Advocate Challenge Transform

Fall 2019

Issues

A Newsletter of the Intercommunity Justice and Peace Center

Listening to Survivors' Voices

By Samantha Searls—Program Manager

For those of us working to end human trafficking, it can feel like a never-ending, impossible task. While we know that helping one person makes a difference, it's sometimes hard to see the big picture. However, when the US Advisory Council on Human Trafficking visited Cincinnati in August, they came specifically to listen and learn about our humble work in order to curate a report that could influence policy on the national level, putting our work in Cincinnati into a larger context.

The council is a presidentially-appointed group of seven survivors of human trafficking, including Cincinnati's own Harold D'Souza, who work through the State Department to inform our national leaders about the needs of survivors of trafficking and those who are being underserved by anti-trafficking efforts. At the meeting, the Cincinnati community shared concerns about the need for more trauma-informed training and their desire to include more survivors in advocacy and decision making.

Not long after the Council's visit, Cincinnati welcomed another national voice, US Ambassador-at-Large John Richmond. Ambassador Richmond works through the State Department as well, travelling to different countries to learn about and support anti-trafficking initiatives.

His visit to Cincinnati complimented the Council's meeting by emphasizing that survivor engagement should be approached with thoughtfulness and transparency. Ambassador Richmond said survivor involvement can't just be a box we check to make sure the work we're doing is inclusive. Survivors should be emotionally ready to share their stories of resilience, and should be offered compensation for their time.

Ambassador Richmond also reminded us that we are working against clear adversaries: the traffickers and industries that benefit from the exploitation of vulnerable people. He also spoke about low prosecution rates and lack of resources and tools for law enforcement to investigate trafficking networks.

The overall message from the Council and Ambassador was to not give up hope. It is possible to end human trafficking, but we must do it together.

Resilient Immigrant Youth

By Samantha Searls - Program Manager

On November 12, over 85 people gathered in a school cafeteria to send a message of love and support to DACA recipients and their families and friends. The crowd added their goopy handprints to a banner reading "Home is Here" while YES shared stories and poems of resilience and strength.

Right now the Supreme Court of the United States is reviewing a case about the DACA program, Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals. After the program was instituted by President Obama through an executive order in 2012, the Trump Administration rescinded the order in September of 2017 and worked to end the protections given to undocumented immigrant youth. The Supreme Court is now deciding on whether or not the Trump Administration gave adequate legal reasons for canceling the program. If the Supreme Court says the cancellation of DACA was fair, the program could end permanently. However, the Court first has to decide if they have the legal standing to review a President's decision to rescind an executive order.

YES Advisory Board Leader, Sandra Oñate with the banner painted by YES.

Many things could happen with the case and legal experts can't predict which way the Supreme Court will rule. If the Court follows the precedent set by the lower courts, the DACA program could be saved.

No matter what happens in the Supreme Court, we know that immigrant youth have the power to create significant systemic change. The youth, after all, were the ones who demanded that President Obama create the program after Congress failed to pass immigration reform.

The path before us calls for Congress to find a solution before the Supreme Court issues a ruling. The decision could come as early as January 2020 but is more likely to be released in June. *Cont'd on pg 3*

A Letter from Allison Reynolds-Berry

As the days have gotten shorter, darker, and colder, I find myself reflecting on the things that have brought me joy recently. It was incredibly powerful to stand in front of 300+ people like you who joined us for our Annual Gathering, Resilience: Planting Seeds and Growing Movements. Looking out into the eyes of those present, I saw many familiar faces and many new ones. Winona LaDuke's words inspired all of us and the passion of those gathered continues to inspire me. Thank you for joining us and celebrating the work of IJPC.

Another source of joy has been the honor of IJPC being named the National Association of Social Workers, Ohio Chapter, Region 6, Agency of the Year! IJPC does its work best in collaboration with others and I have immense gratitude for each of you who have made a phone call to your elected officials, attended an event, found a new perspective, and shared that with someone new. You are part of what makes IJPC so special and we share this award with you, and all those with whom and for IJPC works.

In the Christian church, December 1 marked the first Sunday of the Season of Advent, a time of waiting. As movements ebb and flow, they inevitably experience periods of waiting as well. DACA recipients are waiting for an answer from the Supreme Court of the United States on what will happen with the future of the program that allows them to drive, work, and receive scholarships. Those on Ohio's death row and federal death row wait for more permanent decisions to be made about their future. We continue waiting and know 2020 has yet to be written. I look to the New Year with hope. There will be tumultuous times, especially with a contentious election season already gearing up. As we stay in the present moment, and reflect on moments of joy, in this season of waiting, I give thanks to each of you who continues to stand alongside those suffering, those waiting for good news, and those whose futures are unknown. As 2019 comes to a close, please join me in giving to support IJPC this year. Thank you for being part of the work of cultivating seeds over the past year. Stay strong as we continue building movements into the future.

Samantha Searls and IJPC nominator Ruth Anne Van Loon at the 2019 National Association of Social Workers Regional Awards.

Allison Reynolds-Berry

Upcoming Events

For more information on these dates, visit IJPCcincinnati.org/events

December 9, 9:30-10:30AM
Human Trafficking Public Education and Awareness Committee Meeting
IJPC

December 10, 7:00-8:00PM
Anti-Death Penalty Committee Meeting
IJPC

December 18, 6:30-8:30PM
Immigrant Dignity Coalition Meeting
Clifton Mosque

January 7, 5:30-6:30PM
Peace Committee Meeting
IJPC

January 13, 9:30-10:30AM
Human Trafficking Public Education and Awareness Committee Meeting
IJPC

January 14, 7:00-8:00PM
Anti-Death Penalty Committee Meeting
IJPC

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Cont'd from pg 1

Congress has a looming deadline to do the right thing and protect DACA recipients and other undocumented youth by passing the Dream Act. YES' advocacy for a permanent, comprehensive solution continues, along with their ability to stay strong and steadfast.

"Do Something"... Meaningful

By Jessie Frank— Program Manager

The Ohio Statehouse seems abuzz with talk about gun control, though the buzz, it appears, is just that; whether any fruitful legislation will filter beyond its walls seems uncertain. In November, IJPC joined the Ohio Women Religious's lobbying efforts in Columbus to ask our lawmakers to "do something" about gun violence.

Less than a week before our arrival, a senator introduced legislation that would enact several of the initiatives Governor DeWine suggested after the Dayton shooting, including increased penalties for certain gun crimes, the creation of a voluntary background check process for private gun sales, and an expansion of so-called "pink slip" laws that would function to remove firearms from defined at-risk people. This legislation looks like yet another "first step" or "conversation starter" - but we know it's too late for first steps and the conversation started long ago.

Many legislators who have been pushing progressive gun safety initiatives in the House and Senate know this. During our visit, they shared that they find themselves conflicted about how to proceed with bills that don't go far enough to prevent gun violence. Passing legislation that is good but not good enough could be a small enough win to stop adversarial lawmakers from believing work still needs to be done, they explained, and, holding out support until significant changes are presented might mean holding out for forever. So, what are they to do? Surely, we want our legislators to do something—but aren't we justified in demanding that they do something meaningful?

The question of incremental versus radical change is one that the activism community continues to ask itself in the face of increasingly polarized times. And while I didn't have a straightforward answer for these distraught state legislators, I could tell them that hope is alive—even if it isn't found in our legislative branch at the moment.

All over Cincinnati, people and organizations are coming together to work on stopping the proliferation of violence that threatens our communities, cultures, and lives. From collecting signatures for a 2020 background check ballot initiative to neighborhood meetings to marches and rallies, IJPC, through the NonViolence Alliance is proud to be involved in this work. Because whether change happens slowly or all at once, it will depend on the people who won't give up until change comes. And the people give me so much hope.

Death Penalty Disconnect

By Jessie Frank - Program Manager

2019 has been an eventful year for the death penalty in Ohio, in the best way. Soon after he was sworn into office, Governor DeWine ordered the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Corrections to find a new lethal injection protocol that would pass constitutional challenges and delayed the seven executions scheduled for 2019. Now, Ohio's use of capital punishment is on hold while the state continues its search for lethal injection drugs that they can legally obtain and use.

Often, after I close my death penalty presentations with this update, someone asks a question like, "Why don't they just use the drugs the vet used to put my dog to sleep?" or "What about using anesthesia?" Inevitably, these questions lead into a discussion about other possible execution drugs and methods that seem simple enough to implement. Even an Ohio legislator contributed to this larger conversation when he suggested this summer that Ohio use fentanyl seized from illegal drug transfers for executions.

While it is frustrating when the discussion heads in this unproductive direction, I think the "execution method" conversation offers a look into the American psyche, where our espoused Christian values meet a tough-on-crime ideal that we haven't yet purged. Thus, the US has a certain cognitive dissonance when it comes to the death penalty: on the one hand, we feel empowered to judge a person as unworthy of life, yet on the other, we prohibit our government from carrying out a cruel or unusual punishment that causes unnecessary suffering.

This psychological paradox, I think, is at the heart of what spurs the convoluted quest for execution drugs upon which so many states find themselves. Because, ultimately, the switch from firing squad to electric chair to lethal injection was never about mitigating the suffering of the condemned human life—it is about our comfortability and compliance.

The state of Ohio may presently be searching for alternative execution drugs, but what we are truly searching for is a way to rationalize capital punishment without confronting its cruel reality.

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Thank You for Showing Up

By Hayley Huge—Operations Manager

This year's Annual Gathering welcomed over 300 guests and 29 sponsors, all coming together to lift one another up and share messages of hope and resilience. The words of Mary Anne Bressler, this year's recipient of the IJPC Margaret Full Peace Award, resonated with me and many other IJPC supporters in the crowd when she said, "It comes down to presence and that I'm not leading the charge for anything, but I will show up. And I try to be present in places where presence matters." Our keynote speaker, Winona LaDuke, conveyed a similar message. She shared about her work as a water protector, defending something vital to humanity that cannot defend itself. For her, her presence means everything from speaking in committee hearings to standing in from of bulldozers to protect native lands. Both women spoke to a sentiment that many in the audience could relate to: that working for justice is hard and it often requires us to be uncomfortable. But because of the power we do have, especially, as Mary Anne said, those of us in positions of privilege, we have a responsibility to show up in whatever way we can. As I listened, I was inspired not only by their words but also by a room full of people, familiar and new, who recognize the importance of showing up.

Top: *Winona LaDuke, keynote speaker, and guests*

Left: *Mary Anne Bressler, IJPC Margaret Fuller Peace Award Recipient*

Bottom: *Guests gathering to pick up seed packets and acorns to plant a seed of hope in their community.*