

Adult Ed Advocacy Class: Spotlight on VOICE



On Sunday, March 19th, Trinity's adult Sunday School featured leaders from Virginians Organized for Interfaith Community Engagement (VOICE). Trinity has been a VOICE member since 2021. Loren DePina, Organizer in Arlington and James Pearlstein, Co-Lead Organizer, positive change in our community. The 20 Trinity members in attendance introduced their concerns, which ranged from affordable housing to voting rights and the need for diversity across our communities.

In its early days, VOICE took on the lending crisis by helping those who were at risk of losing their homes due to sub-prime mortgage lending practices. More recently, VOICE worked with low-income residents at the Serrano housing complex, where the management company had allowed horrible living conditions to persist. The organization is actively working to get funding for mental health Crisis Receiving Centers, which allows police to transfer custody of patients who are in a mental health crisis or under an emergency custody order, throughout the state. Crisis Receiving Centers help get the police back on the street to handle other crisis situations and provides a place for people in crisis to go that is not a hospital or a jail. In Prince William County, VOICE has secured enough local and state funding for a Crisis Receiving Center that will serve both adults and youth.

VOICE organizers discussed how it organizes, starting with understanding what power is—the ability to act or do, and how individuals can make a difference locally. While every individual has a bit of power, organized people and organized money are both needed to drive real change. VOICE volunteers, referred to as VOICE leaders, exercise this collective power by listening to others in the community, learning about issues, meeting with state and local officials, coming to government meetings, writing emails, letters, etc.

VOICE seeks to deepen relationships with various entities in our communities, like one brick of power at a time. It's an investment best done face to face, in person, not via newsletters or Zoom. VOICE holds Leader Training and Development, investing in developing people to be effective agents of change in their communities. Any member of a VOICE member institution can attend trainings. Quite a few Trinity members already have.

VOICE also focuses on developing trust and understanding people's top interests. For example, they recently held listening sessions with local high school assistant principals, who revealed issues of feelings of division in the community, the need for more mental health support, and dealing with addictions, including fentanyl. Leaders are working with the APS Student Services Director to pursue getting more mental health services into local schools.

VOICE is working on mental health and addiction beyond the schools, including behavioral health and youth in Arlington. The system is under severe strain. To address this, VHC is looking to build mental health and addiction beds, including 24 designated for young patients under 18 years old, on Carlin Springs Road, but has faced resistance in the neighborhood.

You don't need to be Martin Luther King or Rosa Parks to make change happen. If you want to get involved with the good work VOICE is doing, please contact Dan Campbell, who leads Trinity's Racial Justice ministry. The ministry meets the second Wednesday of every month to discuss effective ways to make an impact. [You can learn more about VOICE on their website.](#)

Article by Diane Allard. Photos by Donna Parry.

