



peace & justice news

A P U B L I C A T I O N O F T H E P E A C E & J U S T I C E C E N T E R

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PEACE & JUSTICE CENTER

60 Lake Street #1C
Burlington, VT 05401-4417
www.pjcv.org
info@pjcv.org
(802) 863-2345

Centering BIPOC at PJC: Programming and Community Engagement

By Aris Garcia, Community Engagement and Volunteer Manager,
and Arima Minard, Events and Programming Manager

For over 40 years the Peace & Justice Center has sought to unite communities through activism and education. As time progressed the organization progressed, taking its initial focus of nuclear proliferation, and refocusing on various social justice campaigns over the years. With each new leader came a new focus for the organization always keeping in mind the goal of a peaceful and just world for everyone. Over the last decade the PJC has been working hard to examine the ways in which we are still upholding an oppressive culture within our own walls. With the leadership of Rachel Siegel, the organization has worked slowly and intentionally to work from an anti-racist lens, which has led to several tangible changes including:

- The creation of a Racial Justice Advisory Committee, a cohort of BIPOC individuals who are paid for their opinions of the work and direction of the PJC;
- A commitment to maintaining a board of directors that is at least 50% BIPOC;

- Financial compensation when we ask anyone for participation in an event, conversation, or coalition, if part of their qualification is a result of their marginalized identity (this has been true for trans, disabled, and BIPOC people but mostly BIPOC), including payment for mileage, wage compensation, childcare, and time;
- No longer participating in efforts, events, or coalitions that aren't also offering financial compensation for the same.

These steps towards real equity in a nonprofit structure has opened the doors to so many other changes the organization is seeking to make.

While the PJC continues to dismantle the systems of patriarchy and racism internally, during this time of deep transition, we hope to shift our focus from the education of white Vermonters to the celebration of BIPOC joys and healing. While we see the value of being such a resource to the white community, and will continue to do so, we realize that to be a truly anti-racist organization

(continued on page 2)



PJC BIPOC retreat at Knoll Farm, July 2020

A Change in Leadership

By Rachel Siegel, Out-going Executive Director

When I was hired in 2013, I met with Paij Wadley-Bailey, a Black, lesbian, elder, activist and a mentor of mine. She told me that as a white person leading an organization that has racial justice at its core, there were two critical things I should do:

1. Change the board composition to minimum 50% People of Color (there was one POC at the time)

2. Create a paid Racial Justice Advisory Committee (RJAC) made up entirely of POC to whom we would be accountable and who would help guide our work.

We achieved that threshold on the board within a year and then changed the by-laws to uphold that commitment. These changes set us on a path for

transformation. This has at times been a painful and bumpy ride, but completely worthwhile.

After the 2008 recession, the PJC (then 29 years old) almost tanked. Grants, store sales, and membership donations all diminished. When I was hired, the organization had had no ED for two and a half years and prior to that, there was a series of short-lived EDs. The most stable time before that

was when Serena Chaudhry was ED. She left in 2008.

I was hired at 20 hours a week and joined four other staff members. The work that was being done was profound and meaningful but without much structure. The staff were run

balance.

I will miss this job. It has truly been an honor to work here. I have learned so much, especially from the People of Color and transfolk who I have worked with, but in general from our board, my coworkers, our Racial

Justice Advisory Committee, our program facilitators, volunteers, interns, members, and community partners. I have been able to grow so much because of all of you. Thank you.

Lastly, I want to be clear, I am leaving this role at the PJC but I am not leaving this work. Although, because of my points of privilege I am not the best suited to lead this work, I am needed. We are all needed.



PJC Board of Directors after voting to add healthcare to staff benefits in January.

ragged, working tremendously long weeks, and not supported the way they deserved. In addition to the paradigm shift to an organization that is better able to center and serve communities of color, we have also made a lot of logistical and mechanical changes. These changes support the staff and so are not unrelated to the shift to a multiracial organization with more racial

Together we can do what we cannot do alone!

Please read my complete statement to learn more about what we've accomplished and my hopes for the future of the PJC online at pjcvt.org/blogs.



Centering BIPOC *(continued from cover)*

we must prioritize the needs of the BIPOC communities we aim to serve.

The organization has committed to the internal practice of racial affinity spaces, both to allow for our colleagues of color to rest and heal, and for our white colleagues to explore and unpack their role in our

community. Through this practice, we hope to offer support, development, and direction to the greater PJC community to begin implementing this approach in their respective organizations so that commitment to disrupting racism can be better actualized.

We hope that our members and partners will join us in celebrating this commitment and the promise that this new direction offers. As we create spaces for folks to push themselves to their growing edge, brave spaces to find vulnerability and courage, and safe spaces for healing

Decarceration Statement

This statement is put forth by the Board of Directors of the Peace & Justice Center with lead authorship by Jayna Ahsaf and TJ Sangaré.

The Peace & Justice Center calls for the decarceration & demilitarization of society leading to the eventual abolition of systems of punishment.

The Peace & Justice Center uses our mission and principles as guiding lights when deciding what is best for our organization. Our organization's purpose is to address social injustices that inhibit the creation of a peaceful and just society. Because of the gross injustices and human rights violations committed by the policing, prison, and military systems, we call for the decarceration and demilitarization of society. When we fully invest in and establish community-based rehabilitation services and social safety networks and employ peace and diplomacy to address international conflict, we will be able to abolish systems that perpetuate violence and punishment.


Incarceration, militarization, and policing enable and perpetuate systemic racism, sexism, xenophobia, homophobia, transphobia, and other forms of dominance, climate disruption, and economic disparities.

They serve to oppress, terrorize, and demonize certain populations — namely Black, Latinx, Indigenous, trans, houseless, poor, and disabled people. Racialized crime, policing,

cycle of incarceration. We need to implement alternatives to our failing incarceration system. This is a circular argument with a constant return to policing and systematic racism

contributing to the over policing of impoverished and marginalized communities. The narrative that sensitivity training or culturally responsive policing will curb systematic racism is not only inaccurate, but a misunderstanding of the depths of systematic racism. As long as communities continue to invest in systems built on racism, systems built on oppression and control, communities will not be liberated. Our government has militarized the police, the police unions have more power than citizens, policing has become increasingly aggressive and citizens have been finding themselves targets of intrusive surveillance and searches.

A world that prioritizes care over punishment is possible. All of our work is toward that vision.

To read the full statement, please go to picvt.org/decarceration-statement. 



Artwork by Nina Yagual @beautifulhoodcrumb


and the prison and military-industrial complexes have devastated the most at-risk and vulnerable communities nationally and globally by tearing apart generations of families and destroying the futures of millions...

The prison system is designed to not rehabilitate but to continue the

and affirmation, we hope to emerge on the other side with a vision of more authentic multiracial spaces that amplify a shared realization of collective liberation.

It is our sincere hope that the BIPOC community in Vermont will see this transition as one that

allows PJC to become a resource and space for healing that we all need. We acknowledge that we have not consistently been that space for BIPOC Vermonters and will continue to work to repair the trust that has been broken here. The BIPOC staff, board, facilitators, volunteers, and

Racial Justice Advisory Committee members are excited about this new direction and hope that you will continue to support us through what has and will inevitably be an emotional journey. 

New Faces



Mac Thomson | Staff

(They/them) Mac joined the PJC staff in 2020 after volunteering and working seasonally with the Center since moving to Vermont in 2016. They have been involved in a variety of activist organizations in the past, including the fields of food security, environmental protection, and labor justice. Mac's family immigrated to the Bronx from Glasgow, Scotland after being blacklisted from coal mining as a result of the 1926 UK General Strike. Carrying forward this heritage of resistance is incredibly important to them.



Aris Garcia | Staff

(She/her) We are so excited to announce that Aris Garcia has expanded her role at the PJC! She

started in September, 2019 as our Volunteer Coordinator and Assistant Store Manager. In December 2020, Aris took on new responsibilities as our Community Engagement and Volunteer Manager. As an Indigenous woman, Aris brings lived experience that benefit us internally and externally in our ability to work with an anti-colonial, anti-racist world



Jorja Lamb | Staff

(She/her) "I am thrilled to be joining PJC as the Program Coordinator! Prior to becoming part of the staff team, I spent two and a half years as the PJC's work study student where I delved into fair trade, racial justice, and peace work. In this new position I wish to continue to teach and to be taught with the hope of growing with you all even further. As a biracial woman born and raised in Vermont, I hope to translate my personal experiences to my work."



Joshua Oyetubo | Staff

(He/him) "I hope to use my lived

experience as a BIPOC to continue to co-create an inclusive financial culture rooted in economic, social, and racial justice. I am curious and collaborative with a sharp mind and a willingness to grow. I often ask myself two important questions: Whose perspectives are and are not represented? What questions have we not considered? In addition to my work at the PJC, I am a dedicated Yogi. My other hobbies are making beaded jewelry, reading, and biking. I am excited to bring all my passion to the PJC and its endeavors."



TJ Sangaré | Board

(He/him) "I am currently a sophomore at St. Michael's College where I am double majoring in Sociology and Public Health, and minoring in Peace and Justice. My drive to be a part of the PJC stems from my passion for social justice work and my ambition to see the liberation of folk from all marginalized communities. I cannot wait to work with my colleagues, learn from the members of the PJC, and contribute to the amazing work being done by this organization. I strive to lift the voices of the unheard, abolish this nation's systems of oppression, and encourage individuals to think outside of the confines that society has held us in."



Jayna Ahsaf | Board

(She/her) “My experiences as a gay woman of color contribute to my desire to make changes to society that are reflective of all the different races, genders, sexualities, religions, and other underrepresented groups. I am very aware of how U.S. society favors and benefits one specific type of human and my everyday experiences enhance my understanding on how to best approach promoting inclusionary practices. I am the Advocacy Manager at the Women’s Justice & Freedom Initiative. We are a prison abolitionist organization that advocates primarily for women, girls, trans, non-binary and gender non-conforming folx.”



Emma Schoenberg | Board

(She/her) Emma is a Vermont-born community organizer and trainer. As a part of the Climate Disobedience

Center, she is working to build NoCoalNoGas—the campaign to close the last large coal plant in New England. Additionally, Emma is a member of the core team launching the Yet-To-Be-Named Network—a direct action network focusing at the intersection of racial healing and climate justice through the lens of “fierce vulnerability.”



Evan Roberts | Facilitator

(He/him) “My name is Evan Roberts and I am a South Korean adoptee. I grew up in Vermont, and was first formally introduced to the concept of social justice at the Governor’s Institute on Current Issues and Youth Activism. It was at this program that I realized this was the kind of work I wanted to devote myself to, and I have worked every day since then to stay true to this goal. I have a BA in Political Science and a minor in Sociology from Vassar College. I hope to use both my educational and lived experiences as an Asian American to work alongside others in the long struggle for equality.”

2020 was a year of tremendous crisis and loss but also a year of growth and opportunity. We were unable to print this newsletter since before the pandemic so we have a lot of new faces to welcome! These are abbreviated bios. You can read more about each of these incredible people and our full team at pjcvf.org/who-we-are.



Susie Merrick | Facilitator

(She/her) “My name is Susie Merrick and I so appreciate being a new facilitator at the Peace & Justice Center, a community I have loved for a long time. I have been a teacher for over 30 years. The Peace & Justice Center has been an essential place of learning for me to work toward becoming an anti-racist and equity-centered educator to better honor each one of my students. I look forward to further learning and growing.”



Sasha Morrisette | Advisory Board

(She/her) “First and foremost, I’d like to express my upmost respect for the Peace & Justice Center employees, members, and the Racial Advisory

New Faces *(continued from page 5)*

Committee members. It's truly an honor to be a part of this inclusive group of incredible open-minded beings. I consider it a great privilege to work beside these members and be a part of the important discussions held in our meetings. To be a part of this kind of social justice work feels truly historical and an important foundation to have and continue to grow in hopes for an all inclusive community—one that can and will provide a sense of safety for all sentient beings."

**Yvonne Lory | Advisory Board**

(She/her) "My name is Yvonne Lory. I was born and raised in Vermont's Northeast Kingdom, then in Montpelier. I am from a mixed heritage and low-income family and from a young age I was keenly aware of injustices. My family's multi-ethnic and multi-cultural background continues to influence my life in many ways. My work and interests lie in the realms of economic, social and racial justice, women's issues, and the needs of an aging population. These passions not only inform but compliment my work at Capstone Community Action. PJC has provided me with ongoing educational opportunities and support navigating injustices that arise in day-to-day life. I feel fortunate to be learning and working with a thoughtful and dedicated group of individuals."

**Asma Elhuni | Advisory Board**

(She/her) Asma Elhuni is a proud Muslim Immigrant from Africa. She was born in Libya and came to the US as a child. She has organized around different issues including immigration, gentrification, economic justice, racial justice and anti-Muslim racism, police, and prison abolition. Asma moved to the Upper Valley three years ago and has led campaigns to pass local immigration policies, rapid response around ICE and Border Patrol, making police less powerful, and deplatforming racist speakers like Border Patrol and Robert Spencer. As Movement Politics Director for Rights and Democracy NH she also tries to get people with a collective liberation mind frame to run for office and support them to pass important policies that center impacted communities. 🌱

New Allied Groups

Community is a term we use often at the Peace & Justice Center. It is our intention and the impact that we hope to create. One of the means to this end is our Allied Group program which provides fiscal sponsorship to parties that are in the process of applying for 501c3 status or who prefer to not incorporate. These mission-aligned projects support our communities through grassroots organizing.

Since our last newsletter was published (December 2019), eight new Allied Groups have joined us. Please welcome:

1. **Extinction Rebellion Vermont** (XRVT) intends to spark and sustain a spirit of collective, creative rebellion which will enable much-needed changes in our political, economic, and social landscape.

2. **SURJ Middlebury** (Showing Up for Racial Justice) is a chapter of SURJ's national network. Through community organizing, mobilizing, and education, SURJ moves white people to act as part of a multi-racial majority for justice. Created to pull like-minded people together to talk about issues in their area. SURJ has since become a incubator for new groups including abolition kitchen and others.

3. **Next Generation Justice** strives to expand the capacity of the State's Attorneys offices within Vermont to push for progressive criminal justice reform.

4. **Vermont's Freedom and Justice Chorus** exists to bring together singers to perform music that represents the ongoing struggles, in the tradition of musical and civil rights legends like Nina Simone and Pete Seeger.

5. **Step Zero** brings PPP and other material goods to homeless people in the Burlington area.

6. **Brooklyn Strong**, named for Brooklyn, a child leukemia patient, advocates for funded childhood cancer societies in Vermont

7. **Social Equity Work Group** was empaneled by the Vermont legislature's Social Equity Caucus to develop policy recommendations to address racial and social justice legislation to achieve social equity.

8. **Waterbury Area Anti-Racism Coalition** (WAARC) works to create a community where every person can fully experience freedom, belonging, and love on a daily basis through education, advocacy, and activism.

To see the list of all our current and past Allied Groups, please visit pjcvt.org/allied-groups. 🌱



Goodbye, Kina!

It is with mixed emotions that we announce Kina Thorpe's departure from her role as the PJC Educational Programming Manager. Kina joined us almost four years ago, straight out of college, as a Program Assistant and grew into her role as Educational Program Manager. We have so much to be grateful to Kina for! Thousands of people have participated in the workshops overseen by Kina, especially the Racial Justice programs. Because of Kina, Vermonters of color can find more community and spaces for both action and healing. Additionally, white Vermonters are better able to create safety, dignity, and humanity for People of Color.

So while we are sad to see Kina go, we are also so excited for her and can't wait to see how her life unfolds! Please join us in thanking Kina for her incredible dedication to the PJC and for all her hours of hard work – both logistical and emotional. 🌱

Peace & Justice Store: Accountability During a Pandemic

by Mac Thompson, Assistant Store Manager

The Peace & Justice Store focuses on providing a fair market for artisans and vendors in the Global South. Some of these vendors have no other access to the western market. The closure of our store last spring severely impacted them. Supporting them through this period has been one of our top priorities so we created an online store that highlights those hardest hit.

Some of our most popular items, from vendors and friends we've worked with for decades, are now available for shipping or at-store pickup. This is the first time many of these items have been for sale online. Peak Macaya Coop, who grows delicious Haitian coffee roasted here in Vermont, is one of those vendors.

Providing a point of sale for our local vendors is also important. Two of them, Tip of the Moon Candles, and A Revolutionary Press, are available online now. Providing space for Vermonters to sell their art, especially in a time where street markets and galleries have been unavailable, is something we feel strongly about.

We've also used this opportunity to change how we sell books. If you were in our space previously, you might remember the wall of books we had for sale. During the pandemic, we have pared down our selection in an effort to bring to our community books we feel most strongly match our work and the world we would like to build. Education is a central tenant of the PJC's work and bringing that into our retail space in a more intentional way has been an exciting change for us.

We miss our customers terribly. We are hopeful that we'll open physically and see you soon. For now, find us at pjcv.org/shop. 🌱

Recordkeeping Crisis and Recovery

by Joshua Oyetubo, Operations Manager

I started working here in August 2020 as the Operations Manager when the organization was in a recordkeeping crisis. Due to office restrictions and hardships caused by coronavirus, in addition to the stress and pain that the civil uprisings against police murders of Black people, the organization was struggling. We functioned for almost six months without an Operations Manager to oversee vital recordkeeping work. The resulting backlog required a lot.

To recreate the story of last year we had to dig deep! We did, and what a story it was! A story of resilience, community, and love.

We have had growth in our Allied Group program which has allowed us to come into further community with more Vermonters. Connecting with other advocacy and activist groups has been a wonderful and engaging experience that allows us to co-create an inclusive financial culture rooted in economic, social, and racial justice. (See list of new groups on the opposite page and list of all groups at pjcv.org/allied-groups.)

We also were trusted by many local business and dozens of new members who donated money to us last spring and summer when we at risk of shutting down. During that chaotic time, we were unable to respond with appropriate appreciation.

If you donated last summer and did not receive an acknowledgement until recently, please know that you are appreciated, and your contribution kept us afloat. We commit to do better with communication going forward.

I look forward to getting to know you. Thank you for your patience, your support, and your solidarity. 🌱

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