

# February 2018 Newsletter

Edited by Rebecca Friday

## **Environmental Stewardship Team by Kate Watters**

Not much to report, except that the environmental team is preparing comments to the bureau of ocean energy management in response to the administration's announcement that it is going to open up the Atlantic shelf to offshore oil drilling. We will be sending a template around to Grassroots members who are interested in commenting to help with organizing ideas.

We are planning to hold our next team meeting in late February or early March and will send more details soon.

## **LGBTQ Team by Megan Chaplin and Rebecca Friday**

In December, we held a bake sale at the Del Ray Farmer's Market to raise money for the Transgender Legal Defense + Education Fund. Despite the snowy weather, we raised over \$400 and were able to speak to many community members about our work. We also recently met on Thursday, Feb 8 to discuss ideas for new projects and decide next steps on ongoing projects, such as working with the new school superintendent and working on the state building bathroom codes. We were happy to see to new faces at the meeting!

## **Steering Committee by Zeina Azzam, Jonathan Krall, Kate Watters and Lisa Friday**

The Grassroots Steering Committee is happy to welcome a new member, Lisa Friday of the LGBTQ Team. Lisa joins Zeina Azzam, Jonathan Krall and Kate Watters on the Committee. The Committee has been relatively quiet, as the teams do most of the deciding and acting in Grassroots Alexandria.

We do have the task of organizing our monthly meetings (4th Wednesday of each month). We were delighted to have Chris Harris speak about NAACP Alexandria in November and Matt Harris (not related to Chris) speak about the Alexandria Human Rights Commission at our January meeting. In lieu of a December meeting, we threw a party to mark the first birthday of Grassroots Alexandria, born December 19, 2016.

At future meetings we hope to address immigration issues, especially the loss of Temporary Protected Status (TPS) for specific ethnic communities, especially our large Salvadoran population. We also hope to educate ourselves on housing issues, which are sure to be raised in this year's City Council and Mayoral elections.

Because we are in an election year, we are inviting candidates to come to our monthly meetings. Each candidate will be given 2 minutes (after the main presentation and discussion) to introduce themselves to us.

## **Anti-Fascist Team by Norah Dick**

The anti-fascism team continues to oppose white supremacy through our bi-monthly protests. At the beginning of 2018, I became the new team leader, taking over from Jonathan Krall, who continues to support the team and attend the protests.

In the new year, we have decided to continue with both the anti-fascist protests and the now regular Appomattox statue protests. As most members will know, our anti-fascism protests take place every second and fourth Sunday of the month on the corner of King and Patrick Streets, outside the office/residence of Richard Spencer. The anti-fascism protest, held 12:30-1:30 p.m., is now regularly followed by a protest at the Appomattox statue on S. Washington from 1:30-2:00 p.m. Since we view protests as an opportunity to raise awareness, we will continue to highlight the real history and meaning of the statue in our advertising and flyers. Our most recent protest theme was "Dismantling White Supremacy"; our protest materials underlined the history of the statue as a Jim Crow monument, and the actions citizens can take to oppose it.

In our focus on educating the public about the Appomattox statue, we have committed ourselves to learning its history and significance. Thanks to the efforts of Sharon Solarzano, who researched the history of the confederacy and confederate monuments in Alexandria, we have planned May 24th as a future protest date, since it is both the anniversary of the day that Alexandria troops marched out of the city to join confederate troops, as well as the day the statue itself was dedicated in 1889. We will use this date as an opportunity to educate and bring awareness to the public about the Jim Crow legacy the monument represents.

Finally, since voting is one way to oppose fascism, we are going to become active in voter registration. Opal Boyer, a member of the anti-fascism team, proposed this initiative and is investigating voter registration training opportunities. We are also surveying what voter registration initiatives currently exist in Alexandria, and who we might partner with in the endeavor.

The latter half of this month we will be marking a year of anti-fascism protests. Many thanks to David Hoover and the members of Christ Church for starting this protest series, and for continuing to partner with us for the anti-fascism protests. And many thanks who have worked hard to help fight fascism, and attend the protests rain or shine (or freezing cold).

## **Vulnerable Communities Team by Zeina Azzam**

The team has been active in supporting Restorative Justice (RJ) programs in Alexandria City Public schools. Members have participated in meetings with important individuals in this field, including teachers, trainers, student services administrators, and school board members, to understand the issues and help formulate an action plan to move forward on getting RJ programs in ACPS schools.

Team members continue to press Alexandria officials and police department decision makers to consider a police data transparency ordinance. They met on November 16, 2018 with Councilman Justin Wilson to discuss this issue and attended (and asked questions at) an Alexandria Human Rights Commission meeting where the Alexandria police chief was the featured speaker.


One designated team member (and usually 3-4 others) attend the monthly Alexandria Human Rights Commission meeting, where monthly speakers and commission members address issues of importance to the Vulnerable Communities team. They cultivate relationships with commission members, bring Grassroots Alexandria's voice to the table, and report back at the monthly team meeting.

On Martin Luther King, Jr. Day (January 15, 2018), team members participated in a lobbying day in Richmond under the auspices of New Virginia Majority. They were part of a larger group of about 350 activists from throughout VA and met with legislators about such issues as criminal justice reform; access to higher education; environmental and climate justice; economic opportunity; voting access and voter registration; and opportunities for immigrant families.

One of our team members is tutoring middle school and high school students regularly at Tenants and Workers United.

Team members have written timely blog pieces for Grassroots Alexandria (all can be found on [grassrootsalexandria.org](http://grassrootsalexandria.org)), including "Why Restorative Justice Matters" (10/22/2017), "Thankful for Democracy" (11/23/2017), and "Trump Normalizing Hate and Islamophobia" (12/5/2017).

# Grassroots Alexandria



## **Communications Team by Jonathan Krall, Team Co-Leader**

We are delighted that Rebecca Friday is our new Communications Team co-Leader. She is also our new newsletter editor. She, along with her wife Lisa Friday, hosted a course on community organizing. The course was online, but we further benefited by coming together and discussing the material as a group.

The public continues to hear our stories. A large crew from a Japanese TV network visited Jonathan Krall's house and one of our Anti-Fascism protests. They interviewed Team Leader Norah Dick and several team members. In January, Grassroots Alexandria was profiled in the Alexandria Gazette Packet. The reporter, Rikki George, interviewed several participants at our January general meeting and wrote about each of our teams. It was a very positive article.

We encourage letters "To the Editor" and write some ourselves. Please don't be shy in telling your stories to the press this way. The Washington Post published one of our letters in November. In the letter, Jonathan Krall urged the public to take White Nationalism seriously and to notice that their toxic ideas are woven into many of our current policy debates. These ideas are couched in polite language, such as "law and order" or "immigration reform," but the results are anything but polite for those unjustly incarcerated, deported, or denied a chance to vote.

Our Facebook Group continues to attract postings and comments, including updates from one of our State Delegates, Mark Levine. Our web page and Instagram staff have been pumping out content. We are working to keep these outlets up to date and to improve our monitoring of the media and of our local politicians.

Upcoming: We are overdue for a team meeting. Stay tuned.