ORGANIZING BRINGS BIG WINS FOR WORKING CLASS RENTERS IN CABARRUS COUNTY!

Cabarrus County is in the middle of an eviction crisis. Just through April of this year, almost 3,300 residents faced eviction cases, up from 2,570 for all of last year. Why the sudden surge? Local elected officials were not working for working class people. They had allowed rents to skyrocket while failing to address an abysmally low minimum wage.

The people of Cabarrus just couldn't make ends meet. And they needed their local government to help. The county had an emergency rental assistance program (ERAP) but the City Council had failed to fund it, adding insult to injury for local residents.

That's when Down Home members decided to organize. Members felt strongly about making the government help poor and working families who were on the verge of eviction and worse. Down Home member Jayne Williams remembered losing her home when she was a young mother. She had to pay a medical bill and was late on her rent – and her landlord decided to evict her so he could raise the rent for the next tenant. She was forced to live in her car with her kids for two weeks.

"When I found out this was the campaign we were working on, I knew this was the thing I had to do," Jayne says.

[Continued on next page!]
Staying focussed, but evolving the strategy

Members identified the with the goal of restoring ERAP funding, but learned that it had originally been funded through state and federal Covid relief programs. The county commissioners said they could no longer fund ERAP because the federal money had dried up. But members wouldn’t take no as an answer, because poor and working people were still in need.

“To be evicted, and have nowhere to turn for help in the county where you pay taxes is unacceptable,” says member Sabrina Berry, pointing out its the governments responsibility to figure out the funding and programs to keep their communities safe.

So the chapter persisted – canvassing their neighbors, attending board meetings, circulating a petition demanding that ERAP be funded again. When commission meetings didn’t have public comment, they showed up with signs advocating for the program and sat silently.

“Over time, our campaign went through some changes,” says Down Home’s regional organizer Jasmine Lewter. They found a different emergency assistance program with the Department of Human Services.

“It was an underutilized program because nobody knows it exists,” she says.

The application was only on paper and not online, and it had all kinds of stipulations that easily disqualified people. It only offered $500, which wasn’t enough to cover most rent. Plus, you only found out you got the assistance months after you applied. Not very useful in an emergency.

Building power for working people

“We kept going to the county commission meetings. We talked to them about it. We told them changes they could make, and asked for them to fund the program better,” says Jasmine. “The budget was only $85,000, which is nothing when you consider the need.”

After working with county commissioners and folks from DHS, our Cabarrus members created a new way forward for their campaign. They were determined to hold their elected officials accountable and make government serve the needs of all residents and not just landlords, who can financially benefit when renters must fend for themselves. Members recall meeting with two of the county commissioners in a casual conversation just to talk about the problems and what could be done to solve them.

The commissioners seemed to want to help, and were open to finding new solutions.

“But I’ve learned you really have to go by what people do, particularly in government and power, and not just their words,” says member Mae Mack. Sometimes people in power make promises they can’t deliver on - but that’s why staying organized and investing long-term is so important.

Making gains for everyone

After the chapter’s strong push to hold government accountable to its citizens during an eviction crisis, the County agreed to make big changes to their emergency program.

- **Down Home won four big changes to help working people** in Cabarrus County:
  - The budget for the program has now been almost doubled, from $85,000 to $151,000
  - Residents can now receive $1,000 in assistance instead of $500
  - Landlords don’t have to be registered for the program, which kept most renters from even being eligible
  - The application is going to be online, which means no more physical forms and it’ll be much easier to find and use
  - Now there’s a quarterly review of the process to allow for upgrades and improvements

In an era when government too often caters to the rich and powerful, about 59% of Americans are one paycheck away from missing their rent or mortgage. That’s why these are real wins for working people, helping to meet the needs of our families and communities.

“This is awesome,” says member Jayne. “This is big. And this is why we need to join together as a team: to get it done.”

**UPDATES FROM OUR OTHER LOCAL CHAPTERS ACROSS NORTH CAROLINA!**

**Watauga and Ashe Counties**

In a very tough housing environment, poor and working class renters in Appalachia are often pushed into substandard housing that isn’t maintained by landlords. Adding insult to injury, the local government hasn’t enacted minimum housing standards to protect their citizens. Our members decided to make their government work for them and demand standards be put in place.

In Watauga, our members knocked doors and petitioned low income renters all across the county. Because of this pressure and the media attention they were able to get on the issue, they have now been will help form a special housing committee to assess what can be done. In Ashe, our members showed up repeatedly at the County Commission to demand housing standards be put on the books, and are now launching a public education campaign about renters’ rights in order to hold their government accountable to people’s needs.

Photo: In June, Ashe County had our biggest chapter meeting yet!

“Right now, all the conversation is around these polarizing topics. But when you get down to it, everyone wants safe and affordable housing. Whether you’re at the high or low end of the tax bracket. Everyone wants clean water, and everyone wants clean air. Because we all need those things. It’s not a Republican/Democrat thing. It’s an everybody thing!"

- Jon Council, Watauga County member
Johnston County
In Johnston County, housing prices are soaring and inflation is high. This has created a big crunch on local teachers, who can barely make ends meet. Some teachers take jobs in the surrounding counties for better pay. That’s why our local members have demanded that the local government be responsible to our teachers and fundschool supplies so that teachers won’t have to pay out of pocket. The pressure our members were able to create around the issue through canvassing and showing up at public meetings helped pass the highest education budget in JoCo history!

Photo: Our JoCo chapter marched at the Juneteenth Parade to celebrate and canvass.

“The campaign was a good stepping stone and gave us confidence. The money was out there, we just had to get it. A win is a win! We got the right people now. In Johnston County, we can get a lot of things done. Down Home went in with the issue, it was accepted, voted on, and approved. So people see that we’re going to make things happen in Johnston County.”

-Vertis Richardson, Johnston County member

Alamance County
Alamance members fought off the county commission from raiding the school reserve fund. The county increased teacher pay supplements, and coaches and trainers got supplements, too. Organizer Bryant Crisp says “We got increases across the board, and built out members’ skills. A lot of people have never done anything like this before. Now they’re canvassing, and speaking out.”

Photo: Member Brian Dickerson mans the grill at the Alamance campaign kickoff event.

“What kind of society do we want our kids to grow up in? What kind of opportunities do we want to give our children? When we invest in our schools and we give them safe places to learn, with adequate equipment, with safe environments, and comfortable temperatures, they can excel. And if we tell them we don’t want to fix your school because we would rather build a courthouse, that says a different message.”

-Amanda Baker-Perry, Alamance County member

Granville County
The City of Oxford neglected a beloved public park in a poor, Black neighborhood and let it go to the weeds. Our members launched a HUGE public campaign to reopen the park and, in particular, get the ball courts back up and running for local kids. There was a tremendous response from Oxford residents, and we got 645 signatures and grew our membership.

Due to our member’s tremendous organizing, the City Council responded to demands by passing larger budget for parks and have now promised a renewed park for the local community.

Photo: Granville chapter rallies after the Oxford City Council budget vote.

“We'll take the wins when we get them, even if they're not going to announce them all the time. And that's a win. But we have a little more work to do. We have to keep their feet to the fire and make sure they do what they said they're going to do. That pat on the back you gave us was nice, but we're not going away. They're not going to get rid of us, and we are going to get our park back. We've got to take what we can get right now, but we know that's not all we're going to get.”

-Jason Dunkin, Granville County member
Coming Home
AN ORGANIZING REVIVAL

Down Home members traveled to Washington, D.C. to attend People's Action's annual conference in June. There they attended workshops and training spaces to dive deeper into our work of building working class power as well as engaged in direct action against corporate healthcare, rental agencies, and big banks demanding they be responsible to our people in housing, healthcare, the climate and the drug war. “It was exciting to meet people from all over the country doing work like we do, to know we aren’t alone but part of something big and powerful,” said one member.
EVENTS THIS MONTH
Find our events and sign up here: mobilize.us/DownHomeNC

ALAMANCE COUNTY
Monthly Chapter Meeting
Saturday, Aug. 5

ASHE COUNTY
Monthly Chapter Meeting
Saturday, July 22

CABARRUS COUNTY
Monthly Chapter Meeting
Saturday, July 22

GRANVILLE COUNTY
Monthly Chapter Meeting
Wednesday, July 19

JOHNSTON COUNTY
Monthly Chapter Meeting
Thursday, July 20

WATAUGA COUNTY
Monthly Chapter Meeting
Tuesday, July 18

SCHOOLS
Public School Strong Training
Wednesday, July 12

TRAINING
Theory of Change Training
Thursday, July 20
Saturday, July 22

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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Photo: Public School Strong team in Chatham County, NC.

A rising tide against extremism: Public School Strong

When it comes to our kid’s education, most of us want the same thing: Good, well funded and inclusive schools that are set up to provide an equal and honest education. That’s why it’s no surprise to us that Public School Strong has taken off like wildfire. In just a few short months, people from over 37 North Carolina counties have been trained to fight this good fight and nearly 40 local teams have launched. You can read more about this work we are engaging with through H.E.A.L. Together NC on our blog, including our work being featured in the Washington Post!

Blue Dots Help Deep Canvass

Sue Schürer is a retiree who likes to get things done. She really got politically active after Donald Trump was elected. "We were devastated when Trump was elected," she says. Now she’s part of a group of folks in Carteret County that calls themselves the Blue Dots. These six people have been volunteering to create a positive change across the political aisles, and they’re doing it in a wealthy seaside community that regularly votes about 70% Republican.

After working for progressive issues locally, though, the Dots started getting frustrated at their lack of progress. That’s when they looked up groups to work with – and found Down Home. “When Down Home said nonpartisan, that really rang a bell,” she says. Talking with our Deep Canvass manager, Bonnie Dobson, Sue felt a kinship with Down Home’s deep canvassing because it emphasizes listening across differences.

Now the Blue Dots are volunteering with Down Home’s Deep Canvass team, working to have conversations with rural neighbors with an interest in issues like education and the environment.

"Why keep fighting? It has to start with listening," she says. "I knew that, but I didn’t know how to give it structure. And all of a sudden, it was yes yes yes! Deep canvassing is magic. I really do think it’s magic."

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Scan QR code to read full article about the Blue Dots on our blog!