

ON SOLID GROUND

Know Where You Stand and Stand There

Unitarian Universalist Veatch Program at Shelter Rock
Newsletter Spring 2017

The Unitarian Universalist Veatch Program at Shelter Rock is the national philanthropic giving program of the Unitarian Universalist Congregation at Shelter Rock, located in Manhasset, NY. The Veatch Program provides long term, core support for social justice organizing throughout the United States. A program of faith in action, Veatch has been a leader in progressive philanthropy since 1959.

GREETINGS

Katie Kurjakovic,
Chair of the Board of
Governors



Joan Minieri, Executive
Director

How Are You Doing?

How many times have you been asked the question lately: How are you doing? From our perspective at Veatch, where we support grassroots leaders who are organizing for social justice all across the country, a breezy “fine” can no longer suffice.

Things don’t seem fine when threats to social justice loom larger than ever before. For those of us with faith in justice, it may feel as if there has been a tectonic shift in the ground beneath our feet.

Rest assured that is not the case. We are, in fact, on solid ground.

The truth is this: across the country there exists a vast and unwavering network of progressive organizations and a growing bench of social justice leaders. As a result, the work of the Veatch Program continues (and must continue)

unabated. In the pages that follow you’ll learn – just as we did – that the ground we’ve gained in the struggle for justice, though it may seem to have shifted, remains solid beneath our feet. In fact, our learning trip to California in May provided indelible proof that the statewide network of progressive organizations – long funded by the Veatch Program – is *stronger* than ever before. You’ll read about how congregants from UUCSR took a bus trip across the river and witnessed grantee organization Community Voices Heard putting the power back into the hands of low-income families and women of color. And you’ll see that in New Orleans, the Workers’ Center for Racial Justice is rewriting the narrative of the working South, acknowledging its past and improving its future.

The reality on the frontlines is that our commitment to, and faith in, justice is bringing us closer and closer to a world that reflects the values and mission of the congregation at Shelter Rock.

So, the next time someone asks, “how are you?,” before you summon an appropriate response, we hope you’ll think of the extraordinary work happening across the country – work made possible because of Veatch and its grantees.

Join us in letting this good news inform your understanding of the fullness of the work for justice in this complex time. You may find you’re doing much better than fine.

Grantee Spotlight: The New Orleans Workers' Center for Racial Justice Fighting for What's True in the Bayou

A NOLA powerhouse in the fight for workers' rights, the New Orleans Workers' Center for Racial Justice is a grantee dedicated to expanding democracy, winning a just economy, and transforming the country by transforming the South.

Soon after the floodwaters of Hurricane Katrina receded, the city of New Orleans turned into the largest and most profitable construction site in America. Hundreds of thousands of immigrant workers arrived in the region, and faced deep exploitation.

The Workers' Center was born during this humanitarian crisis and found its footing in a political economy that purposefully pitted communities of color against each other. Its members, a group of black and immigrant workers from public housing developments, FEMA trailer parks, day labor corners, and labor camps across Louisiana, came together to build a multiracial movement committed to racial, gender, and immigrant justice and dedicated to telling a new story about possibility in the South.



The Workers' Center is led by Executive Director Saket Soni. An immigrant himself, Saket helped organize the collective action that exposed the shocking labor and human rights abuses by Gulf Coast ship and oil-rig builder, Signal International in 2008. Saket illustrates the struggle for justice in both words and action. Writing in the March 9th, 2015 issue of *The Nation*, Saket describes that struggle succinctly: "All around America, there are workers coming together to imagine an economy in which they're truly free. They're fighting for the new generation of rights and guarantees that would let tens of millions of US workers trade anxiety and constraint for dignity and creativity. Those who believe in the promise of the American Dream need to remember that opportunity in America has always been won through generations of collective struggle. If we can imagine freedom in the face

of fear, as the Signal workers did, then we can start to build an economy that will guarantee it."

The Workers' Center has achieved breathtaking wins in the region. Last year, they won bias-free policing and a welcoming city policy for New Orleans; passage of a first-of-its-kind criminal background policy for the Housing Authority of New Orleans that ensures that the housing applications of individuals with a criminal record cannot be rejected on those grounds alone; and the release of numerous members detained and scheduled for deportation because of criminal convictions.

Those who believe in the promise of the American Dream need to remember that opportunity in America has always been won through generations of collective struggle.

—Saket Soni

In the months to come, the Workers' Center, expecting a spike in harsh immigration enforcement, will – among other activities – build a network of immigrant leaders at the local, regional, and national levels. These leaders, trained in strategy, organizing, and policy, will help push back against the ongoing and increased criminalization of immigration and will engage elected leaders to stand firm against unjust federal immigration enforcement.



The Worker's Center is a hybrid, multidisciplinary impact strategy center and membership organization, whose progressive agenda to create and sustain an inclusive and just economy, hews closely to the values of the UUCSR and the Veatch Program's mission to fund grassroots organizations engaged in critical organizing in the fight for justice.

Our Annual Bus Trip: Community Voices Heard

The Power of Participation

Sometimes, participating is difficult to do.

Raising your hand and being counted, showing up and witnessing, choosing to be engaged in something other than the routine – are each *participatory* acts that require energy, effort, and engagement; *more* energy, effort, and engagement, perhaps, than many of us would choose to expend on a typical Saturday morning.

On Saturday, April 1, however, nearly twenty congregation members and Veatch Program staffers did just that – we chose to show up, witness, and engage; and in doing so, learned a great deal about the power of participation.

Our annual bus trip brings the congregation to the frontlines of the extraordinary work accomplished by the organizations we fund. This year we visited long-time grantee Community Voices Heard (CVH). CVH is a grassroots membership organization located in East Harlem that organizes for the rights of New Yorkers, with a focus on low-income people of color and women. CVH was co-founded by our very own Veatch Program Executive Director Joan Minieri and continues to be one of our most successful local grantees.

The first stop on the trip was at a public housing complex in East Harlem where we observed Participatory Budgeting (PB), a process in which community members generate ideas and vote on projects that can be funded by their city council member's discretionary budget.



UUCSR delegation to Community Voices Heard

Participatory Budgeting allows community members to get their hands on the checkbook. To discuss and decide how funds meant to improve their lives *actually will improve their lives* – like making the streets safer, investing in local libraries, upgrading technology and arts infrastructure in schools, recycling, and so much more. We are proud that CVH was the community-based partner that brought this exciting, citizen-powered, participatory process to New York City in 2011.

Now in its sixth year, PBNYC has grown from 4 districts, to include 31 of the city's 51 districts with millions of dollars in funding being allocated by community members to address the needs they identify on their own behalf. It is an amazing community engagement process, and one that clearly reflects the values and priorities of the congregation's philanthropy.

For many, it was the first time they had been able to participate in the governing process, let alone one that was so directly connected to their lives.

CVH not only brought Participatory Budgeting to NYC, but continues to be critical in making sure the process runs smoothly. On that Saturday, Aaron Jones from CVH led a team that distributed ballots and explained to local residents that the decisions being made would be a part of *actual* city spending. Residents chose from a range of options such as new equipment for schools, added recreation centers in parks, and more emergency response vehicles. For many, it was the first time they had been able to participate in the governing process, let alone one that was so directly connected to their lives.

Afterwards, we visited CVH's headquarters, where Vernell Robinson, a CVH leader who lives in public housing in the Rockaways, along with Joseph Mpa of the Board of Directors, lead organizer Stephen Roberson, and campaign organizer Gabriel Strachoca, shared startling facts about the challenging conditions NYC residents frequently face in public housing. We heard about asbestos and leaky toilets, as well as the continued, terrible effects of mold in people's apartments following Superstorm Sandy. They also shared details of their ongoing, relentless efforts to help residents in public housing demand necessary repairs.

cont.

The trip ended with a wonderful lunch provided by a local caterer. While breaking bread together, we discussed the integral part that faith plays in organizing – a strong common thread that connected all of us – and we enjoyed a frank conversation about the challenges of organizing in both East Harlem and Long Island.

There's nothing like a bus ride home to allow time for contemplation and gaining perspective. For many of

us, the trip felt like a great gift. By making the relatively simple choice to spend our Saturday on a bus trip into the city, we were able to see people making a much harder choice: the choice to raise their hands and be counted, to show up and witness, and to do something far outside the routine. Our visit inspired and moved us, and opened our eyes to the extraordinary power of participation.

Education On-Site: California On the Road Again



The Veatch delegation with staff from PODER

In mid-May, members of the UUCSR Veatch Program Board of Governors and staff, and the UUCSR Board of Trustees, traveled to Oakland, CA to participate in an educational site visit of progressive activity throughout the state.

Upon arriving, the group met with Anthony Thigpenn, president of California Calls – a statewide alliance of social justice organizations committed to building a “tipping point” of electoral power and civic engagement to achieve deep reform of California’s broken state budget and fiscal policies. Anthony, a dynamic speaker and recognized expert in grassroots and civic engagement technology, opened a thrilling panel by setting the historical context for how Veatch Program grantees across the state of California have come together to build an infrastructure that is reversing many of the state’s worst policies. “We’ve made progress,” he asserted, “and there’s more work to be done.” Anthony was joined by Christina Livingston of Alliance of Californians for Community Empowerment Institute, Rufaro Gwarada of Mobilize the Immigrant Vote, and Jessamyn Sabbag of Oakland Rising – each uniquely serving California’s underserved populations by engaging underrepresented, low-income voters in state public policy decision-making.

“We have gone from working separately to working together to strategizing together about contesting power,” Anthony reflected. “We are now able to talk about the systems of governance differently.”

Next, the team departed on a “Gentrification Driving Tour” that explored the oft-overlooked story of long term community residents that have been, and are being, separated from their friends, families, and economic opportunity. It was an eye-opening journey below the shiny surface of the area’s coffee shops, boutiques, and health food stores. The trip concluded at the Ella Baker Center for Human Rights, where Dawn Phillips of the Right to the City Alliance, Zachary Norris of the Ella Baker Center for Human Rights, Vanessa Moses of Causa Justa: Just Cause, and Jahmese Myers and Kate O’Hara of the East Bay Alliance for Sustainable Economy further pulled back the curtain on gentrification, exposing the challenges of securing quality affordable housing, good jobs, and community safety in the face of a global push by hedge funds and large corporations to take over local housing markets. Dawn summarized the impact of Veatch funding in the Bay Area: “You are committed, consistent and willing to take risks.”

“We have gone from working separately to working together to strategizing together about contesting power. We are now able to talk about the systems of governance differently.”

—Anthony Thigpenn

We concluded the day with a driving tour of the Port of Oakland and the Oakland Army Base, both of which have been the sites for successful organizing by EBASE for local, living wage jobs that protect workers and the environment. As Jahmese and Kate described to us, on our van tour, their long effort to win development of the site as a warehouse distribution center, we pulled up to an area where the walls of a hard won, massive



Left: Veatch Program Officer Faron McLurkin with Veatch grantee Antonio Diaz of PODER / Right: Veatch grantees Rufaro Gwarada of Mobilize the Immigrant Vote, Christina Livingston of Alliance of Californians for Community Empowerment Institute, and Jessamyn Sabbag of Oakland Rising



The park will be named, Mi Pueblito (My Little Home), making it the first Mayan park in San Francisco. The afternoon concluded with a rousing discussion with Amy Vanderwarker of the California Environmental Justice Alliance, a statewide network, and a few representatives of its member organizations, namely Vivian Huang of Asian Pacific Environmental Network, and Byron Guidel of Communities for a Better Environment. Each organization discussed their work to strengthen environmental regulation, increase investment in green solutions, and organize low-income communities and communities of color to be at the frontlines of the climate justice movement.

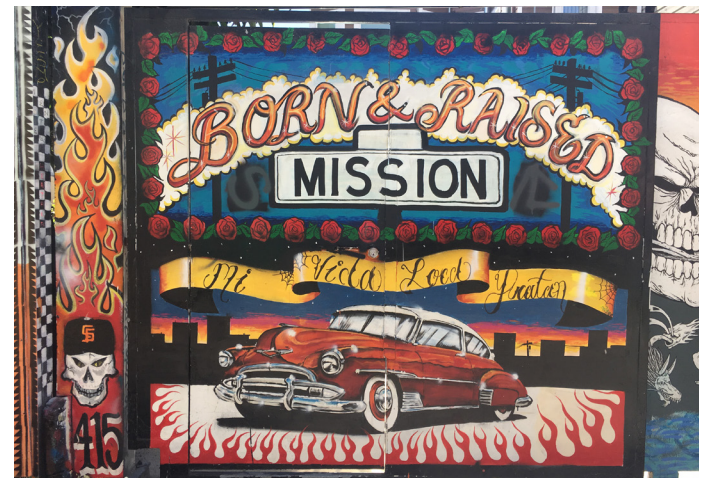
We ended our visit the next morning with a breakfast conversation at our hotel, with Evan Junker of the UU Justice Ministry of California. He shared his experiences of working with congregations to build their racial, economic and gender justice ministries, and of bringing

warehouse now stood. "Oh, look! That was not there two weeks ago!," Jahmese cried out on seeing for the first time, the concrete fruits of their labor. We were excited to share in that wonderful moment.

The next day, well-rested and eager to learn more, the team set off on a neighborhood walking tour with Antonio Diaz of PODER, People Organizing to Demand Environmental and Economic Rights. The tour highlighted how long-term, general support grantmaking has helped PODER reinvent their neighborhood with open spaces, community gardens, and affordable



Veatch Governor Carol Klitzner, Veatch Governor Renee Silver, Veatch Assistant Director Molly Schultz Hafid, Veatch Vice Chair Carole Alexander, Veatch Governor Carol Garbarino, and Veatch Executive Director Joan Minieri



PODER walking tour

a UU presence to collaborating with other organizations, including Veatch grantees, to create policy change in California. Evan's perspective and insights reflected core themes of our days together, including the importance of having those most directly impacted by injustice leading the way to lasting solutions.

The trip proved an excellent opportunity to see, in real time and up close, how Veatch Program funding has powerful and lasting impact on the ground. Each participant returned with a deeper understanding of the statewide effort to build progressive power through organizing and mobilizing low-income earners, people of color, and immigrant communities. Lessons that will not only inform future Veatch Program grantmaking, but also the personal and spiritual investment we all must make in the effort to end injustice across the country, from Long Island to Long Beach, CA and everywhere in between.

housing. We learned that they believe that the alternative to gentrification and environmental blight is community-centered development. By engaging community residents, PODER has been able to live up to their motto "Better Neighborhood, Same Neighbors." We walked over to an area being redeveloped as a park with community organization offices and 127 units of affordable housing adjacent to it, including 20% of the apartments designated specifically for 18-24 year olds.

The Unitarian Universalist Veatch Program at Shelter Rock provides support for efforts within the religious and spiritual mission of the congregation where their purposes are best served by outside agencies action under the Veatch Program and the Congregation.

Veatch Weekend January 2017



(From left to right) Veatch Assistant Director Molly Schultz Hafid, Veatch grantee Amy Goodman of Democracy Now!, Veatch grantee Cristina Jimenez of United We Dream, Veatch grantee Aaron Dorfman of National Committee on Responsive Philanthropy, Veatch grantee Lisa Abbott of Kentucky Coalition, Veatch Program Officer Faron McLurkin, and Veatch Program Officer Marjona Jones



Veatch grantee Lisa Abbott of Kentucky Coalition with Interim Senior Minister Rev. Ned Wight



Unitarian Universalist Congregation at Shelter Rock



(From left to right) Veatch grantee Cristina Jimenez of United We Dream, Veatch Executive Director Joan Minieri, Veatch Board Chair Katie Kurjakovic, Veatch grantee Amy Goodman of Democracy Now!, Veatch grantee Lisa Abbott of Kentucky Coalition, and Veatch grantee Aaron Dorfman of National Committee on Responsive Philanthropy



Veatch grantee Cristina Jimenez of United We Dream



Board of Governors: Claire Bock, Carol Garbarino, Katie Kurjakovic, Carole Alexander, Renee Silver, Bill Kahn, Mary Lardner, Mark Hartman, Jake Campbell, Carol Klitzner



Veatch Staff: Jan Fellenbaum, Joan Minieri, Denise Centkowski, Molly Schultz Hafid, Faron McLurkin, Marjona Jones, Sara Lorenz

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Ned Wight, Executive Director (until August 2016)
Molly Schultz Hafid, Assistant Director
Marjona Jones, Program Officer
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Rev. Jennifer L. Brower
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48 Shelter Rock Road
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Unitarian Universalist Principles

**The inherent worth and dignity
of every person**



**Justice, equity and compassion
in human relations**



**Acceptance of one another and
encouragement to spiritual growth
in our congregations**



**A free and responsible search
for truth and meaning**



**The right of conscience
and the use of the
democratic process
within our congregations
and in society at large**



**The goal of world community
with peace, liberty and
justice for all**



**Respect for the interdependent
web of all existence of which
we are a part**

