Why We Need Universal Background Checks

By Bob Williamson, Gun Sense Vermont

Every Newtown, Columbine, and Orlando rips into me and reawakens a painful memory: My two daughters Clare and Kate survived an armed assault in their school 28 years ago. This happened in Winnetka, IL. One child was killed, Nicky Corwin, and five others wounded, but my kids were spared. Only dumb luck saved them. We need better than dumb luck.

Four years have passed since a deeply troubled young man shot his way into Sandy Hook Elementary School and killed 26 people, yet we still don’t run background checks on all gun purchases. That bothers me: 89% of Americans support it, Vermonters and gun owners, too. Instead, prayers are said after every mass shooting, but little changes to make us safer.

Maybe you know some of the facts that define the grim reality of gun violence: 89 Americans are killed daily by firearms, eight of them children. Three times that number survive, crippled for life. Per year, more than 30,000 die from gunfire. More preschoolers in America were shot dead in 2013 than police officers killed in the line of duty. The US averages more than one mass shooting per day, in which 4 or more people are killed. In fact, more Americans have been killed here by bullets since 1970 than Americans who died in all our wars going back to the American Revolution.

Vermont isn’t immune to gun violence. From 1994 to 2014, over half of our homicides are domestic violence and 57% (71 victims) were killed by guns. Sadly, too, we lead the entire North East in youth firearm suicide death rate; and our firearm death rate – the CDC’s figure that combines homicides, suicides and accidental shootings per 100,000 of population – is nearly three times higher than Massachusetts. Additionally, due to our lax gun laws, Vermont exports a disturbing rate of guns later used in crimes in nearby states. Those Vermont firearms are often the medium of exchange for heroin, which...
From the Director

With your Support We Do a Lot

This past year, the PJC has been busy! We continue to do the following:

- Present our educational programs statewide to a range of groups (such as presenting on White Fragility to 800 people);
- Participate in the statewide coalition working to Raise the Minimum Wage;
- Participate in another coalition to secure Earned Sick Leave;
- Actively support Gun Sense Vermont’s work to pass Universal Background Checks;
- Collaborate with Lake Champlain Chocolate as they achieve 100% fair trade cocoa sources;
- Guide 3 high school and 12 young adult interns as they ground themselves in social justice work; and
- Support nine activist groups that need help with fiscal sponsorship, infrastructure, resources and people power.

The last piece of our work that I want to highlight was the opportunity we had to serve with a handful of advocate groups lead by Migrant Justice to help shape the Fair and Impartial Policing Policy that the Vermont Criminal Justice Training Council passed last June. All law enforcement agencies statewide are legally responsible to adopt and practice the policy. We will continue to collaborate with Migrant Justice, ACLU-VT, The VT Human Rights Commission and Justice for All to monitor and improve the policy as needed.

In order to respond to the amount of calls we receive for educational programming, we are actively recruiting and supporting new facilitators. Read about three of them here. If you are interested, come to the Prospective Facilitator Gathering at the PJC on Thursday, October 20 from 7-8:30pm. (See Calendar on page 10.)

There is so much work to do AND we are doing so much work. It’s wonderful and inspiring to be a hub for all this activity (and more). Thank you for being part of our community in whatever ways you do.

I started doing this work because of all the horror stories I’ve heard from People of Color about what it is like to live in Vermont. I’m especially interested helping create safe schools where all students can develop positive identities and thrive.

– Alyssa Chen

I want be a facilitator because I see it as an opportunity to further educate people in my community about social justice issues.

– Rachel Wilson

I am doing this work with PJC because it is simply impossible for me to live with myself just going about my daily life, cloaked in white privilege, without engaging in strategic anti-racist action. We are in a time where black and brown people are being targeted yet again for being their human selves and the fact that I have a choice to do nothing, not think about it or talk about it, and therefore perpetuate it, is unacceptable to me. I could never answer to my son if I didn't act. My son is a white male. There is nothing to stop him from perpetuating this violence if I do not teach him how to continually act against it. Having conversations about race with white people is the tip of the iceberg.

– Julie Drogin

Alyssa Chen: PJC facilitator

Rachel Wilson: PJC facilitator

Julie Drogin: PJC facilitator

Rachel: PJC facilitator
then fuel our drug problem.’ So, we have work to do.

Pull back and look at the bigger picture. We won’t stop all shootings, no more than speed limits or drunk driving laws will end highway deaths, but we can lower death and injury. One clear way is to require universal background checks (UBCs) anytime a firearm is purchased. Don’t we check backgrounds now? We do up to a point, and then we don’t. It’s complicated, due to compromises demanded by the gun lobby. Let me explain.

Federal law requires licensed gun dealers – that is, those whose primary business is firearms – to run checks on all gun sales. This only accounts for 60% of transactions. The remaining 40% require no check at all – private sales between individuals at gun shows or wherever. That 40% represents 6.7 million guns sold in 2012. In the 20-plus years that the National Instant Check System (NICS) has existed, more than 2 million potential buyers were denied due to criminal histories. Typically a check takes less than five minutes, and some 95% of buyers pass; it’s those 5% who have sketchy backgrounds that stall. Some say the bad apples will just go to the black market. Does that mean we should allow any felon or violent domestic abuser be able to purchase a gun legally?

Even in Vermont, violent people know how to navigate a flawed system. Consider convicted felon Timothy O’Keefe who, during a phone call from jail to his son Alex, instructed his son to purchase a gun for him when he was released. Do it “...privately,” O’Keefe said, “not at a gun store, and not to register it so no one will know.” O’Keefe’s intent came later on in that same phone call: “There are going to be no more warnings and I’m just going to start shooting people when I get out of jail.” Fortunately, police monitored that call, and the sale never happened.

Consider how easily Paul Heinz, Seven Days reporter, bought an assault rifle legally through a private seller just hours after the Orlando, Florida, tragedy, the largest mass shooting in US history (49 were killed and 53 wounded). Heinz purchased this firearm, identical to the one used in Orlando, in a South Burlington parking lot, and then later that day surrendered it to Burlington Police. In the hands of a determined felon like Tim O’Keefe, that simple and legal transaction turns fatal and tragic.

Some argue that Vermont hasn’t had a Newtown, we know how to be responsible with firearms. For the most part, that’s true, until it isn’t. Recall that tragic day in August of 2015 when DCF social worker Lara Sobel was gunned down in a Barre parking lot by Jody Herring who, earlier the same day, murdered two cousins and an aunt.

If you’d told me the day before the crime at my kids’ school what could happen, I might have doubted you. I’ve learned it can happen anywhere. Since Columbine, schools have beefed up security, run intruder drills, practice safety protocols. We’ve taken these steps inside schools, but outside schools it makes sense to implement UBCs.

Seventeen states and Washington, DC, now have UBCs. Data from these sources provide a significant sample pool that shows the life-saving benefits of UBCs:

- 38% fewer women are shot dead by the intimate partner. That stat alone should get our attention, given that half of Vermont’s homicides are domestic violence.
- The firearm suicide rate is 49% lower, even though non-firearm suicide rates are nearly identical.
- Gun trafficking – that is, the interstate migration of guns to crimes in other states – drops 48%.
- 39% fewer law enforcement officers are shot to death with handguns.

Newtown was the 9/11 for middle class parents of young children in that it rattled our complacency and altered our schools. It transformed the landscape in America. Despite the logjam in Congress, states have passed smart reforms. Even here, with the help of Gun Sense Vermont and its 5,000 members, we convinced lawmakers in 2015 to pass a state law that now makes it illegal for felons to have guns. In 2017, we’re going after UBCs. The mayors of eight of Vermont’s largest cities are with us, as is a growing number of law enforcement, as well as most Vermon ters and gun owners.

It’s time we all pulled together to fix this, just like we did after Tropical Storm Irene. Come to the Statehouse in 2017. We need people to show up in-person at the statehouse next session. You don’t need to say anything -- you just need to be there showing your support. At the hearing in 2015, supporters of Universal Background Checks were dramatically outnumbered by opponents. We can’t let that happen again. We need to show legislators that we care enough to show up.

Let us know you’re coming on this link: http://www.gunsensevt.org/pledge_to_show_up. Thank you.

Those interested in joining us in a large-scale gathering at the State House in February or March when the legislature takes up UCB’s please go to gunsense.org to sign up for alerts.

Footnotes

1. CDC.
2. CDC and the FBI.
6. CDC.
7. ATF
10. CDC, National Center for Injury Prevention and Control (WISQARS) (online), 2005.
12. FBI, 2001-2011: Law enforcement killed with handguns not their own.
Why Should the Public Finance Election Campaigns?

By Terry Bouricius, Clean Elections Project

We live in a country where corporations and wealthy individuals can spend virtually unlimited funds, often in secret, to influence our politics. This is not a recipe for democracy. The resulting policies have led to the greatest disparity in income and wealth in the US since the Great Depression, not only sabotaging the well-being of the vast majority of Americans, but threatening the fundamental stability of our nation.

Big Money is the opposite of free speech. And when it dominates our elections, it is the opposite of democracy and undermines confidence in democratic government altogether.

Realizing the importance of this situation, Vermont, like several other states, created a public finance system (so far limited to Governor and Lt. Governor), so that anyone who can demonstrate sufficient public support (by raising a large number of small donations), regardless of personal wealth, the wealth of their friends, friendly corporations or PACs, can receive a public campaign grant to get out the basic information voters need to make an informed election decision.

In passing the broad campaign finance reform law in the 1990s, the legislature expressed concern that Big Money would stifle robust debate and undermining “citizen interest, participation and confidence in the electoral process.” Specifically, in creating the public financing option, it found that:

“Public financing of campaigns … will increase citizen participation and will limit the time spent soliciting contributions, and will reduce the need of elected officials to respond to, and provide access to, contributors. As a result candidates will be freed to devote more time and energy to debate of the issues and elected officials will be able to spend more time responding to constituents and to performing their official duties.

“Public financing of campaigns, coupled with generally applicable contribution and expenditure limitations, will level the financial playing field among candidates and provide resources to independent candidates, both of which will increase the debate of issues and ideas.”

Publicly-funded election campaigns have many benefits. Research from decades of experience in a number of states and cities shows the following benefits:

- reduces the opportunity for corruption
- promotes confidence in government
- promotes contested and competitive elections
- fosters diversity in the electoral process
- encourages positive, voter-centered campaigns

Of these, only the first – preventing outright corruption – is generally respected by the US Supreme Court, and of course, such “quid pro quo” corruption (like a blatant bribe) is minor compared to the control exercised by Big Money over the flow of political information, and the entire public agenda.

And, despite all the recent anti-democratic Supreme Court decisions, if you look hard, you can see a silver lining:

In the Arizona Free Enterprise Club case of 2011, while it struck down a key provision of Arizona’s public financing system, the Court clearly upheld the constitutionality of government providing public financing of campaigns as “legitimately furthering significant governmental interests, such as the state interest in preventing corruption.”

While their reasoning is far too limited, the Supreme Court’s support for maintaining and expanding public financing can bring us all those other benefits. In fact, Vermont can and should own its own elections by publicly financing all state races. This could be done by spending only a tiny fraction (less than 0.1%) of the annual state budget. Unfortunately, publicly financed campaigns as well as crowd-sourcing of small contributions are under legal attack in Vermont, which only serves to increase the power of big money.

The Vermont Attorney General recently threatened the first publicly financed candidate in a decade, Dean Corren, who...
was nominated by the Democratic Party. When the party sent an email in support of Corren, the AG said that it counted as an in-kind contribution and was outside the rules. This after the party asked if it was permissible and got the go ahead. When a group sued in federal court to maintain the fundamental First Amendment rights to political association, the AG sued Corren individually for $72,000. Until this case is won, no one can dare use public-financing. It has been effectively eliminated by the AG’s unprecedented litigation.

Others are launching legal challenges against crowd-funding of campaigns, like Bernie Sanders’ and others have begun to use public-financing. It has been effectively eliminated by the AG’s unprecedented litigation.

Keeping up the fight against the Koch brothers’ billion-dollar political agenda, one of the Koch brothers’ political strategies was to use money to fund nonviolent social movements. These efforts have been thwarted by the Koch brothers’ legal team.

The future of our democracy requires a competitive chance for the 99%. See the sidebar for how you can help.

**Blueprint for Revolution**

*By Natalia Korpanty, PJC Intern*

Srdja Popovic’s *Blueprint for Revolution: How to Use Rice Pudding, Lego Men, and Other Nonviolent Techniques to Galvanize Communities, Overthrow Dictators, or Simply Change the World* is an entertaining read with an incredibly important message. Popovic references his own experiences fighting for democracy in Serbia through the group Otpor! and the experiences of others around the world to help show that nonviolent resistance can create a greater and more lasting impact than turning to arms. Popovic discusses a variety of tactics and strategies that help nonviolent movements gain success and outlines how exactly to go about creating a strong movement. Throughout the work, Popovic emphasizes the importance of patience and creating an end goal, a big picture to work toward even as one’s movement wins certain “battles.” The final outcome of a movement, he claims, should be an equitable and democratic society.

Unlike many “manual guides,” Popovic’s never failed to keep me engaged as a reader – I couldn’t put the book down! His use of humor and pop cultural references was fresh and endearing. Even more than that though, his piece made me actually want to go out and fight for the causes I am passionate about, to create my own plan of action, no matter how “small” the issue may seem to be. Popovic urges readers to use these tactics in their daily lives to help create a positive change. He emphasizes that anyone is capable of changing the world, no matter how meek they may seem.

**One Bead at a Time**

*One Bead at a Time* is the oral memoir of Beverly Little Thunder, a two-spirit Lakota Elder from Standing Rock, who has lived most of her life in service to Indigenous and non-Indigenous women in vast areas of both the United States and Canada. Transcribed and edited by two-spirit Metis writer Sharron Proulx-Turner, Little Thunder’s narrative is told verbatim, her melodious voice and keen sense of humor almost audible over the page.

Early in her story, Beverly recounts a dream from her early adulthood, “I stared at these lily pads for the longest time and I decided that there was one part of the pond that had lots of lily pads and no frogs. I said, ‘I want to go there because there’s lots of lily pads but no frogs and I like creating community.’” And create community she does. Little Thunder established the first and today, the only all-women’s Sundance in the world, securing a land base in the Green Mountains of Vermont for future generations of Indigenous women’s ceremony. She was active in the American Indian Movement (A.I.M) and she continues to practice and promote political and spiritual awareness for Indigenous women around the world. She is a truly remarkable visionary.

When she was forced to leave her Spiritual community 20 years ago, because she was a lesbian, Beverly founded the Women’s Sundance to continue teaching the traditions and ceremonies of her heritage. She currently works with women and children from her Vermont home by teaching leadership skills through the Lakota Sundance ceremony, the sweat lodge ceremony, awareness of and respect for the animal and natural worlds, community talking circles, communication workshops, personal retreats, vision quests and spiritual counseling.

Beverly is the chair of the PJC Board.

**Booksing at the Peace & Justice Center on November 15, 5-7:30pm.**
Robin’s Nest

Goodbye, Paij

By Robin Lloyd

Vermont racial justice and peace activist Paij Wadley-Bailey accepted Death with Dignity at 8:49pm, August 18, 2016.

As your friend Sha’an Mouilert said, “You were a teacher to the end.” You put the dignity into Death with Dignity. You showed us how to go gracefully. You have somehow demystified death for us. You’ve made us see it as a natural part of life. You have given us older folks much to think about.

We held a memory circle for you at our WILPF meeting last week. Laurie remembered your critical role as a member of Kwanzaa, a multicultural percussion group that brought women of color into Vermont schools. You were a prime mover in VARAT, the Vermont Anti-Racism Action Team which sponsored Reading to End Racism in the schools. In that capacity, you wouldn’t let yourself be bullied by doctrinaire school administrations. I remember when Mater Christi cancelled the group’s presentation because of your support for abortion and homosexuality.

You responded, “VARAT realizes that all oppressions are connected, whether it’s racism, sexism, homophobia, or the right for a woman to choose. They are all connected, and how can you endorse one issue and not appreciate that oppression by any other name is oppression?”

I knew you best when I served with you on the US board of WILPF and you, Sha’an and I went to the UN World Conference on Racism in Durban, South Africa, in September, 2001. (We returned on Sept. 11, flying into JFK a few moments after the first twin tower was hit.) You were on the board of the PJC and a member of Old Lesbians Organized for Change. Peggy remembers playing rock and roll with you at the Michigan’s Womyn’s Festival, and how you enjoyed tooting around on a mobility scooter. You were the founding staff member of UVM’s LGBTQQA Center.

I also remember you as a pagan. It was a surprise when you called me this summer and said that you were not able to go to Witch Camp at the end of August and I should go in your place. I had been on the waiting list. Thank you, Paij, for opening the door for me to a new experience.

The Vermont Witchcamp was started 22 years ago by Reclaiming, a non-profit religious organization fostering a tradition of witchcraft that began in the 1980s in Northern California. The values of Reclaiming, as articulated by head priestess Starhawk, stem from an understanding that the earth is alive and all of life is sacred and interconnected. “We see the Goddess as immanent in the earth’s cycles of birth, growth, death, decay and regeneration. Our practice arises from a deep, spiritual commitment to the earth, to healing and to the linking of magic with political action. Each of us embodies the divine. Our ultimate spiritual authority is within, and we need no other person to interpret the sacred to us. We foster the questioning attitude, and honor intellectual, spiritual and creative freedom.”

Quakers and Unitarians have a friendly relationship with Reclaiming. And those of us raised on the harvest pageants of Bread and Puppet – who have seen the great Earth Mother rising up within a circle of chanting acolytes – know that reverence for the Goddess is alive and well in the Green Mountain State. One wonders, when nature is sending us such a strong message of protest to our assault on her air, water, and earth, why more people do not turn to Goddess principles as they struggle for health and healing in the face of climate change.

I attended ‘A week of Myth, Magic, and Mystery in the Reclaiming Tradition’ at the Farm and Wilderness Camp in Plymouth, VT the last week of August. The theme was Persephone’s Journey: Power, Emergence, and Reclaiming the Myth of Light and Shadow. You can read about the six paths that elaborate on this theme at www.vermontwitchcamp.net. In brief, Persephone was abducted by Hades and taken to the underworld, leaving her mother Demeter, goddess of grains and the fertility of the earth, to search despairingly for her. In her anxiety, she let the crops fail. Finally, a deal was worked out that Persephone could return, but she would have to descend every fall to the underworld leaving plants and animals to hibernate until she returned in the spring.

During the week, we created rituals to engage in this story through the lens of our own society’s preoccupations. We opened our hearts to understanding the grief of mothers of the disappeared; of rape and violence against women and how women can sometimes love violent men; the nature of the underworld, so different from the Christian concept of Heaven and Hell; and ultimately, how to maintain the balance between light and shadow in our own lives and in society. As a first time Witch, I did not grasp all that was happening, but I was very much engaged with the process: of people from all walks of life, young and old, men and women working communally to build rituals that create a healing energy, and give meaning to life processes that we are all a part of.

Paij had contributed a box of clothing and jewelry to be handed out to her fellow witches. I got a necklace. And I imagined that if there is an afterlife, Paij would probably choose to spend it in Hades which would be a lot more relaxing than the three Christian alternatives.

**The PJC has received donations in Paij’s memory to the Racial Justice Program. We encourage all who feel connected to Paij to contribute in whatever way you can to work that embodies her energy.**
A New Peace & Justice Store Partnership

By Kristen Connors, PJC Volunteer Coordinator

If you have had the opportunity to visit the Peace & Justice Store this past summer, you may have been treated to a warm smile and friendly conversation from David, a new volunteer at the PJC and also one of our newest vendors.

Early this summer, David arrived at the Peace & Justice Center from Niger, a landlocked country in West Africa, with a case of sterling silver jewelry made by artisans from the nomadic Touareg and Peul Bororo Wadaabe tribes. David is the Secretary General and co-founder of a community based non-profit in Niger called the Association Culturelle Kaouritel. Kaouritel was founded in 1993, and for the past 23 years has worked in Niger to empower members of the Touareg and Peul Bororo Wadaabe tribes, two groups who have been marginalized and vulnerable in today’s societal structures.

In addition to craft and jewelry production, Kaouritel also works with local musicians and musical groups in order to promote and preserve the musical traditions of the tribes. One of the often forgotten Principles of Fair Trade is the emphasis on the promotion and respect of cultural identity. The support Kaouritel gives musicians and artists is an excellent example of how Fair Trade principles can be applied in a community to take care of the emotional and spiritual well-being of a community in addition to their physical needs.

Artisans who work with Kaouritel, 53% of whom are women, are able to send their children to nomadic schools, giving access to education to families who have never before had this opportunity and complying with the Fair Trade principle of ensuring the rights of children. Kaouritel helps its membership build capacity for themselves by facilitating the construction of fresh water wells. For additional income, members can contribute to a food bank run by Kaouritel, which then re-sells the store of grain back to the members at reduced prices during dry seasons. Kaouritel also encourages good environmental stewardship amongst their members by having them plant trees to combat the advancement of the Sahara and Tenere deserts.

Kaouritel has been looking for ways to sell their products abroad. David was drawn to the Peace & Justice Center by the “opportunity to learn more about fair trade and social justice” and to gain product exposure through our Store. The sterling silver jewelry David brought from Niger is some of the only fine jewelry lines we have sold at the Peace & Justice Store. We have a selection of their men’s and women’s rings, earrings, bracelets, and a wide variety of necklaces and pendants.

David showed me a selection of necklaces with various creatively designed cross-like pendants. “Each of the crosses,” David explains, “is unique to the tribe and artisan that fashioned it.” He also shared with me the story behind a matching ring and bracelet set where each piece was made of seven fine silver bangles connected together: “Those bracelets, and these rings, each have seven rings, one for each day of the week.”

I asked David what he likes best about working with Kaouritel, and he answered, “There are many things that I love from my experience with Kaouritel …but the most important is that Kaouritel has helped me to develop the sense of living for the sake of others.”
Clemmons Family Farm

By Lydia Clemmons

Land is the basis of so many things that are important in our lives. Land provides food and sustenance. It defines, shapes and joins communities. Land provides equity, generates wealth, and creates political and economic power. Land offers haven and respite, and opportunities for recreation. Land creates a sense of belonging, a mental and emotional grounding. Land can also divide our communities, and become the object of greed and jealousy, and the instrument of injustice. In our beautiful state of Vermont, land is critical to our economy, supporting two of our largest revenue sectors: agriculture and tourism.

As our Vermont community joins in the growing national excitement around the historic opening of the new National Museum of African American History and Culture in Washington, DC, the significance of the Clemmons Family Farm in the African American story about land ownership in the United States becomes even more apparent. Our family has owned this beautiful, magical place in Charlotte, Vermont since 1962.

A little bit of history around African Americans and land: At the end of the Civil War, General Sherman issued Special Field Order No. 15 – backed by President Abraham Lincoln – which allocated 40 acres and a mule to all former slaves. It was a foundation to help 4 million African Americans start their new lives as free men and women. Some easy math means that this amounted to approximately 160 million acres (or 7% of the land in the US) owned by African Americans in 1865.

When Andrew Johnson assumed the presidency after the assassination of Abraham Lincoln, he rescinded many of the provisions of the Special Order so that much of the land that had been given to African Americans was taken back and returned to the former white landowners. Many African American farmers resorted to sharecropping – an exploitative system that put them back into giving nearly all of the fruits of their labor to the white landowners in exchange for being able to live on the land.

Other African Americans continued to own and farm their land, as my mother’s family did, and began to thrive. A branch of my mother’s extended family, who were in Louisiana, became very successful farmers. During the early 1900’s, their farm was burned to the ground by a group of white farmers whose jealousy of the family’s success was fueled by intense racism. My mother’s great uncle and great aunt fled with their children all the way to California. Between the sharecropping and the crushing hostility and violence they faced in the rural South following their emancipation from slavery, millions of other African Americans made the decision to flee the land and their farms and to pursue better lives and opportunities in urban areas.

My mother’s parents left their farm life when she was a young girl, and moved to Illinois. Her father took a job as a welder, and her mother took work as a seamstress. My father’s parents moved from North Carolina to Wisconsin. His parents owned and operated a laundry and hat-making shop in Milwaukee. Like many African American families who migrated north, our families settled into urban living and urban jobs.

My parents met in Cleveland, Ohio, married, and moved to Vermont in the early 1960’s to raise their five children on a farm in Charlotte, Vermont. Nearly six decades later, like many farming families around the country, we began talking about the future of this land we love.

As the oldest daughter, my task was to begin researching options for the property, including the option of selling some or all of it. My research led me to learn more about the history of African American land ownership in this country, and the realization that the Clemmons Family Farm is much more important than the land and the buildings. This farm, and the story of our family, is an unique and important legacy.

The United States comprises 2.3 billion acres of land. According to the 1920 census, African Americans owned roughly 45 million acres of land in the US. Today, African Americans own roughly 3.6 million acres of land—less than one half of one percent of all of the land in the US. This means that the African American community has lost more than 40 million acres of land in the US since the 1920’s, when my parents were born.

In Vermont, according to the 2012 agriculture census, of the nearly 7000 farms in Vermont, only about 19 are owned or principally operated by African Americans. Of the 1.2 million acres of farm land in this beautiful state, only 740 farm acres are owned by African Americans. The Clemmons Family Farm is one of the largest African American-owned farms in the state of Vermont. It is impossible to let this legacy go. It is too important to our family, to this state, and to this nation to let such a rare gem slip through the cracks and disappear the way that so many millions of other African American-owned farms have disappeared over the past century.

For this reason, the Clemmons Family Farm is transitioning into an African American Heritage and Multicultural Center – a place where everyone can come to learn, to commune, and to celebrate the African diaspora through programs and events around farming, the arts and sciences, and multiculturalism. Please join us in celebrating and supporting the preservation of a rare treasure for Vermont and for the nation. Please visit our website (clemmonsfamilyfarm.org) to learn more about our plans and to share your suggestions!

The Clemmons Family Farm is the PJC’s newest Allied Group. Tax deductible donations can be sent to the PJC. 
Muslim Girls Making Change

By Lena Ginawi

If you ask the typical person to describe what a terrorist looks like, you are likely to hear a description of a Muslim man or woman. This vilifying and gross generalization of Muslims is largely due to the media. Determined to reject this idea, four teenage poets, Hawa Adam, Kiran Waqar, Lena Ginawi, and Balkisa Abdikadir began to write slam poetry. Since their breakthrough poem ‘Wake Up America,’ the group has expanded to include a new member, Basmala Fadel, has traveled to Washington DC to compete in an international competition, and has made real change all over the state and the global community.

While their group, Muslim Girls Making Change (MGMC), has gained attention and a platform through poetry, they began as a service group. Their original goal was to foster volunteerism and fight negative stereotypes by connecting Muslim youth with different organizations. Later, through slam poetry, their group transformed to initiate discussions as well. These girls firmly believe that the first step to solving an issue is acknowledging it and discussing solutions. Through poetry they are able to bring light to their stories, and use their voices to create change around them.

In their writing and performances, Muslim Girls Making Change have learned that sharing takes a lot of courage. In order to hear more stories, MGMC has taken on the mission to create an open space for youth to speak the truth and share their stories. They hope that through this project, youth will feel freer to write and share their voices. These young poets are determined to create a slam poetry community here in Vermont, and are willing to turn the mic over to the youths whom have not had the opportunity to use their voices.

Many people ask, ‘What exactly is slam poetry?’ Slam poetry is a performance art form sometimes called spoken word, that uses words and rhythms along with movement. It evokes audience participation, awareness building, and the stimulation of creativity. In addition, slam poetry often focuses on current events including racial, economic, and gender injustices.

These young poets fell in love with slam poetry and believe others will too. Slam poetry is the key to MGMC’s movement, and holds a deep place in all of their hearts. They seek the hidden talent in Vermont’s youth and hope to foster it to make a more just world.

To learn more about Muslim Girls Making Change, visit their website at http://muslimgirlsmakingchange.weebly.com/ and like their Facebook page. To get involved, make sure to come to one of their upcoming shows or volunteer events! 🎤

Welcome Lacretia Johnson Flash to the PJC Board of Directors! We are delighted to have your point of view, skill set, thoughtfulness, commitment to social justice, artistry, warmth and positivity on our leadership body. You bring a lot!

Lacretia is the Assistant Dean for Conduct, Policy, and Climate for the Division of Student and Campus Life at the University of Vermont. In her role as Assistant Dean, Dr. Flash serves as Chair of the Division’s Diversity Council, providing leadership for major divisional diversity initiatives including the division’s ongoing diversity professional development series and multicultural competencies assessment process. She has also served on the President’s Commission on Racial Diversity at the University of Vermont.

Lacretia earned a doctorate from the Educational Leadership and Policy Studies program at UVM. Her dissertation research was on Developing a Measure of Multicultural Competence in Student Affairs Organizations. She has presented nationally, taught graduate level classes, and received multiple academic awards.

Beyond her professional work and scholarly pursuits, Lacretia is an avid mixed-media artist specializing in polymer clay and fiber, as well as a balletomane (lover of ballet). She lives in an intentional community at Burlington Cohousing East Village. We are grateful to her service in the world and here at the Peace & Justice Center. 🎵
October 3, 10, & 17, Mondays
6:45pm-8:45pm, Building Empathy and Addressing Racism at Sterling College, Craftsbury Common. Three-part program led by Rachel Wilson and Alyssa Chen strives to give participants the opportunity to practice undoing racism, both within themselves and their community. It is important to attend all three sessions. 1) Focuses on the concept of white fragility, the low emotional tolerance the dominant racial group has for discussing and addressing racism. 2) Dives into racial myths, identifying subconscious bias and recognizing how myths and bias affect our daily lives. 3) Offers tools and guidelines for action in order to reaffirm our commitment to creating and supporting an anti-oppressive society. Space is limited. Call 863-2345 x6 to register. This program is free.

October 8, Saturday
6-7pm Border of Lights Global Vigil at the PJC. (borderoflights.org). Meet in front of the Peace & Justice Store to remember the 1937 Haitian Massacre where thousands of Haitians and their Dominican-born descendants were murdered in what the US Ambassador in Santo Domingo, R. Henry Norweb, described as “a systematic campaign of extermination.” At 8:45pm there will be a live Twitter/Facebook Q & A session with Border of Lights. Follow Border of Lights on Twitter and Facebook at @borderof_lights and use the hashtags #BeLights and #BeLights16. This will be an amazing opportunity to ask questions from Border of Lights members and activist from the Dominican-Haitian diaspora.

October 10, Monday
5pm Indigenous People's Day: Rally in solidarity with Standing Rock's struggle against the Dakota Access Pipeline and then march to a major public Vermont Gubernatorial debate to push for a “Clean and Green New Deal” for Vermont. Meet outside of the upper entrance to UVM’s Davis Center and march to the DoubleTree Hotel in South Burlington, where the debate is being held. Sponsored by Rights & Democracy, 350 Vermont, Sierra Club - VT Chapter, Lake Champlain International, Renewable Energy Network UVM, and the PJC. More info at www.radvt.org.

October 15-16, Saturday-Sunday
Conference: Deep Change for Climate Justice: Coalescing a Transformational Movement, White River Junction. Join with Our Children, Climate, Faith Symposium and VT Interfaith Power & Light to connect and draw courage to do the work that's needed to take action on global climate change! Online registration: www.dca4q2016.org. Contact: info@vtipl.org or 802-434-3397.

October 15, 22, and 29, Saturdays
3-5:00pm How to Talk to Kids About Racism at Peace & Justice Center, 60 Lake St, Burlington. This three-part discussion group will be guided by Traci Griffith and Rachel Siegel. All who are concerned about the impact of racism and/or white privilege on our children, including parents, family members, caregivers and teachers are welcome to attend. Please plan to attend all three sessions. Registration is limited to 25 people. $40 for the general public and free for current PJC members and volunteers. No one will be turned away for lack of funds. For more information or to register, call 863-2345 x6 or email program@pjcvt.org.

October 20, Thursday
7-8:30pm PJC Prospective Facilitator Gathering at the PJC. Learn about becoming a facilitator of the PJC’s educational programs. Includes an overview of the programs, explanation of our educational philosophies, and time for you to share your experiences and interests. Next steps include participation in a workshop and then becoming a paid facilitator. Programs include: non-violence, racial justice, fair trade and anti-war. People from around the state are needed so if you are interested, but cannot join us in person, join us via video or phone conference. FREE, light refreshments served. To register call 863-2345 x6 or email program@pjcvt.org.

October 23, Sunday
3-5pm PJC Annual Membership Meeting at PJC. Overviews of our current work, voting on new board members, and time for you to offer input into the work we do going forward. The meeting is open to all and a great way to get to know more about what we do and who is involved. RSVP: program@pjcvt.org, or just show up.

October 26, Wednesday
4:30-6:30pm Medea Benjamin Book Tour. Author Medea Benjamin, the co-founder of the women-led peace group CODEPINK and the co-founder of the human rights group Global Exchange, shares her new book Kingdom of the Unjust: Behind the US–Saudi Connection. In her book, Benjamin shines a light on one of the most perplexing elements of American foreign policy. With extremism spreading across the globe, a reduced US need for Saudi oil, and a thawing of US relations with Iran, the time is right for a re-evaluation of our close ties with the Saudi regime. Book talk followed by Q&A and a call to action! At the PJC.

October 27, Thursday
5-6pm Cocoa Campaign presentation focuses on the issue of child slavery and human trafficking in the cocoa industry. It is designed to educate, brainstorm solutions and create tangible action steps that fit within the comfort zone of each participant. Each of us can become advocates of Fair Trade by making mindful decisions. At the PJC.

7:30pm Agents of Change screening at VTIF. Co-sponsored by PJC. Director Abby Ginsberg will speak. Agents of Change examines 1960’s racial conditions on college campuses and in the country that led to protests. The film’s characters were caught at the crossroads of the civil rights, black power, and anti-Vietnam war movements at a pivotal time in America’s history. Main Street Landing, 60 Lake St., Burlington.
CALENDAR

November 2, Wednesday
Youth Environmental Summit (YES!) Barre Civic Center, Barre, VT. A conference for middle and high school students. The mission of YES! is to inspire, encourage, and prepare youth for a life of environmental responsibility, service and leadership by increasing awareness and knowledge of environmental issues and fostering leadership skills. PJC is leading a couple workshops on addressing conflict. Register online at www.regonline.com/YES2016.

November 2, 9, & 16, Wednesdays
6:45pm-8:45pm, Building Empathy and Addressing Racism in Essex town. Specific location TBD. See October 3 for details.

November 3 & 10, Thursdays
6-8pm Nonviolent Activism 101 at MMU, Jericho. This program is designed to help people in the community access and explore the strategy of nonviolence. The first part focuses on exploring violence and systems of oppression in order to have a meaningful understanding of how a nonviolent strategy is effective in taking on violence. In the second half, we work together to practice developing a coordinated nonviolent response to a particular oppressive policy, institution, structure, and/or practice within the community. We look forward to building skills and strategy to lift up movements and local efforts that contribute to a just and peaceful world. Register online through MMUs After Dark Program. If you need the $30 fee waived and/or you are under 25 years old please call 802-863-2345 x6 to register.

November 13, Sunday
Screening of Healing a Soldier’s Heart. 3:30pm reception with refreshments. 4:30pm film screening. Discussion to follow with filmmaker, Ed Tick. $10 suggested donation. Tickets on sale at the P&J Store. MSL Film House, 60 Lake St, Burlington.

November 15, Tuesday
5-7:30pm Book Reading & Signing with Beverly Little Thunder’s memoir, One Bead at a Time. At the Peace & Justice Store. See article on page 5.

November 18, Friday
5-6pm, Book Reading and Signing: The Pitkin Kids Learn About Recycling! Curious about where recyclables go after you put them on your curb to be picked up? Author John Powell and Illustrator Rob Blum share the adventures of the Pitkin Kids as they visit a local Materials Recovery Facility. This free event features an upcycling art activity for kids and light refreshments! At the Peace & Justice Store.

Save the date! January 19, Thursday
PJC Activist Award Ceremony & Party to honor Rising Tide VT for their nonviolence campaign for environmental justice. Presented by Bill McKibben. Details pending. Tickets on sale in November.

Working for World Peace
One Birth at a Time:

By Jenna Thayer, certified doula & owner of Twinklings

“If we are to create lasting peace we must start with the children.” ~Mahatma Gandhi

Though many now know the definition of a doula and what they actually do, many others do not and either way very few have the privilege to work with one.

While a midwife or obstetrician has clinical responsibilities and also tracks the baby in labor, a doula offers continuous physical and emotional support to a laboring family. Most of the time, the doula is the only one that never leaves the side of a laboring mother from the beginning of labor until after the birth.

As doulas, we meet with a family during pregnancy, we attend the family in labor, and do follow-up visits. Studies show that working with a doula reduces requests for pain medication, the need for an unplanned cesarean birth, and postpartum depression; and additionally increases the whole family’s satisfaction with their birth experience and feeling of confidence moving forward into parenting. Overall, the whole family is often more satisfied with their birth experience and feels more confident moving forward into parenting.

In Vermont, the cost of a doula can run from $500-$1200. Doulas are not covered by insurance and so for some this service is well out of reach.

This is where Twinklings comes in. Twinklings is a second-hand pregnancy and newborn boutique in Burlington. All income supports Handle With Love – a Vermont scholarship fund for families wanting to hire a doula for their birth. Twinklings accepts donations from local families wanting to help the community by providing high quality items that can also be financially out-of-reach for many. Anything that cannot be sold in the shop is passed on to Lund Family Center, VT WIC, or the VNA Family Room so the ripples of this project are wide.

How can you help make a splash?!

- Donate money to at HandleWithLoveVT.com
- Come shop for family and friends at Twinklings
- Donate pregnancy, baby or nursing-related items
- Send every pregnant person you see to Twinklings

Twinklings helps families purchase needed items at reasonable prices and turns the income around to then help other families access doula services. You can find more information about Twinklings at VTtwinklings.com or facebook.com/VTtwinklings.
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