



**DOWN HOME
NORTH CAROLINA**

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BUILDING A WORKING PEOPLE'S PLATFORM

Down Home members across the state are researching and writing a political platform that will work for working people!

Our chapters will be voting to ratify the platform at their March Chapter meetings so make sure you are plugged in!

★ **Get involved! Find your upcoming chapter meeting at mobilize.us/downhomenc**



SCAN ME

Read Down Home's 2023 Annual Report

THE HOLLER

MARCH 2024



Above: Down Homies Sarah Davis in her home of Watauga County, North Carolina

CALLING WATAUGA HOME ORGANIZING THROUGH THE HOUSING CRISIS IN THE HIGH COUNTRY

It didn't take long for Sarah Davis to realize something was wrong.

Sarah is a realtor in Watauga County, North Carolina where the banks of the Watauga and New Rivers are lined with river birch and black willows and where fraiser firs grow on Calloway Peak. *It's gorgeous here.*

She made her living helping local families find good homes to raise their children in. But in late 2020 and 2021, as the pandemic changed the country's economic landscape, she said her entire team sold "maybe 20 houses to actual human beings who were going to live in them." The rest were being sold to LLCs and big companies to become Airbnb and vacation homes.

As a realtor, it shouldn't have mattered to Sarah. After all, properties were selling and often selling for astronomical prices. Monetarily, It wasn't a bad time to be a realtor by any stretch of the imagination. But for Sarah, a local mom with life-long connections to these mountains and the people here, she was "disgusted at what was happening in Watauga."

Sarah lives with her grandmother in the small, unincorporated township known as Meat Camp, where most of her family remains. The family has been here since the late 1800s and she lives on family land. She has a cousin across the street and a grandparents up the road. A military child, she came home to Meat Camp every summer, playing in the hills, forests, rivers, and streams that make Watauga County so special.

It's those features- the snowy slopes in the winter, the cool rhododendron-lined trails in the summer- that have made Watauga County a vacation destination. Most local jobs are in the tourist and service industry, at the ski resorts or river rafting outfits, and at the restaurants and bars that line King Street in Boone.

These jobs pay low wages that have been far outpaced by the cost of housing. "The people that work here can't find a place to rent or buy," explains Sarah, thinking of the many families she has tried to help over the last few years. "They will search for months and months, putting in a dozen offers or more. But when an LLC is going to offer 60 grand over the listing price, no regular family can compete."

Continued next page



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The same goes for rentals. With the existing housing stock being used so heavily for vacation rentals and second homes, local renters find themselves in competition with each other for a place to stay. Landlords, especially in the county area, take advantage of the absence of minimum housing codes and rent out substandard and even dangerous housing for prices no one should have to pay.

“I didn’t know what to do,” Sarah says about what she was witnessing. “I have bills to pay and this is how I pay them... and I know this is a system problem, not mine alone. But, the human problem still exists. And it was impacting people I know.”

She felt stuck and uncertain of what to do, what could be done. That’s when she got a text on her phone. “Holy shit, phones do read your mind!” she remembers thinking.

The text was from Down Home North Carolina and was simple enough– asking if she wanted to get involved with a group of working-class people to make local change. That text offered Sarah the possibility to connect with other people who loved Watauga County and knew they could make it better. So she responded.

Sarah and other Down Home members started to knock on doors throughout the county asking a simple question: What’s on your mind? She learned quickly that she was not alone– in fact, far from it. “Overwhelmingly, the people we talked to said that the housing crisis in Watauga County was their biggest concern. The community was so clear in that collectivity, that we knew our first campaign as a chapter was going to be about housing.”

The group researched the situation and brainstormed ways they could make an impact. “The big issue is affordability, and we knew we needed a campaign to start to chip away at that,” explains Sarah. They honed in on the lack of a minimum housing standard out in the county (the town of Boone has one) as a way to start holding both the local government and landlords accountable for safe, decent housing and as a mechanism to start to address larger housing issues. Housing standards would help preserve the existing dwellings– important in a place where a lack of water and sewer infrastructure makes new construction complicated.

It was also an issue that local members had direct knowledge and experience of. While knocking on doors, they had visited mobile home parks with unsanitary, overflowing dumpsters because the property owner wasn’t paying for trash removal and they knocked on doors of rental “apartments” that were little more than sheds. Local members describe living in rentals where the latches on the front door wouldn’t close and in homes where plywood-covered long-broken windows and broken pipes were the norm.

The chapter took their research and a proposal for adopting a minimum housing code to the Watauga County Commission. “Quickly, we realized this campaign was going to be about laying down stepping stones,” explained Sarah. They knew to make their case, the poor and working-class people who were impacted by the lack of housing codes were going to need to be at the forefront of this campaign.

Read the full story about how Sarah and the other members of her local chapter fought for housing standards in Watauga County-- and the wins she captured along the way-- on our Reclaiming Rural blog here: medium.com/reclaiming-rural



Above: A mobile home park in Watauga County



GETTING THE WORD OUT ABOUT OUR PEOPLE

Our members in Granville County and Johnston County voted to endorse local members who are running for office and being primaries!

In Johnston, our members endorsed both April Lee and Sam Solmonson for school board, and in Granville our members endorsed Norma Harris Allen for County Commission.

They spent much of February knocking on doors, sharing information, and making sure their neighbors know there is an election going on!

Check out this video from our Johnston County chapter to see what canvassing is all about!

★ Get involved!

Our members make our endorsements and will, next month, be voting on our platform. Want to get involved? Contact your local organizer.



SCAN ME

"Everybody needs to put their hand on this plough"



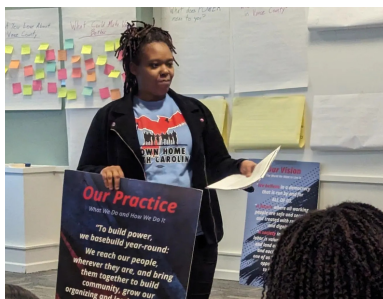
Above: Members in Pitt County gathered to launch their new chapter

"In Pitt County," explained another participant, "We have one percent that controls everything from jobs to housing... everything. That's why we need to shift the power."

In rural Vance County, members expressed similar sentiments at their chapter launch. Gathered in a large circle in the community room at the Henderson library, residents from all over the county check in with each other. Some were from Henderson, others from Kitrell and Middleburg.

"We need to build multiracial power because these issues impact all of us," said a mom while balancing her toddler on her knee. Participants talked about the lack of activities for children and families in the county, as businesses such as the local roller rink have closed and parks are few and far between.

The Pitt and Vance County chapters join the growing Down Home statewide network focused on rural power. Now that the members have launched official chapters, they will be able to vote on local issue campaigns to run (which both chapters will be doing in March) and make endorsements in local and statewide elections.



Above: Members led the launch in Vance

Members launch our latest chapters in Pitt and Vance Counties

In Pitt County, Down Homies gathered together at Parker's BBQ in Greenville to celebrate the launch of their new chapter. Over plates of hushpuppies and slaw, our members discussed what they believe "building power" with poor and working folks would look like in the county.

"Power would have everyone represented," said a grandmother who had brought her pre-teen grandson to the meeting. She talked about how some areas of the county are overlooked, while the people in power come from a concentration of wealthy families and business owners.

"Power is self-determination. The ability to determine our own livelihoods," said a young man who had come with his friends, commenting on the heavy policing of Black communities and the lack of opportunities in the county.



Top: Pitt County folks gathered at Parker's BBQ to celebrate
Bottom: Member in Vance County after launching their chapter

★ Get involved! Live in Vance or Pitt? Reach out to us!

Vance County: Contact Nick at Nick@downhomenc.org

Pitt County: Contact Carlose at Carlos@downhomenc.org

WHEN WE SAY CO-GOVERNANCE, WHAT DO WE MEAN?

"Get out the vote!" That's our rallying cry across rural North Carolina. Our members will be busy this year helping register small-town voters, knocking on doors, and making sure that our neighbors know how and where to cast their ballots.

While an important tool, voting isn't the end all be all of our work. We want to build power with poor and working-class folks all across North Carolina. That's why at Down Home, we aim to make sure that the people we help elect work for us. We call this "co-governance." Down Home members organize together to hold government accountable to our needs. Read more on our blog to see the three ways you can be involved in "co-gov" at Down Home.



WE WON IT. NOW, LETS GO GET IT.

MEDICAID EXPANSION ROLLS OUT IN NC

That's what happened last year when a decade-long fight for Medicaid expansion was won here in North Carolina. It was working folks like you who secured that win through relentless organizing. We grabbed "politics" away from big business and the wealthy few and made it ours. And now our communities are seeing the results in our day-to-day lives.

Medicaid expansion went into effect on December 1st, opening up access to health coverage for the 600,000 North Carolinians. "These are people who were in the Medicaid gap up until now," explains Kate Daley, Down Home's Health Justice Campaigner, "meaning that they were not able to afford health insurance, but their income was still too high to receive Medicaid." Since December, over 350,000 of those people have now signed up for Medicaid expansion and have coverage.

That's over 350,000 people who can go to the doctor today who, two short months ago, didn't have that choice. That's a real working-class win.

Medicaid expansion is not only having this very real impact on those 350,000 people- it's also helping our rural communities. For years, our small towns have been losing health care providers and hospitals have even been closing due to the General Assembly's refusal to expand Medicaid. Now that so many more people have coverage in our small towns, healthcare providers can keep their doors open.

The next hurdle is to make sure people know how to enroll and get the health coverage they qualify for and need. Down Home is hosting education and enrollment events across the state to help spread the word and get people the help they need. Some rural counties, such as Edgecombe and Robeson-where 12% and 13% of adults in the county have enrolled - are making strong efforts to make sure this resource is available to local families. Other counties, like Watauga and Granville, lag behind with less than 4% of the population with the information they need to get the coverage they qualify for.

We find ourselves asking: What will it take to get the word out in these places? How can we hold our elected leaders accountable to this?

Expanding Medicaid is a huge win, but it's not and never was our end goal. We strategically used Medicaid as a foundation off which we can build. We won Medicaid expansion against all odds- proving to those in power and to ourselves that we are a real force to be reckoned with.

We now know what we can do, and our Health Justice Working group is working to identify more places and spaces in which we can flex our kind of "politics"- the politics that help everyday people in real ways.

We've heard from people in rural communities across the state about the challenges that affect them when it comes to health care, and there are several issues that seem to be felt across the board," says Kate Daley.



Above: Granville County members discuss how Medicaid expansion is... and isn't... reaching the communities in their county that could benefit the most from the measure.

"Women's reproductive health care is extremely limited in rural areas, and many counties do not have an OB GYN office or a labor and delivery unit. And the political attacks on abortion access in NC are felt hardest in the rural areas of the state. Lack of specialists and even primary care providers who can accept Medicaid is an example of a discrepancy that affects rural communities in our state, that can be addressed at the local level through the creation of provider incentive programs and public/private partnerships."

Down Home members have started a statewide Health Justice working group to address these issues through research and advocacy, and through local member-campaigns that will continue to center the needs and voices of our people.

★**Get involved:** Care about the health of your family and community? Join our Health Justice Working group by contacting kate@downhomenc.org



Do you receive Medicaid?
Is it working for you?
What would you change?
Let us know with our survey.



LOCAL MATTERS MOST



BUILDING CAMPAIGNS IN OUR HOMETOWNS

More than 120 people representing over 20 North Carolina counties traveled from the mountains and the coast gathered for the Campaigns Bootcamp- coordinated by Down Home North Carolina, Siembra North Carolina, Carolina Federation and the Heal Together NC coalition, including Creed NC and the Education Justice Alliance. Together, we walked through how everyday folks who deeply care about their hometowns- parents, service workers, grandparents, farmers, school employees-can build local campaigns to get their local governments to address pressing issues such as housing, education funding, transportation, etc.

To win big wins, we need to start locally. Local is what our folks know best- they are the experts in what their communities need, so that's where we begin.

Clockwise: Folks from small towns all across the state gathered at the bootcamp; Chatham County residents present an idea to bring interpretation to local board meetings; Ashe County members discuss the problems with transportation in their rural community; Alamance chapter members talk about ways they can protect public schools in their county.



DEFENDING PUBLIC EDUCATION IN ORANGE COUNTY

The local Public School Strong team in Orange County has been out knocking on doors after Public School Strong Voters endorsed their first-ever candidates!

"My kids are in these schools, my neighbors kids are, too. I want a school board that will fight as hard for our kids as we will," said one participant in a recent canvass in Orange County.

★Get involved: Want to join your local Public School Strong team?

Come out to our next training on Monday March 25th at 7 PM (don't worry- its online!).



SCAN ME



Left: Getting ready to knock doors in Orange County **Right:** Our team has been out all over the state talking about schools, housing, and all kinds of local issues-- including in Nash County around Rocky Mount

MARCH 2024 EVENTS

All event details: mobilize.us/downhomenc

Alamance Chapter Meeting
Tuesday, Mar 28, 6:00 PM @ Alamance Office

Ashe Chapter Meeting
Tuesday, March 12, 6 PM @ Ashe Office

Cabarrus Chapter Meeting
Thursday, March 28, 6 PM @ Cabarrus Office

Granville Chapter Meeting
Wednesday, March 27, 6 PM @ Granville Office

Johnston Chapter Meeting
Thursday, March 28 6:30 PM @JOCO Office

Nash County Power Building Workshop
March 7, 6 PM @Rocky Mount

Person Chapter Meeting
Monday, March 25, 6 PM @Person Senior Center

Medicaid Education and Enrollment Event!
Saturday, March 16, 1 PM
@ 851 Howell St, Greenville, NC

Pitt County Chapter Meeting
Tuesday, March 26, 6 PM

Vance Chapter Meeting
Sunday, March 10, 1:30 PM
@ Perry Memorial Library in Henderson, NC

Watauga Chapter Meeting
Tuesday, March 12, 6:30 PM @ Watauga Office

Medicaid Information Event
Saturday, March 2, 1 PM @ Watauga Office

Public School Strong Training
Monday, March 25, 7 PM (online)

Heal Together NC Statewide Call
Thursday, March 28, 7 PM

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, opinion pieces about your campaigns and your community-- whatever you think is a good fit!

Gwen Frisbie-Fulton, gwen@downhomenc.org
(336) 253-4649

GUIDED BY OUR FAITH



Down Home is working with our partners, members, and faith leaders across the state to build an inspiring vision for the North Carolina we want and deserve.

Whether we are Jewish, Christian, Muslim, agnostic, or however we are led, we are pushing back against extremism and using our faith to ground us as we navigate a political landscape where religion is being used as a wedge.

Check out the video above to hear from NC faith leaders discuss the political moment we find ourselves in.

Does your faith matter to you? Do you want to be a part of a multi-faith, multiracial coalition making meaning this election year? Contact Rev Brinson at cj@downhomenc.org and fill out the interest form!

★ **Get involved!** Join our next multifaith coalition call! on March 7th at 6:30 PM (online). Everyone is welcome!



T H E F I N A L W O R D



Whoowhee. This guy. Always talking. Extremist Mark Robinson is running for Governor in North Carolina and he does NOT represent us!

Mark Robinson has mocked and bullied teenage survivors of gun violence, has called LGBTQIA+ North Carolinians "filth," and denegrates women regularly. Moreover, he has been clear that he not only holds these views, but wants to enact laws around them that would impact regular working-class North Carolinians like us.

Mark Robinson is too extreme for our people and our state!

Get daily DHNC updates at:

@downhome_nc @downhomenc @downhomenc