ORGANIZING WORKS! A BIG VICTORY FROM OUR MEMBERS IN THE HIGH COUNTRY!

Just a couple months ago, our Watauga County Chapter saw a problem. Their local county commission was holding public comments AFTER their meetings, meaning that local residents weren’t able to address what was being voted on until after the votes happened!

So our members organized to change this... and it worked!

How did they do it? It’s all about knowing how to break off little bite sized organizing chunks to build towards big organizing wins.

Just for this campaign, our Watauga members did a lot in a short period of time:
- They identified a problem and analyzed solutions
- Hosted a public comment training session for members
- Went to practice speaking at a town council meeting (then improved by debriefing it!)
- Held another training session so more people could be brought into the work
- Wrote letters to the editor of their local newspaper
- Emailed their county commissioners as part of a coordinated campaign
- Prepared public comments for the next meeting
- Spoke out at the county commission, laying out their solution to the problem
- Wrote follow-up emails to the commissioners
- Spoke out at county commission, again

AND THEN THEY WON!
CHAPTERS LAUNCH LOCAL BUDGET CAMPAIGNS

All across the state, our members are fighting for local issues that will improve their communities! Here's a quick overview:

**ASHE**

Upgrade the minimum standard housing code
In the High Country, working people face an increasingly difficult housing market. The beautiful mountain location brings folks buying second and third homes, but locals have been squeezed out by stagnating wages and indifferent or hostile landlords. As member Tanya Robinson (photo) says, “We need to hold landlords accountable and make sure we have healthy and safe housing.” Their demand: a new minimum standard housing code.

**WATAUGA**

Renters deserve safe and respectable housing
This campaign addresses a widely felt issue. It ensures existing rental units are safe and viable, increasing the quality of life for renters and clearing a risk and legal-free pathway for reporting potential violations. “In the county, there’s no regulation and landlords can do whatever. But everyone deserves safe and secure housing,” says member Sarah Davis (right) with member Alana Baird (left).

**CABARRUS**

Evict less, house more
This campaign focuses on allocating $8 million in the county budget to subsidize an emergency rental assistance program, providing funds to someone before they are faced with eviction. The county funded it before COVID, but has let funding lapse. “People have the right to have shelter through a temporary situation,” said member Sabrina Berry, pictured left with member Mark Ortiz (right).

**ALAMANCE**

Our schools our dollars
Our members are campaigning to keep the Alamance County Commissioners from using $2.9 million dollars from the education reserve fund to fund new courthouse renovations. This would keep those funds available for use on the over $17 million dollars in repairs that have been identified as necessary throughout our school system.

**GRANVILLE**

The Granville Street Blacktop Project
Granville Street Park is central to the city of Oxford, but it’s fallen into neglect. We want to restore it as a hub for families and youth by bringing back the basketball courts and adding lighting and seating. The city’s multi-year $7.5 million surplus would be the funding source. As member William Johnson (above, with Myla Pettiford, at the park) said, “This used to be the place to be, and now kids don’t have a place to go and play.”

**JOHNSTON**

Helping teachers do their best
Teachers spend an average of $459 of their personal funds each year on school supplies. JoCo’s goal? Get the county commissioners to add $900,000 to the budget for school supplies for the upcoming school year. It’s good for teachers, good for students, and good for parents, too. “The lack of essential items in classrooms is a really big problem,” said member Erika Hall.
Extremist and divisive, Mark Robinson has gone after women, immigrants, the LGBTQIA+ community, and, yes, even Black people. This is why he is dangerous. And that’s why we showed up at his rally when he announced his candidacy for governor.

IF YOU’RE FROM NORTH CAROLINA YOU MAY HAVE HEARD THE PHRASE “SKIN FOLK AIN’T ALWAYS KINFOLK.” THAT’S WHAT I THINK OF WHEN I THINK OF MARK ROBINSON.

By Bryant Crisp, Alamance County

I love my county and my state. I was born and raised right here in Alamance County. 43 years...this is all I know. I’ve seen how great this county and state can be, and I’ve seen things I’m not so proud of. Anyone who’s been in a relationship knows that when you love someone or something you have to take the good with the bad. So while I love how most people here are friendly, we have spectacular natural scenery, amazing southern cuisine, and a host of other amenities...I also have to recognize where our county and state must improve if we are ever going to thrive.

In Alamance County and North Carolina for that matter we have residents from many different racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic backgrounds, and in conversation with all the people I’ve talked to I’ve come to find that 90% of us want the same things. The media would have us believe our differences are too vast to come together, but they are not. We all want nice homes, a safe environment to raise our children, the ability to make a living wage to support our families, and schools for our children that have all the resources they need. Most of all we want to live in peace and harmony, and Mark Robinson doesn’t represent harmony at all. That’s why I know he is not our man.

We must do better when it comes to educating our children and keeping them safe. We must protect women’s rights. We must do a better job of protecting black and brown residents from over policing. We must do better with our crumbling infrastructure. We must do better to make sure our LGBTQ community feels connected and heard and not alienated.

None of these things are a priority for Mark Robinson.

If you’re from North Carolina you may have heard the phrase “skin folk ain’t always kinfolk.” That’s what I think of when I think of Mark Robinson. I would love to have our first African-American Governor in our state, but he is not that man. I would love to have a person of integrity to continue Governor Cooper’s work, but he is not that man. I would love to have a governor that would seek to bridge the gap between parties and bring people and lawmakers together, but he is not that man.

ANNOUNCING:
PUBLIC SCHOOLS STRONG!

When we go to our local school board meetings they are often overrun with extremists and culture war politics that distract from the real issues. Why are these the loudest voices even though we’re the majority?

The truth is, these loud voices are being mobilized by a big money campaigns being pushed by national groups such as Moms for Liberty. But the local parents we know are much more concerned about fixing the gym roof and making sure classrooms are equipped than they are about CRT or what’s in a few books in the library.

That’s why Down Homies – and our friends in the HEAL Together coalition – are building local Public School Strong teams to attend their monthly school board meetings and respond to attempts to undermine our public schools. Our folks are learning how to show and build support for well-resourced and inclusive public schools. We need to show more and more people that we are the majority.

Our message is clear: We want an honest and accurate education for our kids; we want safe and well funded environments for our children to learn in. We won’t be distracted by the extremists who are trying to undermine our public schools.

Want to join or start a local team in your county? Our goal is to have Public School Strong teams at every school board meeting in every county in the state by the end of 2023.

Public Schools Strong virtual training is Saturday, June 17!
Watauga County
May Day Party and Campaign Kickoff Saturday, May 6
Community Mapping Session Monday, May 8
Community Canvassing Saturday, May 13
Community Phone Bank Monday, May 15
County Commissioners Meeting Tuesday, May 16
Chapter Meeting Tuesday, May 16

Public School Organizing
HEAL Together NC Statewide Call (virtual) Thursday, May 25
Public School Strong Training Saturday, June 17

Training and Skill Building
Writing Op-eds and Letters to the Editor (virtual) Tuesday, May 2 and Thursday, May 18
Local Chapter Campaign Training Wednesday, May 3
Take Better Photos for Organizing (virtual) Tuesday, May 9
Public Comment Training (virtual) Thursday, May 11
Theory of Change Training (virtual) Saturday, May 13

Ashe County
Ashe Public Comment! Monday, May 1
Community Mapping Session Sunday, May 7
Chapter Meeting Tuesday, May 9
County Commissioner Meeting Monday, May 15

Cabarrus County
Chapter Meeting Thursday, May 4
Community Mapping Session Saturday, May 6
Campaign Canvassing Saturday, May 13

Granville County
Cookout! For the Granville Street Blacktop Project Sunday, May 7
Community Mapping Session Thursday, May 11
Chapter Meeting Wednesday, May 17

Johnston County
Board of Commissioners / Board of Education Meetings Monday, May 1
Neighborhood Canvass Day Wednesday, May 3
Board of Education Public Comment Tuesday, May 9
Community Mapping Session Wednesday, May 10
Campaign Kickoff and Monthly Meeting! Thursday, May 11
Board of Commissioners Meeting Monday, May 15

The Importance of Talking with Each Other
All across North Carolina, Down Home local chapters are gaining support for their local issue campaign through deep canvassing—the art of using long, empathetic conversations to help shift someone’s belief. Down Home has long believed that this earnest and honest relational technique is the key to unlocking and building working class power in rural Southern communities.

If you are a Down Home member and want to get involved in deep canvassing for your local issue campaigns, contact your local organizer! Our skilled Deep Canvass team is busy helping provide training and support so that you can skill build to hold these important and transformative conversations in your community and we would love you to take part!

Got something to say? Say it in The Holler!
The Holler is the monthly newsletter showcasing the work being done by Down Homies across the state!
Send us your updates about your chapter, photos, their opinion pieces about your campaigns and your community!

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Fighting Bullies and Being True to Yourself
“When we censor books,” Johnston County member Allen Hall told his Board of Education, “we’re not just limiting children’s access to information, we’re also limiting their ability to think critically and form opinions.”

Hall, a husband and dad, reads from the children’s book “My Shadow is Purple” and you tell us if this message is inappropriate for kids.

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