main focus: To increase their capacity to organize around issues through the consistent development of new, grassroots leaders to lead movements of social, racial, economic, and environmental justice.

## ***Organizational Leadership:***

The Mid-South Peace and Justice Center operates with a diverse board of directors, staff, and group of core volunteers whose membership is culled out of the communities in which our programs operate.

## ***Staff:***

Jacob Flowers, Executive Director  
 Allison Glass, Education Coordinator  
 Giovanna Lopez, Office Coordinator  
 Brad Watkins, Organizing Coordinator  
 Jo Williams, GrowMemphis Coordinator

## ***Partners:***

Our work is always done in coalition with other groups, individuals, and organizations. Our partnerships are diverse and range from other organizing groups to advocacy organizations, intergovernmental organizations and committees, and the government itself. We seek to break down barriers that have traditionally kept our progressive movements siloed into their own actions and ignoring the possibilities for change within a united and mutually beneficial organizing strategy.





### Grassroots Organizers Training for Power - G.O.T. Power

MSPJC's community organizer training program began with a pilot class on June 10, 2008. A diverse group of people come together for an 8-week course to learn specific tools and skills of community organizing. Weekly topics include: strategic planning, running meetings and planning events, media, grassroots fundraising, transforming conflict, and nonviolent direct action. Each topic is facilitated by a local expert in that particular subject, and participants receive a manual full of valuable supporting materials from a variety of sources.

This program has been highly successful with waitlists of potential participants compiled after each session has reached capacity. We have also expanded the training to include a format that is offered in Spanish with translated training materials. Day-long and weekend formats are currently being developed to be able to reach an even broader audience.

Over the Center's 28 year history of community organizing we identified several factors that led to the creation of the G.O.T. Power program.

First, there is no shortage of issues that require the attention of our community members in order to better our city. Memphis is at the top of too many of the wrong lists, from infant mortality to diabetes to violent crime. Second, there is also no shortage of caring and driven individuals and organizations that have worked and will continue to work to bring about positive change in their communities. Third, the confluence of the first two indicators leads us to believe that the missing piece of the puzzle

is a lack of properly trained and supported community organizers in Memphis.

The need for the training is apparent, as the course has been filled to capacity in every session to date. Participants came from a wide variety of work backgrounds including non-profits, neighborhood associations, corporate or businesses and government employees. In the post evaluation, 95% of participants said that the training was highly effective, the highest rating available. All participants said they would refer a

friend or co-worker to attend the training session, and all said that they wanted to stay in communication with our staff to receive follow-up training and continue their development as a grassroots leader through coaching and consultation.

G.O.T. Power is critical to the mission of the Center. It benefits both our internal organizing campaigns and builds new groups of organized citizens working independently on the grassroots issues most important to their community.



- **Community members trained: 120**
- **Number of organizational affiliates: 80**
- **Number of trainings per year: 4**
- **Total number of trainings to 2008 - 2009: 8**
- **Cost to participate: \$0**





## Focus Area 1: Education & Training

### Participant Demographics

- **Women: 62%**
- **Men: 38%**
- **White: 37%**
- **Black: 36%**
- **Latino: 20%**
- **Other: 7%**
- **Under 20: 18 %**
- **20 – 30: 24%**
- **31 – 40: 22%**
- **41 – 50: 14%**
- **51 - 65 : 11%**
- **Over 65: 11%**



ALUMNI

### *Cristina's Story*

**Cristina Condori** was the instigator and inspiration for our community organizer training course to be translated and offered in Spanish. She is a strong rising leader within the Latino community in Memphis and currently serves on the Board of the Mid-South Peace and Justice Center. The following is an excerpt of an interview with Cristina that has been translated into English.

*I have been looking for information, a guide to learn because of the injustice that I live with anti-immigration laws. I want to work with people who also want to work to make change. People need information, but we need not only information but also ways to act, and I want to transmit that to them, that they have the power to act. The G.O.T. Power training helped me to be confident about what I want to say because now I know the information I have is real and I can transmit it and explain it assuredly. Now I speak with my partners at work, I spread flyers and I also speak to women's groups to tell them what I*

*do and to share my experience. I know that when we organize, we have the power to make a change; before I didn't know that. We cannot wait for someone else to do something for us, we have to get involved.*

*The Peace and Justice Center has opened doors for me to be here. Now I send information by email about rallies, direct actions, and even for cultural activities and people ask me how I have time to do this because I also work as a house keeper. But I think that if we really want to help, we make time for that, and if we do not want injustices, we have to learn how to avoid them and take action.*







## Focus Area 1: Education & Training

### Gandhi-King Conference on Peacemaking



The Gandhi-King Conference on Peacemaking brings 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. What makes this conference unique from others in the country is:

1. *Accessibility:* The conference is dedicated to remaining affordable for anyone who wants to attend through work trade options, low admission for all, and affordable lodging options.
2. *Partnerships:* There is considerable collaboration from local and national supporters including academics, activists and lay people.
3. *Relevance:* That Memphis hosts the conference is significant because of its historically-unique roots, current community challenges, as well as being a central location for a national and international audience.
4. *Comprehensive:* Adult and youth educational workshops, speakers, and working groups that promote individual and organizational skills in conflict resolution, community building, & nonviolent communication.



Gandhi-King  
CONFERENCE ON PEACEMAKING





## Focus Area 1: Education & Training

### Gandhi-King Conference on Peacemaking

#### 2008

5th Annual Conference, October 17-18, Christian Brothers University.

#### Speakers:

- Amy Goodman, Democracy Now
- Father Roy Bourgeois, School of the Americas Watch
- Ruby Nell Sales, Spirit House
- Michael Nagler, Metta Center for Nonviolence Education
- Reverend Lennox Yearwood, Hip Hop Caucus

#### Highlights:

- 600 individuals attended from 34 states.
- Gandhi-King Youth Conference: Over 200 high school students attended from the Mid-South.
- Organizers formed a new partnership with our local PeaceJam affiliate to expand youth outreach and depth of conference experience.
- Youth Conference featured Sounds of Unity, a community performance event which included hip hop, spoken word, dance, and art.
- A sample of presentations that were offered include: "Growing Green Jobs: Equity for People in the New Economy", "Gandhian Nonviolence as a Way of Life", "The Challenges of Racial Reconciliation in Selma, Alabama", and "International Solidarity with the La'Onf Iraqi Nonviolence Movement".
- Prominent national organizations were present including: Voices for Creative Nonviolence, Alternatives to Violence Project, Free Press, United to End Racism, Fellowship of Reconciliation, and Grassroots Leadership.

#### 2009

6th Annual Conference, October 23-25, Christian Brothers University.

#### Speakers:

- Reverend C.T. Vivian, lifelong civil rights activist
- Mubarak Awad, Nonviolence International
- Kathy Kelly, Voices for Creative Nonviolence
- Michael Nagler, Metta Center for Nonviolence Education
- Barbara Love, United to End Racism
- Rudy Balles, PeaceJam

#### Highlights:

- 634 individuals attended from 37 states and three countries.
- Gandhi-King Youth Conference: 270 high school students attended from the Mid-South.
- Examples of presentations include: "Healing the Harm to Secondary Victims of Crime through Restorative Justice", "Aikido: The Way of Harmony and Peace", "Playback Theater: A Tool for Community and Self-reflection", and "Moving the Mid-South Forward: Green Jobs and the Green Economy".
- Gandhi-King Convergence was created, resulting in a year-long network of people working together and supporting each other through established working groups.
- Two prominent national organizations joined the governing body of the conference: the M.K. Gandhi Institute and the Metta Center for Nonviolence Education.



### Community Organizing Educate :: Organize :: Mobilize

2008 - 2009 was an especially busy time as the Mid-South Peace and Justice Center pushed forward on several new grassroots campaigns and programs. Each of these projects were implemented with a commitment to organizing with those who have been traditionally disenfranchised, socially, economically and politically, within our community in hopes of providing moral, effective and fiscally responsible solutions to some of our most serious challenges.

In addition to organizing around national issues, 2008 and 2009 saw the launching of three new ongoing programs and three campaigns addressing community concerns in the fields of criminal justice reform, homelessness, issue-based electoral organizing, sexual assault, and support for workplace equality for Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender workers.

#### Campaigns

##### National Issues :: Local Organizing

##### Health Care, Immigration & Jobs

- Participated in the First 100 Days lobbying effort in partnership with the Center for Community Change campaign for community values. Center staff lobbies Capitol Hill to support health care reform, worker justice and immigration reform.
- Worked with state and national coalition partners in support of a new federal community jobs initiative to ensure that federal stimulus job programs focus on low income urban areas.
- Center staff and leadership convened with local and state coalition partners in support of the TN Green Jobs Act to provide local job creation/training opportunities via surplus TANF funds.

##### JUSTPEACE MEMPHIS :: Criminal Justice reform

- Organized community support for and raised awareness of positive alternatives to incarceration for offenders with substance abuse issues and the mentally ill.
- Successfully advocated to the Shelby County Commission for \$2.3 million in additional funding for the Shelby County Drug Court, the Jericho Initiative, expansion of pre-trial diversion services, and vertical prosecution. Increased funding to these programs will lower recidivism rates among participants and save Shelby County and estimated \$4.1 million in incarceration costs.
- Worked in coalition to support a Restorative Justice model for the juvenile criminal justice system.
- Joined Mayor Ford's Drug Court Task Force to ensure funding, continued operations and expansion of vocational training and employment opportunities.





### Campaigns

#### ISSUES FIRST: Voter Education/Electoral Advocacy

- Organized and rallied community partners to educate the voting public on often ignored community issues during the Memphis special mayoral election, and upcoming 2010 and 2011 countywide, city and congressional elections.
- Created the People's Agenda: a community-based platform centering on issues related to poverty, jobs, health, crime and violence.
- Successfully secured a signed pledge from the top six candidates in the City Mayor's race stating that the issues outlined in the People's Agenda would be priorities in their administrations if elected. Memphis Mayor AC Wharton signed the pledge.

#### H.O.P.E.: Homeless Organizing for Power and Equality

- Created the Memphis Survival Guide, a user-friendly directory of Memphis homeless services distributed to the homeless directly and via service providers, hospitals and the criminal justice system. Distributed 6050 Survival Guides.
- Conducted a survey of 300 homeless individuals in the city of Memphis. Results of this survey will be provided to homeless service providers and will guide advocacy efforts.
- Raised community awareness and advocated in opposition of a planned police sweep of the Downtown and Midtown homeless population.
- Recruited volunteers to assist the city of Memphis in the Point in Time homeless census, done without police presence for the first time.
- Advocated for positive solutions to homelessness and alternatives to criminalization of poverty as a member of The Mayor's Planning Committee to End Homelessness.

#### Friends of MSARC

- Worked in coalition with other local organizations in raising awareness of serious service gaps at the Memphis Sexual Assault Resource Center.
- Successfully advocated to elected officials in support of the Rape Crisis Center becoming a function of county government and the creation of a Victims of Crime Advisory League (VOCAL).
- Engaged the greater Memphis community via door-to-door canvassing, phone banking and community events in areas with high rates of sexual assault.



#### Shelby County Non-Discrimination Ordinance

- Worked as a coalition partner to successfully advocate for the passage of a county-wide non-discrimination ordinance for Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender county employees.
- Co-hosted community rallies and recruited volunteers to aid in advocacy efforts.

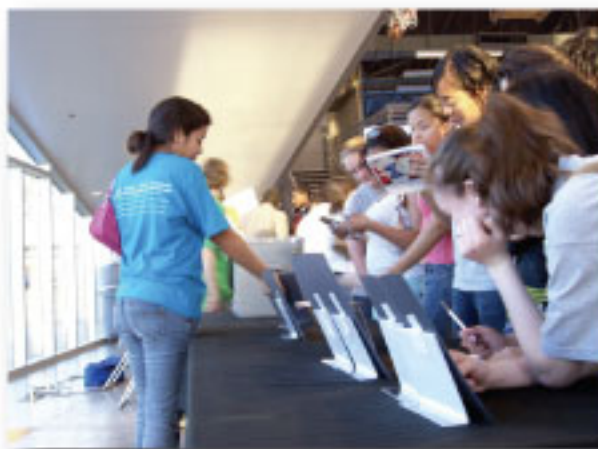
## Campaigns

### Change Memphis: Voter Education / Electoral Advocacy

- Registered 1500 new voters in low-income / low-voter-turnout communities of color in 2008.
- Get Out The Vote (GOTV) efforts raised voter turnout in four low-income / low-voter-turnout communities by 15%-45% in 2008.
- Educated the public on the ten proposed City and County charter amendments, offering plain English explanations of what these ordinances mean and what effect they would have on City and County government.
- Educated the general public on charter amendments via door-to-door canvassing, direct mail, phone banking and four community forums.
- Distributed ballot information via poll workers at more voting locations than any other local campaign in November of 2008.
- Successfully advocated to the Charter Commission that ballot items be listed separately with a yes or no vote each, as opposed to a single line item.

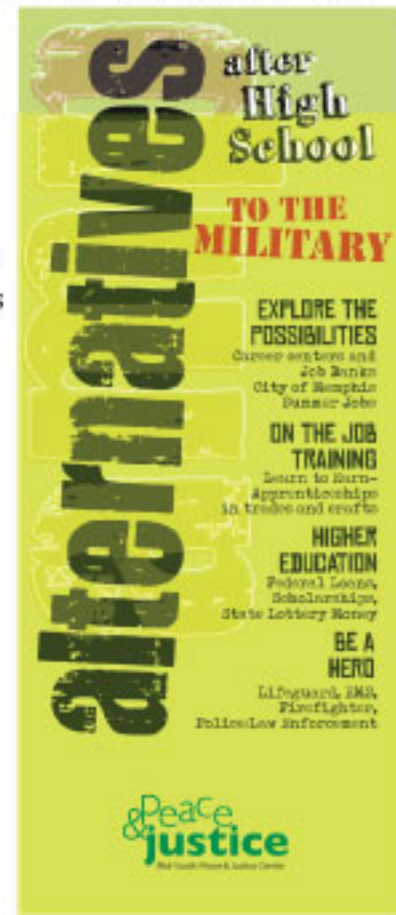


Voter Education. Citizen Advocacy.



### AMP: Alternatives to the Military Project

- Youth organizing and educating about the realities of military service providing resources on the many alternative career and educational options that exist after high school.
- Created and distributed our “Nonviolent Career Alternatives” booklet to all Memphis city high schools.
- As a result of leafleting at local high schools, city-wide policy regarding the ASVAB military aptitude test was changed to an opt-in only policy.
- Attended the National Counter Recruitment Conference in Chicago in July, 2009.
- Developed a youth-led workshop on truth in recruiting and alternatives that has been offered at several conferences and youth events.







In 2001, ground was broken in an empty lot in Orange Mound to start the MSPJC's first neighborhood garden partnership. In addition to tomatoes, okra, and peas, the seeds were also sown for the idea that would become GrowMemphis. The Orange Mound garden demonstrated the power of urban gardens to transform empty lots into thriving centers of the community, and in doing so engage residents across generations in growing their own food and nurturing both the garden and their communities. In 2007, the program was formally launched including the St. Augustine Parkway Garden and the Midtown North Community Garden in addition to the then six year old garden in Orange Mound.

Since its inception, GrowMemphis has been committed to helping communities develop environmentally, socially, and economically sustainable urban gardens by assisting groups to select and prepare garden sites, recruit and organize garden participants, use organic techniques to build soil and control pests, and more.

The program has grown by leaps and bounds to include youth employment and entrepreneurship, collective marketing of local produce, and working for policy change to improve food security in local communities.





## Focus Area 3 : GrowMemphis

### Some recent accomplishments include:

#### 2008

- Beltline Community Garden, McMerton Community Gardens in Binghampton and the Cunningham Community Growers in Frayser join GrowMemphis.
- Four neighborhood youth apprentices are employed for the summer in community gardens learning and working in all aspects of urban farming, from planting the seed to selling the produce at the Botanic Garden Farmers Market.
- Midtown North Garden expands to include honeybees for pollination and honey production.
- Community gardens demonstrate organic vegetable growing methods, worm composting, three bin compost systems, apiculture (beekeeping), fruit cultivation, and more.

#### 2009

- The Uptown Community Garden, the Memphis Center for Independent Living Garden in Midtown, the Angelus Street Garden in Midtown, the Memphis Urban Ministries Garden in Triangle Noir and the Savory Patches Garden in Riverview Kansas join GrowMemphis.
- Over \$12,000 of in-kind donations to community gardens are secured through sponsorships of the Uptown Community Garden by the Downtown Rotary Club and the Angelus Garden by the Drake and Zeke Morning Show on 98.1 the MAX.
- Through partnering with the city of Memphis to use greenhouse space, over 3000 seedlings are grown, supplying all ten gardens with enough left over to earn \$1,200 in plant sales and give hundreds away to low-income seniors in cooperation with the Memphis Urban Garden Program.



- Greenhouse (approximately 2000 square feet) is completed at the Midtown North Community Garden.
- Educational workshops are given on Worm Composting, How to Start a Community Garden, Rain Barrels, Seed Saving, and Making Jams and Jellies and more.
- Gardens demonstrate container growing on plots with lead contamination, wheelchair accessible gardening, greenhouse management and hanging tomatoes.
- Chef Jackson Kramer of Interim Restaurant hosts a benefit dinner for GrowMemphis in July using produce from the gardens and other local food. A full house of sixty diners shows that Memphians are putting their money where their mouths are and supporting local food initiatives.
- GrowMemphis attends the farmers market at the Botanic Garden throughout the season selling produce from a total of six community gardens and earning over \$1,500.
- Secured \$12,000 in funding for existing community gardens for 2010 to purchase equipment and other necessary investments for financial sustainability.
- Five new GrowMemphis garden projects are planned to start growing in 2010.





## Focus Area 3 : GrowMemphis

### In 2010, Grow Memphis plans to:

- Work with neighborhood youth to assist them in growing enough high quality produce so that they can employ themselves in urban agriculture.
- Open the "Market in the Mound" produce stand at the Orange Mound Community Garden and facilitate the implementation of other strategies to get more garden produce into the neighborhoods immediately surrounding community gardens.
- Work with community partners and local government to facilitate the creation of a Memphis Shelby County Food Policy Council to address issues relevant to our local food system such as zoning ordinances and farmers market regulations.
- Continue to work with new and existing garden projects to build community and bring fresh produce into Memphis food deserts.
- Continue marketing to restaurants and selling at farmers markets to earn revenue to keep individual garden projects financially sustainable.
- Host a screening of the movie Food, Inc. in South Memphis on April 17th to catalyze discussion and action around food access and public health in Memphis neighborhoods.

### Money's Story

Montreal (Money) McFerrin is a 10th grade student at Melrose High School and a resident of Orange Mound. It just so happens that he lives next to the Orange Mound Community Garden.



Money got involved with the garden in 2008 when he worked as a Summer Youth Apprentice planting seeds, tending plants, weeding and watering, and harvesting produce for market. Despite the fact that his internship ended in October, 2008, Money has stayed engaged with the garden ever since. Whenever Money comes to the garden, he is often accompanied by younger siblings, cousins, nieces and nephews - sharing with them the experience of finding snakes and giant worms and waiting for sunflowers to bloom and strawberries to turn from green to red. "My favorite part about working in the garden," he says, "is going to the farmers market."

At the market, he has the opportunity to represent GrowMemphis and sell produce from several garden sites, including produce he himself has grown in the Orange Mound Garden. Selling produce at market means Money and his co-salesman and cousin Anthony know all about the wide variety of vegetables, can explain the sustainable methods used to grow them, and can give shoppers advice about how to prepare them. The customers and other market vendors look forward to seeing Money and Anthony each week at the farmers market. Does Money want to be a farmer one day? Well, no, he's planning on becoming a veterinarian. He also wants to have a piece of land, and he's not worried about his future, because he knows he can always grow his own food and earn money doing it.



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Thank you for your generous support. You have made this work possible!



# & Peace justice

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