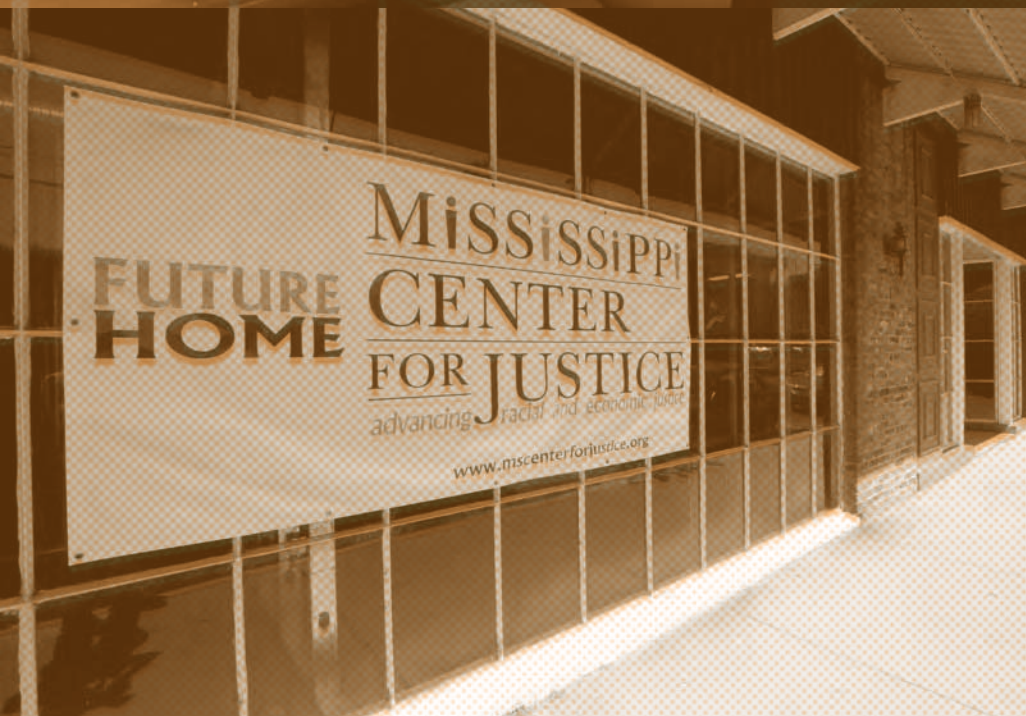




Advancing racial and economic justice in the Mississippi Delta





Imagine Mississippi

...where children, elderly and people with disabilities living in poverty have healthcare coverage to meet their basic needs.

...where all residents recovering from a disaster receive prompt, fair and adequate help in rebuilding their lives.

...where state policies promote equitable and affordable housing for all communities, regardless of race or socioeconomic status.

...where predatory financing is outlawed and low-income residents have access to fairly-priced financial services.

...where all children receive a quality education, benefit from a safe, constructive discipline system and stay in school to graduate.

...where neighborhood residents work with developers, contractors, business owners and landlords to create vibrant, mixed-income communities for everyone.

...where all citizens have equal access to our justice system to resolve their legal problems.

...where lawyers and other advocates make a sustained commitment to advancing racial and economic justice statewide.

...where poverty has been eradicated.

Imagine Mississippi... the social justice state.



Located in northwest Mississippi, the Mississippi Delta, with the largest concentration of African Americans in the country – nearly 60 percent of the population – stands out from the rest of the state: more racial disparity, more poverty, fewer opportunities for high-quality education and worse health outcomes. In the Delta, white, middle-class students go to costly private schools. African-American children go to public schools. The public schools are under-resourced and failing. The economy, once reliant on agriculture, created wealth for white landowners but did nothing to build financial security for African American sharecroppers and tenant farmers who worked the land. That wealth gap continues to drive segregation in the school systems, access to financial services and access to quality healthcare. While there is an evident, persistent achievement gap to be overcome in the Mississippi Delta, there is hope. This is a region with a long history of political activism and leadership, delivering such civil rights pioneers as Fannie Lou Hamer and Aaron Henry. Rich in musical culture and reliant on an entrepreneurial spirit built out of necessity to survive, the people of the Mississippi Delta are committed to fighting for a future that bridges economic and educational gaps. The Mississippi Center for Justice is proud to be working alongside them. Following many months of planning and advance work, the Center achieved its long-term goal of establishing a meaningful presence in the Mississippi Delta, the region of the state most challenged by its long history and continuing legacy of racial and economic injustice. In October 2011, the Center opened an office in the Delta city of Indianola, county seat of Sunflower County, where staff members focus their efforts on education and health advocacy. With two attorneys, one community organizer and a growing group of interns, community partners and *pro bono* support based in Indianola, the Center is determined to bring about systemic change in a region plagued by generational poverty and discrimination.



Access to Affordable Healthcare

Mississippi has the dubious distinction of having the lowest average life expectancy in the nation. There are many causes of low longevity, and Mississippi has them all: poor healthcare, high rates of controllable disease, low levels of education, ingrained poverty, embedded racism.

The situation in the Mississippi Delta is dire. Some 35 percent of the Delta's population lives in poverty, making it the poorest region in the country. The Delta leads the nation in infant mortality, teen pregnancy, health disparities, heterosexually acquired HIV/AIDS and more. Rates of hypertension, diabetes, stroke and asthma are among the country's highest.

Mississippi also has one of the highest HIV infection rates in the country, and a gross racial health disparity among those who have contracted HIV. African Americans, who make up 37.5 percent of the state's population, represent 78 percent of new HIV infections. Within the state, the Delta is among the hardest hit regions, with nearly 18 out of 100,000 people infected with the HIV virus. Yet, until Marni von Wilpert, a Skadden fellow and staff attorney with the Center, launched her work, there were no organized, free legal services available to Mississippians with HIV/AIDS in the Delta. As von Wilpert says, "You have HIV, racism, homophobia and fear. And that's the perfect storm that creates such a huge civil rights issue."

Marni von Wilpert and Anthony Kyser, combatting discrimination faced by people living with HIV/AIDS.

Living with HIV/AIDS: The Story of Anthony Kyser

Anthony Kyser knows what it is like to live with HIV. A 35-year-old African American living in Greenville, he has been HIV positive for 15 years and has seen it all when it comes to stigma, housing and employment discrimination, threats to personal safety and lack of access to the quality care you must have if you are HIV-positive and want to stay healthy.

Kyser devotes his life to outreach and education about the HIV/AIDS virus, with a focus on prevention, testing and access to services. "After I got diagnosed," he explained, "I became an expert and I read up and did my own research. I know my rights." He currently serves on the board of the nonprofit organization called Community Impact, which works to alleviate racial disparities in care, particularly around the HIV virus.

People like Kyser who are HIV-positive face a multitude of obstacles when it comes to getting support and healthcare. ➤

Do You Know

► The challenges reflect the lack of state and local resources and low levels of education that are so prevalent in Mississippi. For example:

Breach of Confidentiality: The Mississippi Delta is a large, rural region, peppered with numerous small towns. Typically, everybody knows everybody's business. This small-town characteristic can bring closeness in a crisis, but that does not happen with HIV/AIDS. Some HIV patients are reluctant even to go to their own family doctors.

In Kyser's case, an emergency room doctor revealed his HIV status to his sister without his permission. This was a violation of his rights, said Kyser, who was not ready for his sister to know. "People need to understand that confidentiality is confidentiality," he said. When Kyser's sister found out his status, he said, "She called everybody. She thought I was dying."

Lack of Accurate Information: Much of the stigma around HIV in the Delta comes from a lack of knowledge about the disease, a significant problem that has improved more across the country than in Mississippi. As Kyser says, Mississippians think you can catch AIDS by touching someone who has it. Or, he added, "They think if you have HIV, you're gay, no question about it," pointing out that this is not at all true.

Unprotected Sexual Activity: Kyser worries about both heterosexual and gay teens in his community. They are often sexually active and have unprotected sex. The schools do not teach safe sex. The churches don't even discuss it. Kyser estimates that about 80 percent of teens do not know their status. He knows teenage girls who want to get tested, but their parents will not allow it. "These kids are spreading amongst themselves and don't even know it," he said.

Lack of Support from the Church: In the South, people turn to family and church for support in time of need. But if you have HIV, many churches will turn you away. "If, as African Americans, we can't get support from home, we're at least supposed to get it from the church," said Kyser. "But you can't even get it from a church down here." Too many pastors have the attitude that people with HIV are being punished for having sex or being gay.

"These kids have nowhere to live. And they can't talk about their HIV. That spells D – E – A – T – H."

Get Tested!

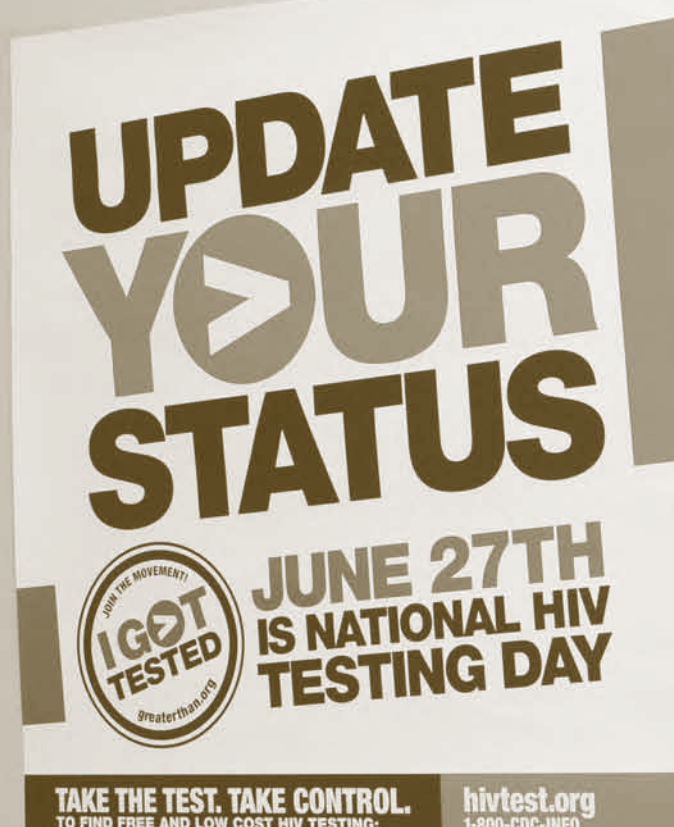
Housing Discrimination: If you are open about your status in the Delta, it is often hard to find housing. A federal program called Housing Opportunities for People with AIDS (HOPWA) offers rental assistance, which Kyser's landlord accepts, but many others do not, because they do not want HIV-positive people in their units. "People literally have nowhere to go. They're out on the streets. That's how bad it is," Kyser said. Kyser gets calls in the middle of the night from young people who have been put out of their homes by their parents. "It's bad enough that we don't have enough health services," he said, "but just think about it. These kids have nowhere to live. And they can't talk about their HIV. That spells D – E – A – T – H."

Access to Healthcare and Medication: Anyone who has an HIV diagnosis needs quality healthcare. But it is a challenge in a region where few have their own health insurance plans and most struggle through the eligibility issues of Medicaid, Medicare and Social Security. Even when they get coverage, dental care or eye care is rarely included. Some doctors in the Delta do not treat HIV-positive patients at all.

Getting the right medicines is another hurdle. Kyser's HIV medication is covered by insurance, but medication for his other problems, such as seizures and visits to his neurologist, are not. Even where people get their medication can be an issue in small towns where the pharmacist knows everyone.

Facing such intractable problems, is it any wonder that HIV-positive Mississippians in the Delta simply hide their status, sometimes even from themselves? This response compromises their health, as well as the health of their sexual partners. And it misses a huge opportunity to educate the community and dispel the many myths about HIV/AIDS that feed much of the stigma surrounding it.

There are a few resources available to help, even in this resource-starved region. But people do not take advantage of them, as Kyser said, "because they're so stuck in their shell and don't want anybody to know." For his part, Kyser, without prying or being direct, tells those he counsels that "I'm the guy who can help you, cause I know my resources." He is a determined voice of support. "I'm not gonna stop until somebody hears me, point blank, period," he said.



Linda Stringfellow, educating the community with facts about HIV/AIDS.

Fighting Tradition and Mindset: The Story of Linda Stringfellow

Tackling an issue as complex as HIV/AIDS in the Mississippi Delta takes a lot of commitment, creativity and stamina. Linda Stringfellow, Director of AmeriCorps/VISTA, has all three. She has been working for years as an advocate and organizer to help people in the Delta understand the disease and support those who have the virus. She is determined to help people in the Delta "pull our heads out of the sand," as she put it.

Stringfellow began as a community HIV/AIDS advocate and now trains others. She and those she works with spread the message that people with the virus can survive, that HIV is not a death sentence. She counters the host of myths surrounding HIV/AIDS, all the while educating the community about the importance of knowing their status. "You have to be willing to be tested," she noted. "It is better to know than not to know."

Stringfellow learned that if you want to talk about sex, you cannot do it in the schools, despite the fact that teenagers are sexually active and eager for knowledge about safe sex. She gives her workshops taglines such as Crayons to Careers and includes information about anatomy, sexuality and HIV. "This generation is almost fearless," she said of today's teens, which is good in some ways, in that they are willing to be tested. "But they do reckless things when it comes to sex." With adults, she does workshops called Chocolate Love, pointing

out that "adults, too, want to know about having better sex. And the tagline sells that, but when they get in, they're also going to learn about safe sex and HIV prevention."

Stringfellow has a list of target audiences to work with, including barber-shops and beauty salons, college students, churches, the elderly and medical professionals.

Stringfellow collaborates with the Center on outreach and legal education, working hand-in-hand with attorney Marni von Wilpert. "Everybody saw stars," Stringfellow said, when the Center came to town to help educate the medical community about their legal obligations and counsel those who have HIV/AIDS about their legal rights. "A lot of businesses, agencies and staff are not aware of things they're doing that are illegal," she said. "Some of them are not trying to be illegal, but it's out of tradition and ignorance."

Stringfellow wants more people to know that the Center is here to help. If those with HIV/AIDS knew they had "somebody out there fighting for them," she said, it would make a huge impact. "It would help people breathe better."

Stringfellow is an optimist at heart. "We know it's a lot of work, and we know we're fighting a lot of tradition," she said. "But it can be done. What's the saying, 'How do you chop down a tree that's been there for 300 years? One root at a time.'"

A Medical Student Joins the Team: The Story of Nathan Sison

Since its inception, the Mississippi Center for Justice has welcomed *pro bono* support from attorneys in the state and across the country. The Center has also hosted a cadre of law students who spend their holidays and summer vacations working with the Center. With its focused access to healthcare work in the Mississippi Delta, the Center proudly added a medical student to those ranks.

Nathan Sison is a second year medical student at Brown University in Providence, Rhode Island. He is a Mississippi native, but he's from the Gulf Coast, far from the geography and culture of the Delta. Sison read about the Center's intention to develop Mississippi's first medical-legal partnership in an article on Salon.com. He then called the Center's own Marni von Wilpert, and simply said: "Hi, I'm a medical student and I'm coming to work with you."

Sison arrived in June 2012, with an assignment to interview doctors and other medical personnel in the Delta about HIV/AIDS. "I'm going around to primary care providers, including doctors, nurse practitioners and physicians' assistants," he said. "I'm talking to them about their attitudes about HIV and AIDS in general, and their testing practices."

Sison understands that patients are sometimes reluctant to ask for a test themselves. Some are "embarrassed" even for their own doctor to know, he said. Most patients go to Jackson to the Mississippi State Department of Health to get tested and for treatment. If they are HIV-positive and linked to care at home, follow-up becomes a real challenge, as does compliance with drug regimens. "It's a cultural, systemic problem," Sison said, one that goes back decades. That's why Sison likes the Center's approach of attacking it from all directions: community organizing, the law, education and medicine.

At first, getting into doctors' offices to do his interviews was challenging. "It's hard to be trusted," he said, especially since

he's not from the Delta. Once he gets in, however, and begins talking, it's fine. "The doctors care about their patients," he said. And doctors want more information, particularly about testing. They want the state to tell them whether they should do routine testing. And they want rapid tests. Sison explained that most doctors in the Delta still used the older blood test, not the rapid test that does not involve needles and gives a very quick result.

Sison is not doing a formal research study. As he said, "The Delta has been poked and prodded and tested and data-collected for years and there's a large distrust of people who come in and say, 'Oh, I want to do a study,'" and then leave. That's why Sison is gathering qualitative information from his interviews to help the Center with its effort to launch a medical-legal partnership. "We don't want numbers," he said. "We want thoughts. We want ideas. We want trends. We want things we can translate into action and interventions that will help."

Sison returned to medical school in August. But the ideas he gathered and trends he noted will be filtered into the Center's work as it progresses. Sison will no doubt tell others of his work in the Delta, possibly recruiting new medical volunteers and certainly spreading the word about efforts to control an epidemic that is devastating this region.



Nathan Sison, medical student and volunteer committed to better healthcare.

"We want things we can translate into action and interventions that will help."

In Search of Affordable Health Insurance: The Story of Doc Jones

In the 1990s, Willie 'Doc' Jones made an annual salary of about \$50,000. He was a truck driver in Indianola for a network of retail grocery stores. As he put it, he was paying "a whole lotta taxes," but he also had benefits, including health insurance, paid vacation and a retirement plan.

In 2003, that all changed. His employer decided to go with private contract drivers and Doc would have to have his own truck, which he did not have. "At that point, the insurance was gone," he said. He looked into buying his own health insurance plan, but it would cost him \$400 a month, with a \$2,000 deductible. That was not affordable. "If I have a major problem," he explained recently, "I reckon I'd put my house and the store up just to pay my medical bills."

Doc, now 53, runs a combination trophy store and Christian bookstore in downtown Indianola. He has high blood pressure and diabetes. When he goes to the doctor, he pays out of his own pocket...before he is even allowed into the examination room. As a result, he said, "I don't go as much as I should."

Many of Doc's friends and family are also without health insurance, even those with jobs. Farm workers, for example, make minimum wage and the farms don't provide insurance. "The workers are just on their own," he said.

Doc knows the value of insurance. He had it once and would like to have it again. He does not understand the opposition to the federal Affordable Care Act. "What kind of people wouldn't want people to have insurance? Insurance is something very important."

The Center agrees that health insurance is "something very important," especially in Mississippi. That's one of the reasons they came to the Delta and opened their doors to legal action and community organizing around access to healthcare. It's also why they are working in coalition with others across the state to ensure that the Affordable Care Act, including the healthcare exchange and Medicaid expansion, are fully implemented in Mississippi.



Willie "Doc" Jones, small business owner who supports the Affordable Care Act.



The Right to Educational Opportunities

The economic future of a state rests on the quality of the education of its citizens. No wonder many in Mississippi are concerned. Mississippi is consistently at or near the bottom of all national rankings on test scores, graduation rates and educational expenditure. Mississippi Center for Justice is trying to change this for future generations.

While the challenges are daunting, the Center is on the ground learning more about the need for equitable funding, fair discipline systems and statewide policy that will help shape the Center's role in creating a brighter future for Mississippi's kids.

Many tough issues face the state's school systems, including the lack of a fair discipline system that treats students with disabilities with dignity and provides the individual support to which they are entitled under federal and state law. The Center's initiatives are teaching parents and students about their rights to appropriate testing, the development of individual education plans and access to special education services. The Center is also working with community partners who have established relationships with schools, churches and other organizations throughout the Delta, as well as *pro bono* attorneys across the state who share the Center's belief that access to a quality education is a priority if we are to change the course of life for Mississippi's kids.

"Having access to the Center and to Kim meant the world to me."

Supporting Children with Disabilities: The Story of Tre Farmer

Sometimes a child's disability, or medication taken for a disability, interferes with the capacity to learn and causes "discipline" issues that teachers do not understand or know how to handle. Suspending or expelling a child because of a disability is a federal violation. The Center is working to ensure that all children with disabilities get the education they are entitled to.

Tre Farmer is one of those students.

Tre, now 13 years old, attends school in Grenada. Tre is an honor roll student who likes school and enjoys playing basketball. He suffers from bipolar disorder. Tre was diagnosed with the condition, his medical records were shared with the school, but the school refused to acknowledge his special needs.

In 2011, Tre missed almost three weeks of school due to suspensions for "behavioral" issues. After several suspensions, he was ultimately expelled for arguing with a teacher. When his father, a retired law enforcement official, learned about this, he was outraged, but wasn't sure what could be done.

Mr. Farmer knew a youth court counselor, who referred him to the Mississippi Center for Justice's managing attorney and education director, Kimberly Merchant. She told Mr. Farmer that the school could not simply suspend Tre, that they were required to meet with Mr. Farmer and hold a hearing to determine whether or not Tre's behavior was related to his disability.

"I don't mind Tre being disciplined when he needs it, but I don't want him to be abused," Mr. Farmer said. "I wasn't going to let him miss a year of school, but I could not afford an attorney. Having access to the Center and to Kim meant the world to me."

Thanks to the Center's intervention, Tre was allowed back in school. He takes medication regularly to help control his disability. He continues to make good grades, and is trying out for the basketball team.

Mr. Farmer is also being more proactive. Before the 2012 school year began, he met individually with each of Tre's teachers. He says the seemed more aware of how to work with him, and he is optimistic about Tre's future.

Tre is not alone. Approximately 11 percent of Mississippi school children suffer from a disability, creating a challenge for teachers and administrators who lack an understanding about the link between a disability and a child's behavior. As Merchant pointed out, "teachers need training" about how to recognize disabilities and work with children who have special needs. By law, school districts are required to provide modifications and accommodations for students with such disabilities, but a lack of resources in the Delta and other school systems across Mississippi means these needs are often not met or addressed.

As a result, children with problems are all too often seen and treated as "bad kids," when addressing behavioral and medical problems is the key to success for both the student and the school.

The Center is committed to ensuring that school systems comply with these laws. It is the first step in helping to make the dream of a good education a reality for Mississippi's school children.



Mr. Farmer, father of a special needs child who now knows his rights.

Working with Parent Advocates: The Story of Betty Petty

Parents have every right to be angry about the state of the schools in the Delta. The schools are failing. The Indianola, Sunflower County and Drew school districts, for example, are all under conservatorship, taken over by the state because of consistent failure.

As a community-focused legal organization, the Center knows it takes more than a legal approach to address educational inequity in Mississippi. That's why their mission includes educating parents about their rights and local leaders about the importance of support for public schools. In the Delta, the Center works closely with parent advocates such as Betty Petty, executive director of the Sunflower County Parents and Students Organization. A community organizer at this post for 17 years, Petty helps parents find their role in building successful and excellent schools.

If parents do not know how to talk to school personnel about their child's education, for example, Petty takes them by the hand and shows them. She explains to them: " You may not know what to ask for, but come on, I'm going to be a model for you. I'm going to show you how it's done."

In the past, Petty said, it was "extremely hard to get attorneys to come in and help or fight on behalf of parents and students. So many are afraid to challenge the system." But challenging dysfunctional systems is in the DNA of the Mississippi Center for Justice, and the Center and Petty are working hand-in-hand to support the Delta's children.

A key component of their work together is listening. Petty explained, "You have to listen, not only with your ears, but with your heart, to what the community and parents are saying they really need. Our children's voices also need to be heard. Who is the better person to tell you what is happening with them in school than the child?" She added: "The children have been crying for a long time and no one has heard their cry." Students know when their education is not working.

Petty and the Center also share a big-picture approach to community change: "This is not just a school issue," Petty said. "This is a parent/student/the churches/the community and the school concern. And if all of us are concerned about who is in the center—our children—there's no way that our children will not succeed."

Betty Petty, community organizer
who is passionate about quality education.

Support from Pro Bono Attorneys

On the legal side, the Center works with one child, one family at a time, sending a message to the schools and the community about compliance, about parents' and students' rights to a quality education. This is a first for the Delta and just the presence of an attorney at a school meeting can help balance the educational power structure, which until now has been overwhelmingly on the side of the administrators.

But there is no quick solution to serious problems. To extend their own resources, the Center is building a team of *pro bono* attorneys across the state: local lawyers who will advocate for students and parents who need help. The Center is asking attorneys to take up to two cases a year to help parents challenge school districts in support of their children. The Center hopes that this individual representation will help school districts take notice that complying with federal law is not optional. The Center will demand that administrators and teachers provide resources that are appropriate and available under the law.

There is a bottom line here. As Merchant says, "Every child deserves the right to go to a quality school, to be taught by a quality teacher, to have quality supplies and attend a quality facility. And that's why this is a civil rights issue." That's also why the Center is holding school systems accountable for providing a quality education to all children.

Kimberly Merchant, leading the Center's education advocacy campaign.



**Meigan Thompson, organizing
Delta communities for better access to healthcare.**

Organizing for Educational Opportunities and Access to Healthcare: The Story of Students Involved in Community Change

Sixteen-year-old Sabrina Knowles lives in Alligator, Mississippi, a small Delta town near Shelby, where she goes to high school. She wants to be a lawyer, but she knows her high school is not preparing her for college, much less law school. That's why she joined a group called Students Involved in Community Change, SICC for short, which was started by students in 2010.

As they say on their Facebook page (where they had 385 friends and counting in mid 2012), they are "students organizing for an excellent education." Their emphasis is on the "excellent," although they know their school system has a long way to go.

Knowles needs extra help in reading, a skill she must master to get to college. But mastery of reading or most anything else is elusive in most of the Mississippi Delta public schools, where a good education is still held hostage to poverty and embedded racism. She cites a teacher who separated the classroom according to grades: A and B students on one side of the room, Cs and Ds on the other. "He taught to the As and Bs the whole time," Knowles said. At the time, she was one of the struggling kids on the C and D side of the room. "It made me feel like I wasn't going to be anything," she said.

Knowles is quick to point out now that "I proved him wrong." She worked hard and is succeeding, thanks in part to the tutoring she gets at SICC. "I think SICC teaches us more than school does," adds Korderick Davis, 17.

At SICC, the students have a mission. They want their schools to be so good that parents and teachers alike will enroll their own kids with enthusiasm. As high school sophomore Andre Ross, 16, said: "We wanted people to come to our school and be like, 'I like this place. My child can come here.'"

SICC students get together every afternoon. Some are enticed to come because there is a recording studio, which is particularly appealing to aspiring rappers. But the teens also read books and articles and discuss what they read every day. They talk about issues of importance to their community, conversations they do not have at school. They also do community service, including cleaning up the neighborhood and volunteering at the local nursing home or food pantry.

"In a lot of communities, people talk but don't do anything," says Davis. "When you talk about it and go out and do it, it gives people more respect for you and for their town. They can say, 'I'm proud of where I come from.'"

Learning about the Affordable Care Act. At first glance, the federal

Affordable Care Act might not seem an ideal starter conversation for high school teens in Shelby. But SICC students are conducting a healthcare survey in their community and meeting weekly with Meigan Thompson, the community organizer in the Center's Delta office. The survey teaches them about health insurance, what it is, who has it, who does not and why. They also learn about the benefits of the Affordable Care Act.

Through the surveys, the teens learned that some adults in Shelby get insurance through their jobs, but approximately 60 percent of the adults in their community are unemployed and have public health insurance or none at all. As Davis put it, "We learned about the financial expenses and trouble you'd probably have to go through if you got injured and had to go to a hospital. That stuff is not cheap." Knowles added, "If you don't have insurance or Medicaid, it's very hard to pay for the things you have to pay for. You really need it."

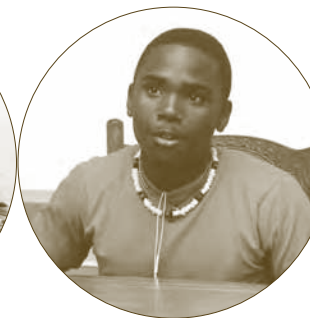
Jonathan Calvin is program director of the education foundation that houses SICC. He appreciates that the survey "keeps the kids current with what's going on," which is one of his goals for the students. As they do their interviews, the students also learn about the value of education. They learn, as Kore explained, that "the level of education you have will probably affect what kind of healthcare you have." They also learned that people without a high school degree are most likely to be unemployed.

Calvin added that the conversation about who has – and does not have – health insurance also leads to conversations about class issues. "With Meigan, the students discuss things like 'What is poverty? How does education get you out of poverty? Why is a majority of this town on public insurance?'" He explained: "We want our kids to reach for more knowledge. Our goal for them is college. Kids who don't go to college can't get a good job or are unemployed."

At the end of each day, Calvin makes sure the students discuss what they did and learned that day. "We call it the three Ds: dinner, debriefing and doing. We want it to end with some kind of action." Action is what the Mississippi Center for Justice is all about, too.



Sabrina Knowles



Andre Ross



Jonathan Calvin
Co-Program Director
Students Involved in Creating Change



Korderick Davis

Beyond the Mississippi Delta

Beyond the Mississippi Delta, the Center's work addresses a variety of issues, including educational opportunity, financial security, access to healthcare, affordable housing, disaster recovery and community development.

- The Center worked to ensure that the Mississippi Development Authority fairly treated more than 17,000 applicants for hurricane housing repair assistance newly available under the terms of the Center's 2010 landmark settlement with the State of Mississippi and the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. The Center helped improve the eligibility rules regarding duplication of benefits and insurance and streamline the process for proving land ownership. The Center provided direct services to many of the 4,500 eligible households, including assistance with proof of income, intake issues and clearing title. The Center also encouraged HUD to review MDA's processes and accelerate the speed of program implementation. The Center expects that well over \$130 million in assistance will flow to mostly low-income and African American families who were excluded in previous phases of the recovery.
- The Center provided extensive and ongoing legal support to a coalition of community organizations united in securing economic and environmental justice from Mississippi's proposed investment of \$600 million in the expansion of the State Port at Gulfport. The Center brokered an agreement with former Governor Haley Barbour to bring this coalition into a four-month-long discussion with business and political leaders to explore solutions to the port expansion and related transportation corridors. This work has continued into 2012 with new Governor Phil Bryant. Supported by the Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law, the Center offered frequent public presentations and educational sessions about environmental justice, community benefits

agreements and other topics. The Center also provided organizational and operational advice to the participants in the coalition.

- The Center's *Pro Bono* Foreclosure Prevention Initiative continued to provide legal assistance to keep Mississippians in their homes. In 2011, one Equal Justice Works AmeriCorps Legal Fellow ended her fellowship and another fellow took up her work. Each fellow worked with *pro bono* attorneys and a network of housing counselors to help homeowners find affordable solutions and to ensure their loans were properly serviced. In 2011, the Center represented 251 Mississippians facing foreclosure, advising them at every stage of the foreclosure process and working with mortgage servicers to correct servicing errors, renegotiate loans or help with a graceful exit of the home. The Center provided legal assistance to an additional 165 homeowners in counsel and advice sessions. The Center has provided education and representation to prevent and address scam artists targeting homeowners threatened by foreclosure. The Center also worked with the National Consumer Law Center to train *pro bono* attorneys and produce brochures about foreclosure and mortgage-related topics.
- During the 2011 Mississippi legislative session, when the payday industry sought renewal of its authorizing legislation, the Mississippi Check Cashers Act, the Center's campaign to combat the abuses of payday lending focused intensely on policy advocacy. The Center and its broad coalition of allies, including the Mississippians for Fair Lending Coalition and a new faith-based coalition, sought to defeat the industry's well-funded effort and came within just five votes of killing

the authorizing bill in the House of Representatives. After the session, the Center sought to capitalize on the heightened awareness created by its effective media campaign and the momentum of the coalition work. They developed a plan to make fair lending alternatives more widely available through partnerships with employers and mainstream financial institutions.

- The Center continues advocating for improved access to Medicaid and is working to ensure full and timely implementation of the Affordable Care Act in Mississippi. By distributing its brochure, "A Parent's Guide to Applying for Mississippi Health Care Benefits," the Center is helping Mississippians better understand the Medicaid and CHIP application process.
- Capitalizing on the continued enthusiasm of law students, thousands of whom descended on the Gulf Coast after Hurricane Katrina, the Center operated its Biloxi and Jackson offices as hands-on learning laboratories for dozens of law students, who spent their winter, spring and summer breaks volunteering in both offices. The Center's law school and law student partnerships have become an institutionalized feature of its delivery system, including in the new Indianola office.
- Soon after the BP Deepwater Horizon oil rig exploded in the Gulf of Mexico in April 2010, the Center convened legal aid providers across the Gulf states to mount a campaign to meet legal needs of the oil disaster's



most vulnerable victims. In December 2010, the Center negotiated an agreement with Ken Feinberg's Gulf Coast Claims Facility to provide legal assistance in the claims process, and in 2011 implemented a delivery system involving 12 legal services organizations in the five Gulf states. By the end of 2011, 16 full-time equivalent lawyers had provided counsel and advice to some 6,000 oil disaster victims, opening case files and providing extended claims representation to more than 4,000 of these claimants. In 2012, the coalition's work was recognized by the American Bar Association Section of Litigation with its prestigious John Minor Wisdom Public Service and Professionalism Award. The work continues under a new agreement with the federal court that oversees the settlement claims process.

- Nichols School, located in Biloxi, is a longstanding source of community pride and cohesiveness. The school earned a national Blue Ribbon award from the U.S. Department of Education for high achievement. Following Hurricane Katrina, Nichols was rebuilt as a state-of-the-art facility, but was closed by the school board in April 2010, with no notice to parents or the community. On behalf of parents, community members and educators who joined forces as the Save Our Schools Coalition, the Center filed the first phase of a legal challenge to the closing, and after winning a key ruling, spearheaded negotiations with the school district that ultimately stalled. The Center is preparing to file the second phase of the litigation challenging the school board's decision.

"....the Center represented 251 Mississippians facing foreclosure, advising them at every stage...."

Social Justice Campaign Partners

We offer our deepest thanks to the many community organizations and advocacy groups who collaborate with us to strengthen our campaigns to advance racial and economic justice throughout Mississippi. We value every hour of support from each volunteer attorney, student and staff member at the law firms, corporate legal departments, law schools, colleges and universities who partner with us. Progress would not be possible without you.

State and Regional Partners

AARP Mississippi
ACLU of Mississippi
Activists with a Purpose
Advocates for Environmental Human Rights
Alabama Appleseed Center for Law and Justice
Back Bay Mission
BancorpSouth
BankPlus
Better Choices for Mississippi
Brown & Associates, Inc.
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Children’s Defense Fund, Southern Regional Office
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Coalition for a Prosperous Mississippi
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Coastal Women for Change
Community Builders’ Leadership Initiative
Community Foundation of Greater Jackson
CredAbility
Disability Rights Mississippi
Downtown Jackson Partners
Episcopal Diocese of Mississippi
First Pentecostal Church, Jackson
Florida Bar Foundation
Florida Legal Services
Greater New Orleans Fair Housing Center
Gulf Coast Community Design Studio
Gulf Coast Fair Housing Center
Gulf Coast Interfaith Task Force
Gulf Coast Renaissance Corporation
Gulf Regional Planning Commission
Gulf Restoration Network
Habitat for Humanity – Metro Jackson
Hancock Housing Resource Center
Hinds County Human Resources Agency
Hope Community Development Agency
Hope Enterprise Corporation

HMIS United to End Homelessness
Institute of Southern Jewish Life
Jackson Medical Mall Foundation
Jackson Public Schools
Nollie Jenkins Family Center
Kingdom Community Development Corp.
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Mississippi Center for Nonprofits
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Mississippi Commission for Volunteer Service
Mississippi Communities for Public Education Reform
Mississippi Consumer Protection Division, Office of the Attorney General
Mississippi Credit Union Association
Mississippi Economic Policy Center

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Mississippi Home Corporation
Mississippi Housing Partnership
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Mississippi Immigrants’ Rights Alliance
Mississippi Low-Income Child Care Initiative
Mississippi Parent Training and Information Center
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Mississippi Volunteer Lawyers Project
Mississippi Youth Justice Project
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NAACP, Gulfport Branch
NAACP, Mississippi State Conference
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Southern Echo
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Sunflower County Parents and Students Organization
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West Tennessee Legal Services
William Winter Institute for Racial Reconciliation
Women’s Fund of Mississippi
Word and Worship Church

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Financial Support

Each contribution to the Mississippi Center for Justice is put to immediate use in support of our home-grown capacity to provide legal support for the advancement of racial and economic justice. We are immensely grateful for the generous support of foundations, institutional contractors, law firms, corporations and individual donors who make our work possible. Listed below are 2011 donors of \$250 and more.

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statements of Activities

for the years ended December 31, 2011 and 2010

	2011	2010
Support and Revenues		
Contributions.....	\$ 724,178	606,261
In-kind Contributions.....	933,295	1,656,174
Grants	3,965,108	1,497,200
Interest and Dividends	2,375	260
Miscellaneous	37,886	3,379
Contract Services	94,447	104,707
Total Support and Revenues	5,757,289	3,867,981
Expenses		
Program Services	3,221,805	3,646,401
Management and General.....	122,920	330,432
Fundraising	246,195	200,980
Total Expenses	3,590,920	4,177,813
Increase (Decrease) in Net Assets	2,166,369	(309,832)
Net Assets at Beginning of Year	1,052,711	1,362,543
Net Assets at End of Year	\$ 3,219,080	1,052,711

This page provides a condensed version of the Center's financial statements as presented by management for the fiscal year ended December 31, 2011. Our financial statements have been audited by Matthews Cutrer & Lindsay P.A., an independent public accounting firm. Their complete report of audited financial statements with accompanying footnotes is available upon request from the Center's offices.

statements of Financial Position

At December 31, 2011 and 2010

	2011	2010
ASSETS		
Current Assets		
Cash.....	\$ 2,192,356	118,361
Receivables	1,090,108	1,210,654
Prepaid Expenses	17,443	6,595
	3,299,907	1,335,610
Property and Equipment, net	118,290	38,991
Other Assets		
Deposits	9,100	7,760
	3,427,297	1,382,361
LIABILITIES AND NET ASSETS		
Current Liabilities		
Accounts Payable	22,334	148,060
Accrued Expenses.....	84,161	82,675
Payroll Liabilities.....	1,722	98,915
	108,217	329,650
Long Term Liabilities		
Notes Payable	100,000	
Net Assets		
Unrestricted	129,148	(294,914)
Temporarily Restricted	3,089,932	1,347,625
	3,219,080	1,052,711
	\$ 3,427,297	1,382,361

about the Mississippi Center for Justice

The mission of the Mississippi Center for Justice is to advance racial and economic justice. The Center carries out its mission through a community lawyering approach that combines legal services with policy advocacy, community education and media advocacy. The Center's campaigns are creating better futures for low-wealth Mississippians and communities of color in the areas of educational opportunity, financial security, access to healthcare, affordable housing and community development.

The Center capitalizes on the time and talent of volunteer attorneys, law students and professionals from other public and private sectors. To find out more about the Center's work, including volunteer opportunities and how to donate in support of our work, visit www.mscenterforjustice.org and follow us on Facebook and Twitter.

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As of September 10, 2012

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Jackson Office

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Courtney Choi, Staff Attorney

Phylcia Cotten, Accountant

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Jeremy Eisler, Senior Education Staff Attorney

Charisse Gordon, Staff Attorney, Oil Recovery

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Allytra Perryman, Community Organizer, Education

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We express our deep gratitude to Joanne Edgar, writer, and Suzi Altman, photographer, for their contributions to the development of this report.



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YOU MUST FIRST LEARN TO
LOVE YOURSELF!

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