

THE

FRONTLINES of HOPE





Back row: Jeremy Eisler, Norman Rosenberg, Seth Shannon, John Jopling, Paheadra Robinson, Reilly Morse, Janerick Holmes, Monica Galloway, Sid Scott, Charles Lee, Jacqueline Smith, Matt Williams, Sandra Williams, Alfonso Franklin, Allytra Perryman, Stephen Teague Front row: Melanie Williams, Yumekia Jones, Kimberly Merchant, Denise Antoine, Jessica Catchings, Beth Orlansky, Tanya Talley-Chorba, Whitney Barkley, Bridgett Kellum, LaShay Melton, Courtney Choi, Bonnie Allen, Charisse C. Gordon, Carmelita Scott, Martha Bergmark, Linda Dixon Rigsby
Not pictured: Lauren Welford Childers, Philycia Cotten, Soad Mana, Kyra McDonald, Theodora Rowan, and Olger C. Twyner, III

MISSISSIPPI CENTER FOR JUSTICE

Advancing Racial and Economic Justice

IMAGINE MISSISSIPPI

- where every low-income person has health care coverage to meet his or her basic needs.
- 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 all residents recovering from a disaster receive prompt, fair, and adequate help in rebuilding their lives.
- 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.

Introduction

The Mississippi Center for Justice enters its second decade having won many hard fought battles on behalf of racial and economic justice. In the past ten years, the Center has preserved Medicaid benefits for 65,000 elderly and disabled residents in poverty, compelled the State to more equitably spend federal disaster housing funds, and launched innovative partnerships to combat payday lending and discrimination against persons with HIV. Every step of the way, the Center has been guided by an abiding commitment to ensure fair treatment and non-discrimination for all Mississippians.

Despite these advances, enormous challenges lie ahead. Poverty and discrimination remain deeply entrenched in Mississippi. The problems are systemic and must be confronted with a coherent strategy. The Center's mission is to meet those challenges forcefully and stand up for those in need.

While Mississippi continues to be at the bottom of most positive social indicators, **OUR GOAL WHEN THE CENTER WAS FOUNDED IN 2003 IS STILL OUR GOAL TODAY—TO SEE MISSISSIPPI BECOME A MODEL OF EXCELLENCE IN SOCIAL JUSTICE.** Some would see this as a daunting task, but we understand it to be both an exciting opportunity and an obligation.

Over the next decade, we are poised to take new ground in education, housing, health care access and consumer protection. The Center's community lawyering model continues to bind us in coalition with other individuals and organizations working toward the betterment of the state. Our policy advocacy has created partnerships and coalitions, as well. Of course, the Center actively litigates cases, but we are something more than a civil rights law firm—we promote community programs that combat social injustice at a structural level. We are part of the community, working within it as citizens and neighbors.

Through building coalitions and partnerships, creating programs that directly address urgent needs, and engaging in political advocacy and litigation, the Center has a multi-pronged strategy that works for justice on every level. Our team of attorneys and other professionals is implementing this comprehensive strategy to target some of Mississippi's most intractable problems. In this report, the Center will focus on our work in education, fair housing, health care access, and collaboratives, but we also have ongoing campaigns in consumer protection, affordable housing, and disaster response.

THE NEEDS ARE DIRE. BUT THE RESOLVE OF THE MISSISSIPPI CENTER FOR JUSTICE IS UNYIELDING.

For more information, please go to mscenterforjustice.org/our-work.

The Center's Summer Jobs Program brought new hope and opportunity to young men of color in Sunflower County. At the end of the season, a celebration was in order.



Community change and betterment take community involvement—one relationship at a time. Consequently, we put our work where our values are.





(l-r) Delta office managing attorney Kimberly Merchant, education staff attorney Jacqueline Smith, and community advocate Betty Petty.



LOW-INCOME FAMILIES CONTEND WITH VASTLY UNDERFUNDED, SECOND-CLASS SCHOOLS, MEANING THE PEOPLE WHO WOULD EXPERIENCE THE GREATEST UPWARD MOBILITY FROM A STRONG EDUCATION ARE LEFT WITHOUT ONE.

Education

DESPITE OUR STATE'S EXTRAORDINARY LITERARY HERITAGE, MISSISSIPPI HAS HISTORICALLY LAGGED BEHIND THE REST OF THE NATION WHEN IT COMES TO EDUCATION. While legally mandated school segregation is no longer permitted, Mississippi's public education system continues to be divided along racial and economic lines. Low-income families contend with vastly underfunded, second-class schools, so that the people who would experience the greatest upward mobility from a strong education are left without one.

Particularly in the Mississippi Delta, the weight of generational poverty threatens to crush educational attainment by students and a nurturing home environment by their parents. The combination is devastating, and the results are predictable. To make matters worse, too many schools fail to provide guidance or support to their students but instead weigh them down with arbitrary and improper discipline.

The injustices in school discipline in which the Center intervenes are varied and complex. In some cases, a child's behavior is evidence of a disability and should trigger legal protections instead of punishment for violating rules of conduct. In other cases, the school's punishment is discriminatory or disproportional. In still others, a school infraction is improperly escalated into a criminal offense. It is hard to imagine a system that could be more destructive to students' lives given the already difficult nature of their circumstances.

This leads to a vicious downward spiral where children and teenagers are saddled with school suspensions and expulsions, which leads educators to treat them with suspicion, which in turn leads to a greater possibility of being suspended, expelled or arrested. And once this cycle begins, children and teenagers become isolated and have little hope, and all too often the end result is a lifetime spent in and out of the criminal justice system.

It is tragic that this is happening to so many young people. It is also exceedingly costly. Instead of these students becoming productive citizens, they become a financial drain on a poor state's already strained resources.

THE MISSISSIPPI CENTER FOR JUSTICE IS PUTTING A STOP TO THIS, STARTING ONE CHILD AT A TIME.

The Center's integrated approach to social justice is proving to be a highly effective remedy to these and other educational woes. Kimberly Merchant, managing attorney for the Center's Indianola office, oversees a skillful response to educational problems that includes coalition building, litigation and the creation of programs that provide students with mentorship and a path for success.

To restore justice in school discipline, the Center's education team is using its legal experience to keep kids in school, secure access to programs, and disrupt the school-to-jail pipeline. In the Delta, Merchant and Jacqueline Smith, both of whom served as assistant district attorneys, bring compelling courtroom experience into this arena. On the Gulf Coast, Jeremy Eisler, former director of litigation at South Mississippi Legal Services, draws from over thirty years' experience in poverty law to take on the Center's toughest litigation challenges.

How serious is this problem? To cite one example, a first grade boy came to school with a pink plastic water pistol and was expelled for bringing a weapon. The boy's mother, distraught and intimidated, called the Center desperate for guidance. The help came quickly. Merchant immediately contacted the school to protest the expulsion and accompanied the boy and his mother to the school board meeting where the case was being reviewed.

"I think the only reason the board reversed the decision was because I was there," Merchant explains. "These are the exact kinds of cases we are looking for, so we can establish precedent and stop the incredible harm being done to our young people by treating them as criminals." ▶

"WHEN THERE IS NO DUE PROCESS FOR THESE AT RISK STUDENTS, THEY GROW UP WITH CYNICAL EXPECTATIONS ABOUT HOW THEY WILL BE TREATED BY OUR SYSTEMS."

—Reilly Morse, President, Mississippi Center for Justice

► When a first grader is expelled for bringing a pink plastic water pistol to class, the damage is far more long lasting than losing a year of education. The student is given the impression that the education system is rigged against him. Distrust takes root and the student becomes wary of the school system, and of other symbols of authority. Such a case may seem sensational, but unfortunately it is indicative of a widespread problem the Center is determined to eradicate.

Jacqueline Smith is vigorously engaged in ending this blight. "I had an eleven-year-old boy with a medical condition that led to behavioral issues at school. His mother had repeatedly tried to get help from the school," she explains. "There were delays in getting him the accommodations and modifications he needed. In the meantime, he was getting into trouble at school."

The boy eventually walked out of a room and bumped into the adult who was supervising him. When she asked him to come back, he did not. Unacceptable behavior, to be sure, and a firm reminder that the boy needs medical help. But the response to this situation, like the response to the pink plastic water pistol, was far out of proportion to what occurred.

The police were called in, and the boy was arrested and charged with assault. Smith points out that once a student has been arrested, the judge will frequently impose a yearlong probation period. If the student gets into any trouble at school (including being tardy or absent), he breaks the terms of his probation and ends up back in court. One does not need to be a child psychologist to know that the odds of a student going for a year without getting into some kind of trouble are low.

"It benefits society to keep kids out of jail and in school, but I am not there to cover for a child when that child is wrong," Smith states.

"I AM THERE TO SEE JUSTICE IS DONE."

Another young man saw his prospects go from certain school suspension to a college education thanks to intervention by the Center. In 2012, Jacori was a 16-year-old 11th grader. He had never been in trouble at school. One day a student handed Jacori a wadded up paper towel that contained narcotics as Jacori was heading to the bathroom. When Jacori opened the paper towel in the bathroom and saw drugs were inside, he went back to class and gave it back to the student. The teacher saw this and both students were expelled, even though the other student admitted that Jacori was innocent.

Jacori's mother contacted the Center. The Center's education team took the case and got the expulsion reversed. Today, Jacori is a freshman in college.

Reilly Morse, President of the Center, sees the discipline pattern as one of those systemic root problems that have festered for too long and have had terrible consequences.

"The message to these young people is this: You can't trust your teachers. You can't trust the police, the judges, anyone involved in the system," he contends. "When there is no due process for these at risk students, they grow up with cynical expectations about how they will be treated by our systems. We have witnessed the bitter outcomes that stem from this all across the country."

Seeing that justice is done is what the Mississippi Center for Justice is all about. But our integrated, holistic approach means attacking problems at the source. Toward that end, the Center has established several programs that are having a significant impact. ►

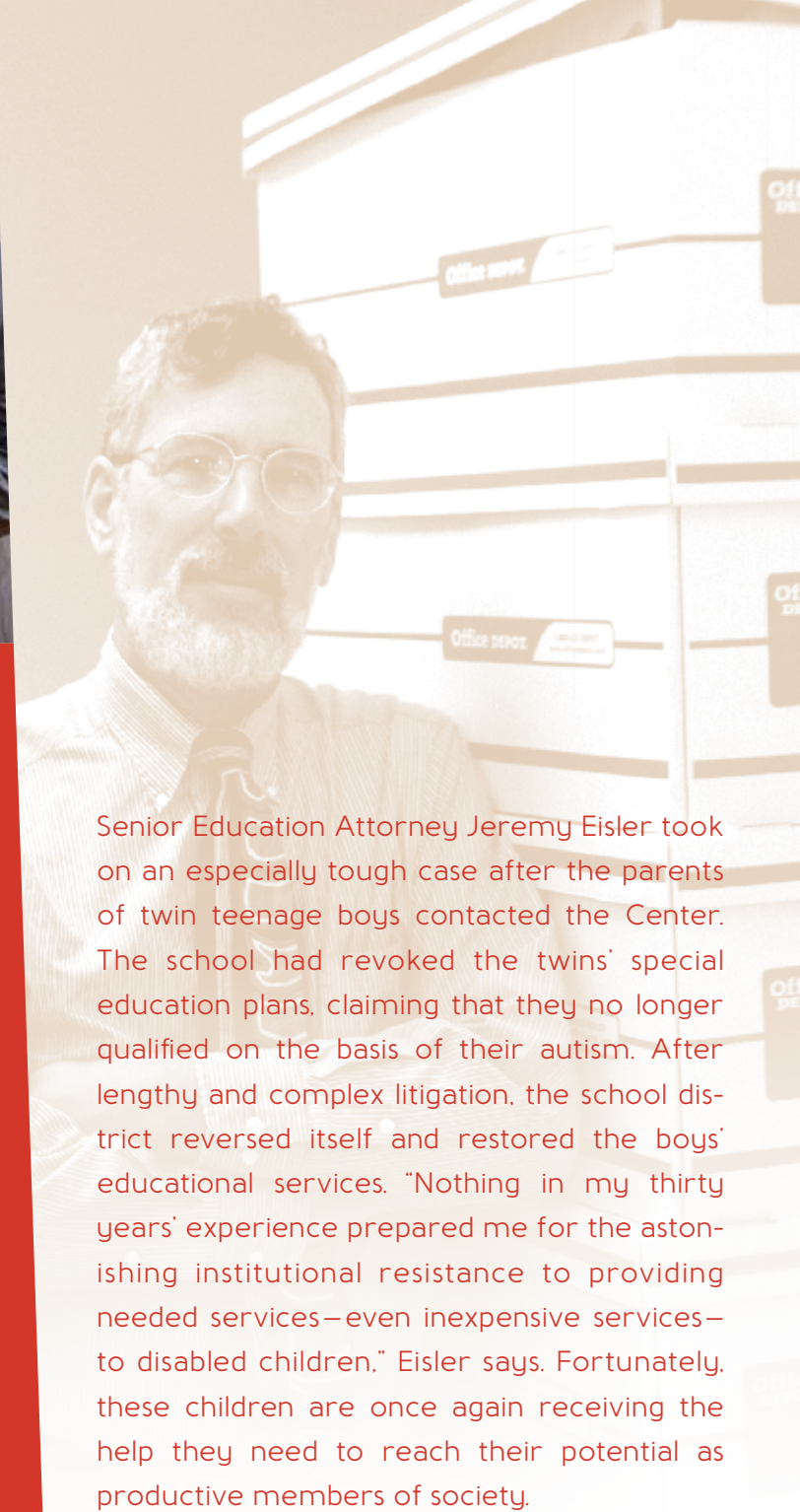
**BUT OUR
INTEGRATED,
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▲ Mississippi Center for Justice president Reilly Morse works with a dedicated staff to advance the frontlines of hope and to reimagine Mississippi for the betterment of all.

◆ Education Staff attorney Jacqueline Smith uses her experience as a prosecutor to advocate for Mississippi students in school discipline cases, giving them the voice they deserve.



Senior Education Attorney Jeremy Eisler took on an especially tough case after the parents of twin teenage boys contacted the Center. The school had revoked the twins' special education plans, claiming that they no longer qualified on the basis of their autism. After lengthy and complex litigation, the school district reversed itself and restored the boys' educational services. "Nothing in my thirty years' experience prepared me for the astonishing institutional resistance to providing needed services—even inexpensive services—to disabled children," Eisler says. Fortunately, these children are once again receiving the help they need to reach their potential as productive members of society.

YOUTH IN TRANSITION INCLUDES A CRITICALLY IMPORTANT MENTORING PROGRAM THAT IS



► One such program is Youth In Transition, which not only keeps students out of the criminal justice system, but also provides a clear path for success, as well as guidance for staying on that path. As Merchant explains: "We didn't want to abandon these troubled students. We wanted to provide strong support for them after the case is over."

A natural complement to the White House initiative, My Brother's Keeper, Youth In Transition includes a critically important mentoring program that is changing lives. Alfonso D. Franklin serves as project manager and mentor. His connection with the young men is profound. He gets to know their families and furthers his relationships with the school district and teachers, as well as counselors and principals.

He is a regular presence in the lives of the young men he mentors. He goes to school a minimum of twice a week to make sure there is mutual understanding between at risk students and teachers and principals. He meets once a week with the students he mentors. Franklin holds a masters degree in history and was a researcher for the forthcoming Mississippi Civil Rights Museum, so on Saturdays when he spends time with his mentees, they often go on field trips and learn about their heritage.

The program is in the second of its three years, and one highlight will be a documentary film that Franklin and the young men he mentors will produce about their journey as they deal with barriers that are unique to young men of color. The effort spurs creativity and fosters accountability, as the young men realize their decisions and actions are part of the record of their lives. It places in them the desire to craft a meaningful narrative.

The difference that Youth In Transition is making is profound, and as its capacity increases in the future, the Center will be in a position to make lasting change.

Another serious issue the Center has identified is simply that student conduct handbooks vary greatly throughout Mississippi, and in some cases, the handbooks lay down rules that are onerous and even unconstitutional. "You cannot deny students due process in the name of controlling behavior. Again, this is where young people lose their respect for the law," Morse points out. In response, the Center has examined the student handbooks in every school district and is preparing to release a thorough report to the decision makers and citizens of Mississippi, revealing unconstitutional rules in the handbooks as well as restrictions that are simply wrong-headed. The Center will advocate for the state

to pass a law requiring a uniform code in all student handbooks. Ever proactive, the Center will present the legislature with a model discipline due process policy when it has been produced.

This past summer, the Summer Jobs Program sought to do something more than keep teenagers out of trouble by arranging employment for them. The idea was for their summer to be an occasion for real advancement, returning them to school even more prepared to succeed. There were 150 applicants for 50 available jobs in 2014. Merchant said the proportion of applicants to jobs alone makes it clear that young people are eager to work hard to advance and make lives for themselves.

THE SUMMER JOBS PROGRAM

worked with Youth In Transition to keep at-risk teens on the right track, but it was open to all young men of color in Sunflower County. Each student who participated in the program was paid ten dollars an hour. They were required to open a savings account and encouraged to save at least two hundred dollars by the end of the summer. They were also given financial literacy training. However much participants saved, the Center provided matching money as an incentive.

"THEY REALLY GOT IT," SAYS MERCHANT. "THEY FELT EMPOWERED, SOME OF THEM FOR THE FIRST TIME IN THEIR LIVES. WE'VE HAD PARTICIPANTS WHO SAVED UP ENOUGH MONEY TO BUY CARS."

One young man who majors in journalism at the University of Mississippi was going to work at a fast food restaurant for the summer until he applied to the Summer Jobs Program and was instead given a job at the local newspaper, the *Enterprise-Tocsin*. He went from burgers to bylines, thanks to the Summer Jobs Program. Though launched as a one-time effort funded by a national foundation, the tremendous success of the program inspires the Center to find ways to resume this initiative in the summer of 2015.

The Center's work to reverse the injurious effects of generations of poverty and discrimination demands a vigorous and comprehensive approach to the many problems at work in education. With its combined strategy of community lawyering, coalition building, partnerships and programs, the Center is making an impact and is prepared to make an even much bigger one that will benefit all Mississippians.



Fair Housing

PRESIDENT LYNDON JOHNSON SIGNED THE FAIR HOUSING ACT (FHA) INTO LAW AS PART OF THE 1968 CIVIL RIGHTS ACT. FORTY-SIX YEARS LATER, THERE HAS NEVER BEEN A STATE AGENCY IN MISSISSIPPI TO ENFORCE THE FHA, nor a state law prohibiting discrimination. The implication is clear—state government does not seem to think the Fair Housing Act is important.

The Mississippi Center for Justice sees things differently and we're doing something about it. Aside from continuing to pressure lawmakers to establish a monitoring agency, the Center has organized to provide relief now.

For John Jopling, managing attorney for the Center's office in Biloxi and housing law director, the reason for the Fair Housing Campaign is simple: "We've been getting calls about discrimination. People did not know where to go. The work was not being done. Someone had to do it."

Jopling stresses that **THE CENTER'S FAIR HOUSING CAMPAIGN** is about more than enforcement of the Fair Housing Act. The Center is also pushing for affordable housing and for renter's rights.

The Fair Housing Campaign received funding in 2012 to get the work started. "Even to get a HUD grant you have to have knowledge and partnerships. We have both. Now we have the money to initiate a Fair Housing enforcement program," Jopling explains.

Enforcement is a sophisticated operation. To locate abuse, the Center relies on referrals from partners. The Center also targets areas where there is reason to believe discrimination takes place. Violations of the Fair Housing Act include more than obvious cases where a landlord or manager discriminates based on race. Sales, marketing and advertising techniques can be tools of discrimination. An advertisement that stipulates "No Children" violates the FHA, for example. The Center has already witnessed gross acts of racial steering in sales.

Charles Lee serves as staff attorney in the Jackson office and works with Jopling on the Fair Housing Campaign. A Mississippi Gulf Coast native, Lee co-founded the Gulf Coast Fair Housing Action Center in 2003. In 2012, he joined the Mississippi Center for Justice. He is well versed in the process of rooting out and stopping housing discrimination.

"Our testers have found a lot of discrimination. Once we discover it, we file a complaint with HUD. We file against the management company, owners of the building, people who show the apartment, though ultimately the responsibility is the owner's."

In one case a white male was shown an apartment and all of the complex's facilities. A few minutes after he left, a black male, who was similar in background and economic status to the white male's, was refused a viewing of the apartment, handed a brochure and told that he would have to make an appointment and that there was no one available to show him an apartment or the facilities.

Other cases involve disability issues. The Fair Housing Act requires reasonable accommodation to afford a person with a disability equal opportunity to use a dwelling, and the Center investigates housing where that standard has not been met. Property owners or managers who violate the FHA will refuse to grant a person with disability assigned parking, or deny that a first-floor apartment is available when in fact one is available. Then there is the issue of mobility and whether the design of the apartment squares with Fair Housing Act standards. "You find a lot of design and access flaws," Jopling says. "What we want to do is to make it unrewarding to discriminate. With the state refusing to set up an enforcement agency, violators of the Fair Housing Act have felt free to discriminate. We are going to change that."



Staff attorney Charles Lee helps keep the Fair Housing campaign focused and on task.

THE CENTER IS ALSO PUSHING FOR AFFORDABLE HOUSING AND FOR RENTER'S RIGHTS.

Cynthia Gomez, a Filipino-American, came to the Center after her landlord discriminated against her on the basis of gender and national origin. MCJ assisted her in filing a fair housing complaint with HUD. Once the complaint was filed, the landlord twice attempted to evict her. After three court appearances, the evictions were dismissed. Ms. Gomez is still in her apartment and MCJ has amended her complaint to add a charge of retaliation. "This is a case of egregious landlord misconduct," Jopling says. "Given the fact that Mississippi is among the very few states in the nation without a fair housing enforcement agency, it becomes critical for MCJ to provide both the local presence and the fair housing expertise to protect tenant rights like hers, which too often are trampled upon in justice court."



"WHAT WE WANT TO DO IS TO MAKE IT UNREWARDING TO DISCRIMINATE."

—John Jopling, Biloxi office managing attorney, Mississippi Center for Justice



"WE ARE TALKING ABOUT HOUSEKEEPERS," RIGSBY SAYS. "WE ARE TALKING ABOUT THE PEOPLE WHO WAIT TABLES. WHO TAKE CARE OF OUR CHILDREN. THEY ARE HARD-WORKING MISSISSIPPIANS. DON'T THEY DESERVE OUR HELP?"

—Linda Dixon Rigsby, *Health Law director, Mississippi Center for Justice*



THE VIDEO WENT VIRAL AND THE WHITE HOUSE TWEETED IT OUT TO THOUSANDS OF FOLLOWERS. NOW THE STUDENTS ARE WORKING ON ANOTHER SONG CONCERNING MEDICAID EXPANSION.

(youtube.com/watch?v=hDyR_TtyAzY)

◀ Health Law director Linda Dixon Rigsby works with HIV/AIDS patients, making sure they are aware of their rights under the law.

Health Law

Mississippi continues to rank at or near the bottom of every positive national ranking of health and health care, yet state leaders make baffling choices that keep the poorest and most vulnerable from getting health care coverage. About 300,000 Mississippians without health insurance could have been covered at no cost to the state if it had expanded Medicaid coverage last year.

It did not, and now 138,000 of those residents are left in limbo without affordable health care coverage options. They fall into the coverage gap because they don't qualify for Medicaid and make too little to qualify for the health insurance marketplace exchange. Given that the state's diabetes and hypertension rates are approaching crisis levels, the refusal to extend health coverage puts the uninsured at risk of not getting preventive care and puts the taxpayers at risk of bearing far larger costs of emergency room visits when these conditions go untreated.

To make matters worse, as hospitals confront reduced funding for uninsured care, they must cut costs through layoffs and reductions of services. It is bad, and costly, for all Mississippians.

Linda Dixon Rigsby, the Center's health law director since 2008, made this argument last January when the legislature was in session, and we anticipate a robust fight next year. But another component of the Center's advocacy is to educate Mississippians about what is at stake.

"That is an important part of getting the legislature to close the coverage gap. We are focusing on teaching people about the Affordable Care Act (ACA) and the expansion of Medicaid," Rigsby states. "We've developed our own curriculum and are teaching high school and college age students about the issue. We identify leaders who go back into their community and share what they've learned."

Given the policy environment in the state legislature, this grassroots effort is a key step in the Center's overall advocacy strategy. The Center has also joined the **COVER MISSISSIPPI COALITION** to maximize outreach.

"When you come together and form a coalition, it is powerful and people take notice," Rigsby says. "Community organization requires creativity and thinking outside of the box."

A good example of out-of-the-box thinking involves a video produced by high school students in Shelby, Mississippi, after they had received training by the Center's community organizer. Rigsby points out, "We taught the students about access and why it was critically important to implement the ACA. They got excited and wrote a song and made a video out of it."

The video went viral, and the White House tweeted it out to thousands of followers. Now the students are working on another song concerning Medicaid expansion.

Whether engaging in skillful advocacy with legislators, or grassroots organizing and education, the Center is not going to lose this one. The stakes are too high.

"We are talking about housekeepers," Rigsby says. "We are talking about the people who wait tables. Who take care of our children. They are hard-working Mississippians. Don't they deserve our help?"

The second pressing item on the health care agenda is ensuring that those with HIV/AIDS are not discriminated against. Mississippi has the seventh highest rate of HIV infection in the country. To help the state deal with this reality, the Center has developed the first medical-legal partnership in the state with the University of Mississippi Medical Center, the Mississippi State Department of Health and the Jackson Medical Mall Foundation to combat this problem.

Staff Attorney Courtney Choi, in her role with the medical-legal partnership, works to prevent and remedy employment and housing discrimination. Choi says, "There are federal laws to protect against discrimination, but they must be enforced. We help educate people about the laws so they make informed decisions about their lives."

The Center's hard work has been noticed in Washington, D.C. Rigsby was invited to lead a White House panel on achieving impact at the local level and White House officials came to Mississippi to learn how Mississippi is contending with these issues.

Obie Snow lives in Holly Springs and was employed at a factory until an accidental fall at home injured his spine. A retired member of the Army Reserves, Mr. Snow is mired in paperwork as he awaits treatment from the area VA hospital—treatment he may not even get because his injury was not service related. Now unable to work and uninsured, Mr. Snow and his wife would only become eligible for Medicaid if Mississippi expanded coverage under the ACA. "Folks like us need MCJ to speak for us on Medicaid expansion because no one in government is going to pay attention to us," Mr. Snow says.

Collaboratives

"BUT WE ARE OPTIMISTIC. WE WORK NOT FOR HOPE, BUT *FROM* HOPE."

—Melanie Powell, Sunflower County United For Children director

BY CONNECTING WITH OTHER ORGANIZATIONS AND INDIVIDUALS, OUR IMPACT IS INCREASED AND OUR CONNECTION WITH THE COMMUNITY GROWS DEEPER.

Through our community collaboratives a rich and neighborly social network is established, leading to trust and mutual understanding, both of which are essential when working together for lasting change. We currently have two collaboratives underway in the disparate communities of East Biloxi and Sunflower County.

Historically an important part of America's immigration story, the East Biloxi peninsula has welcomed new Americans for generations. Through this peninsula, immigrants have found their way to East Biloxi for more than a century. On the positive side, immigrants have found work and been offered the promise of assimilating into American society. On the negative side, genuine opportunity to assimilate often never materializes, and immigrants are the first and hardest hit during economic downturns. Without a voice in politics and with little knowledge of the political and economic system, they have been marginalized.

The Center is proud to support East Biloxi's wonderfully diverse community, which today includes Vietnamese, Latino, and African Americans. After Hurricane Katrina, we undertook and prevailed in a multi-year campaign to reverse Mississippi's decision to divert hundreds of millions of federal housing dollars to the State Port at Gulfport before meeting the needs the area's poorest and most needy residents. Now, with the job market tightening, those same residents are again left to fend for themselves. There is important work to be done here.

Running the East Biloxi Community Collaborative (EBCC) for the Center is Carmelita J. Scott, a native of Biloxi. The collaborative is twenty organizations strong, allowing the Center to have a thoroughgoing impact on East Biloxi. Generations of racism, language barriers, and economic disadvantage have created a community that is alienated from political participation and financial management. Consequently, they have little say in many of the decisions that affect their lives and prospects. After a detailed needs assessment was conducted, the collaborative prioritized

the education of residents concerning civic engagement, education, economic security, health care and neighborhood viability.

The statistics are disheartening. One out of four residents earns less than fifteen thousand dollars a year. Six out of ten are single-parent households. More than a third of residents receive temporary food support. There are 6,300 residents in this community. The Center is committed to seeing that they have a stake in the American dream. Part of accomplishing this goal means civic advocacy and litigation, both of which the Center actively provides. But a remedy that leads to long-term change means empowering community members with knowledge.

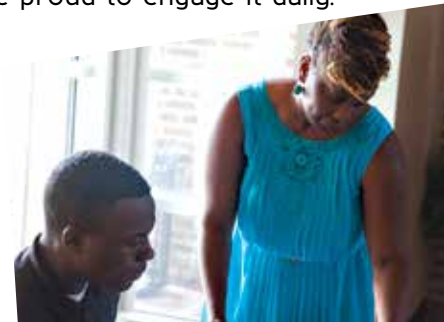
"I'm from here and locals trust each other," Scott says. "But we have to be working with each other day in and day out. We can't just host an event once in a while. We have to remind residents and inspire them. My dream is that East Biloxians will want to remain and return to this community that they love so much."

In Sunflower County, the challenges are also plentiful. The county school district remains in flux, having undergone conservatorship and consolidation. This, combined with a history of calcified racial and economic disparity, presents a challenge unlike any other the Center has engaged. Sunflower County United for Children (SCUC) is staking out the territory of inclusiveness in the community, under the belief that together we can make a difference. Directed by Melanie Powell, SCUC rejects the paradigm of "us" and "them," choosing instead to view the entire county as a community of citizens with a common investment. SCUC has partnered with advocates, nonprofits and community leaders in a collaborative effort to create equitable opportunities and to improve systems in Sunflower County. "If you look at it in terms of equity, we are not on the same playing field," Powell says. "But we are optimistic. We work not for hope, but *from* hope."

Supported by a national foundation, EBCC and SCUC address issues of literacy, civic responsibility and financial management. The programs expose residents to the operations of local government and help them work together on a roster of common goals. This is grassroots, boots-on-the-ground work. And we are proud to engage it daily.



Melanie Powell registers participants in the Summer Jobs Program at an end-of-the-summer event.





East Biloxi Community Collaborative (EBCC) coordinator Carmelita J. Scott works in the community to make sure citizens and local activists are a part of the EBCC's vision and plan.

"MY DREAM IS THAT EAST BILOXIANS WILL WANT TO REMAIN AND RETURN TO THIS COMMUNITY THAT THEY LOVE SO MUCH." -Carmelita J. Scott, *East Biloxi Community Collaborative*

Conclusion

qualified team of people whose passion for social justice means they never quit pressing ahead, no matter how onerous the odds.

The odds were long when we started, and they cast their shadows still, but we have a record that indicates the odds are no match for perseverance in the name of a just cause. When Mississippi's governor and legislature eliminated Medicaid drug benefits for 65,000 elderly and disabled residents, we fought back and won. After the destruction of Hurricane Katrina, we took on the governor's effort to divert federal dollars away from the needy. We won that one, too. To make sure BP Oil Spill dollars got to the most needy, we took on the challenge to provide free representation through a four-state coalition. We've been winning that battle as well.

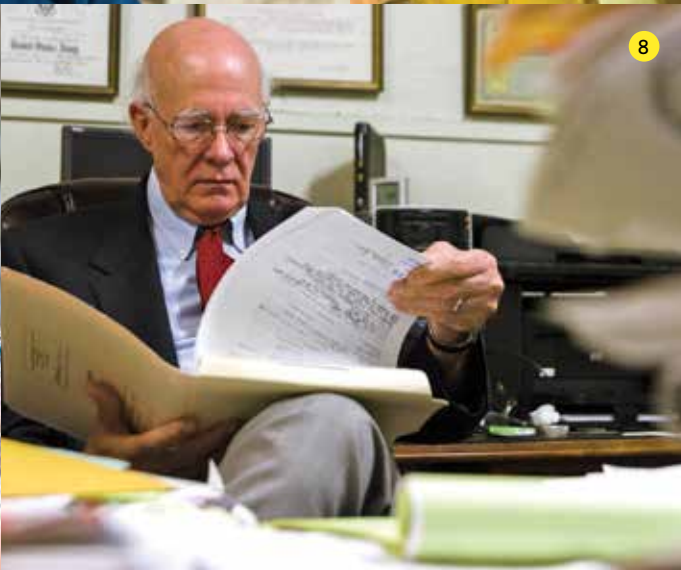
There is a long and impressive record of achievement.

16 Much remains to be overcome. And we are always mindful that we are guided by something more than a desire to right wrongs. **THE DREAM ENVISIONED BY THE LEADERS OF THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT WAS SOMETHING FAR MORE INCLUSIVE AND INSPIRING THAN CREATING A LEVEL PLAYING FIELD. THE DREAM INCLUDES EQUAL TREATMENT AND FULL OPPORTUNITY FOR ALL AMERICANS WITHOUT REGARD TO RACE OR ONE'S LOT IN LIFE.**

The Center believes and has invested itself in the proposition that Mississippi remains ground zero for achieving racial and social justice in America.

We are convinced that Mississippi can be an example to the rest of the world of how to overcome the divisions that plague us today and realize the American promise. This is why, in addition to our history of aggressive and successful litigation, the Center has been at the forefront of founding programs to create not only equal treatment but also a shared sense of community and civil society among all Mississippians. This is the new ground we inhabit, and we are committed to extending our reach every day. For the betterment of all.





SOCIAL JUSTICE CAMPAIGN

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.
Capital Area Bar Association Young Lawyers Division
Catholic Diocese of Jackson
Children's Defense Fund, Southern Regional Office
Church of Christ (Holiness)
City of Canton
City of Jackson
Coalition for a Prosperous Mississippi
Coastal Family Health Center
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
Goldring Woldenberg Institute of Southern Jewish Life
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
Jackson Medical Mall Foundation
Nollie Jenkins Family Center
Kingdom Community Development Corp.
Legal Services Alabama
Legal Services of North Florida
Liberty Bank and Trust Company
Living Independence for Everyone
Lone Star Legal Aid
Louisiana Appleseed
Louisiana Civil Justice Center
Louisiana Justice Institute
Louisiana State Bar Association Access to Justice Program
Magnolia Bar Association
Mercy Housing and Human Development
Mid South Delta LISC
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Mississippi Association for Justice
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Mississippi Center for Nonprofits
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Mississippi Coalition of Vietnamese Fisherfolk and Families
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
Mississippi Families as Allies for Children's Mental Health
Mississippi Health Advocacy Program
Mississippi Home Corporation
Mississippi Housing Partnership
Mississippi Human Services Coalition
Mississippi Immigrants' Rights Alliance
Mississippi Low-Income Child Care Initiative
Mississippi Parent Training and Information Center
Mississippi Religious Leadership Conference
Mississippi United to End Homelessness
Mississippi Volunteer Lawyers Project
Mississippi Youth Justice Project
Moving Forward Gulf Coast
NAACP, Biloxi Branch
NAACP, Gulfport Branch
NAACP, Mississippi State Conference
North Florida Center for Equal Justice
North Gulfport Civic Club
North Gulfport Community Land Trust
North Mississippi Rural Legal Services
Operation Shoestring
Parents for Public Schools—Jackson
The Pro Bono Project (New Orleans)
Public Policy Center of Mississippi
Rebuild Jackson County
Self-Help
Soria City Civic Organization
South Delta Regional Housing Authority
Southeast Louisiana Legal Services
Southern AIDS Coalition
Southern Echo
Southern HIV/AIDS Strategy Initiative
Southern Mississippi Planning and Development District

Southern Poverty Law Center
Steps Coalition
Sunflower County Parents and Students Organization
Teach for America
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Turkey Creek Community Initiative
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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 2013 donors of \$250 and more.

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Statement of Activities

for the years ended December 31, 2013 and 2012

	2013	2012
SUPPORT AND REVENUES		
Contributions.....\$	1,458,367	845,305
In-kind Contributions.....	911,594	803,171
Grants.....	3,016,575	2,464,850
Interest and Dividends.....	1,296	236
Miscellaneous.....	-	541
Contract Services.....	382,823	140,703
TOTAL SUPPORT AND REVENUES	5,770,655	4,254,806
EXPENSES		
Program Services.....	4,617,113	4,194,712
Management and General.....	196,929	187,969
Fundraising.....	273,854	250,625
TOTAL EXPENSES	5,087,896	4,633,306
INCREASE (DECREASE) IN NET ASSETS	682,759	(378,500)
NET ASSETS AT BEGINNING OF YEAR	2,840,580	3,219,080
NET ASSETS AT END OF YEAR\$	3,523,339	2,840,580

Statement of Financial Position

for the years ended December 31, 2013 and 2012

	2013	2012
ASSETS		
CURRENT ASSETS		
Cash.....\$	1,641,250	1,594,560
Investments.....	-	33,293
Receivables.....	1,644,228	887,712
Prepaid Expenses.....	18,701	16,424
	3,304,179	2,531,989
PROPERTY AND EQUIPMENT, net	472,710	529,696
OTHER ASSETS		
Deposits.....	9,423	9,073
	3,786,312	3,070,758
LIABILITIES AND NET ASSETS		
CURRENT LIABILITIES		
Accounts Payable.....	29,430	5,888
Accrued Expenses.....	133,333	122,881
Payroll Liabilities.....	210	1,409
	162,973	130,178
LONG TERM LIABILITIES		
Notes Payable.....	100,000	100,000
NET ASSETS		
Unrestricted.....	1,299,935	1,092,040
Temporarily Restricted.....	2,223,404	1,748,540
	3,523,339	2,840,580
	3,786,312	3,070,758

The summarized financial data was taken from audited financial statements prepared by Matthews Cutrer & Lindsay P.A.

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 health care, 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 mscenterforjustice.org and follow us on Facebook and Twitter.



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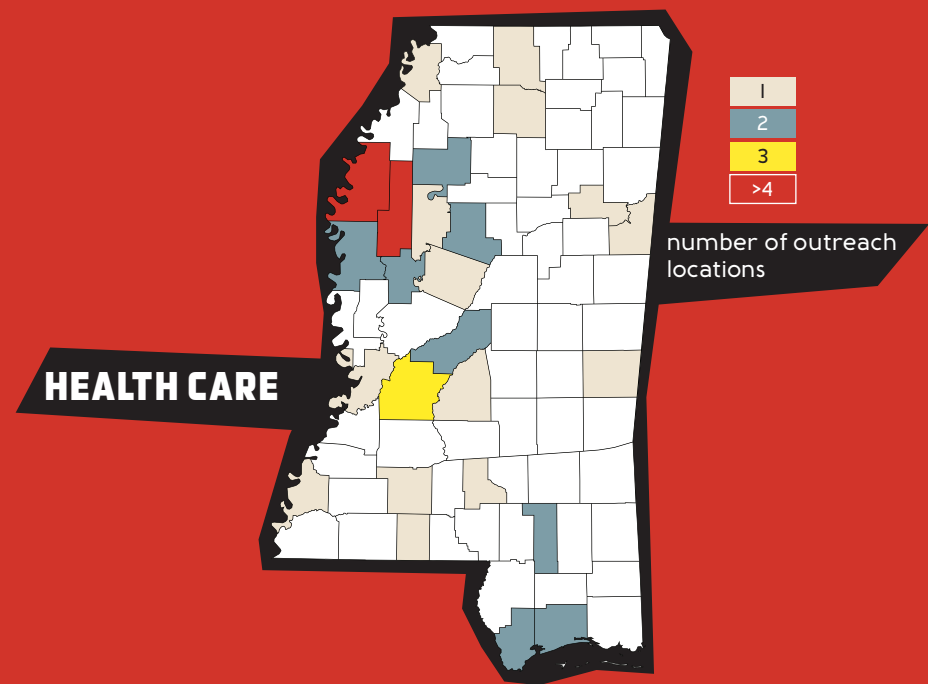
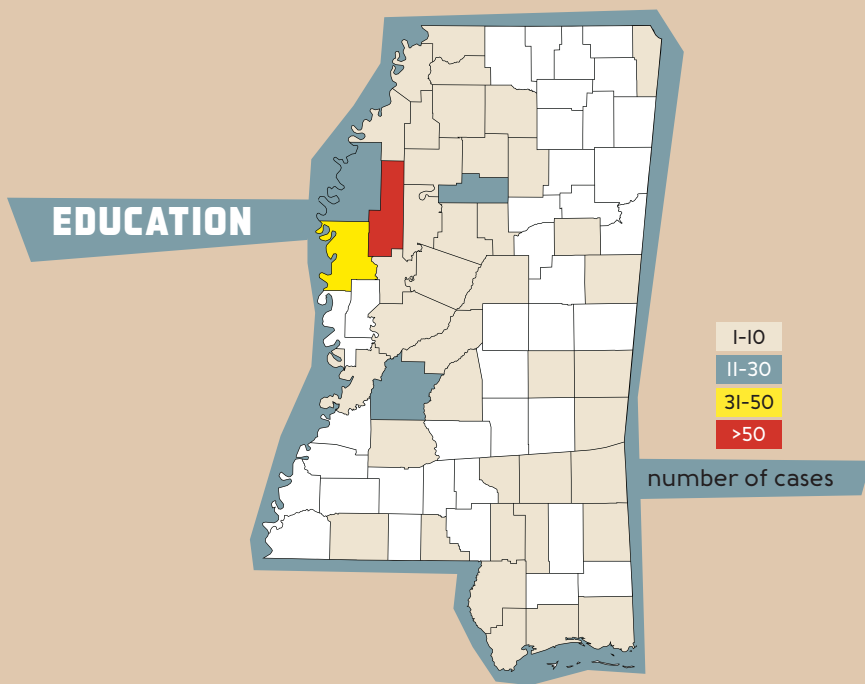
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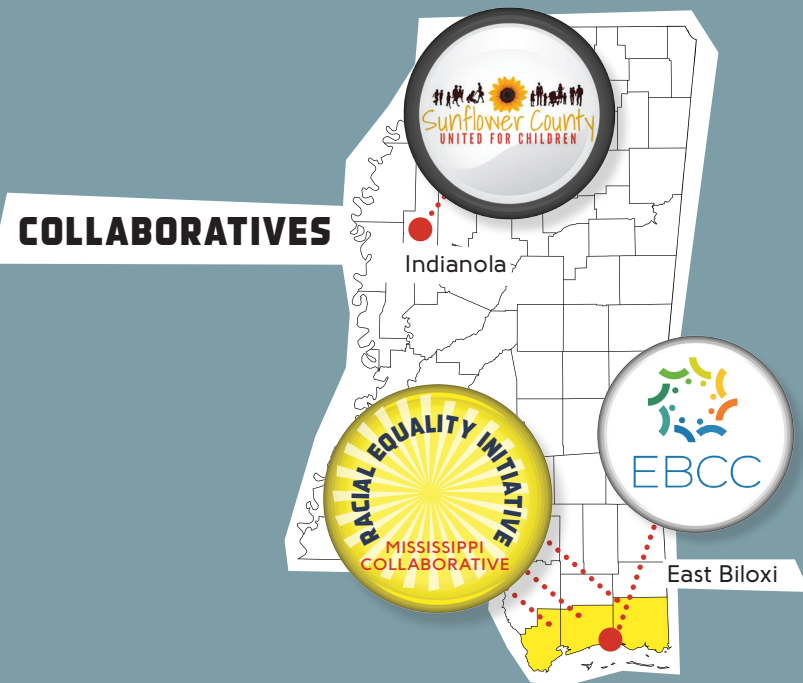
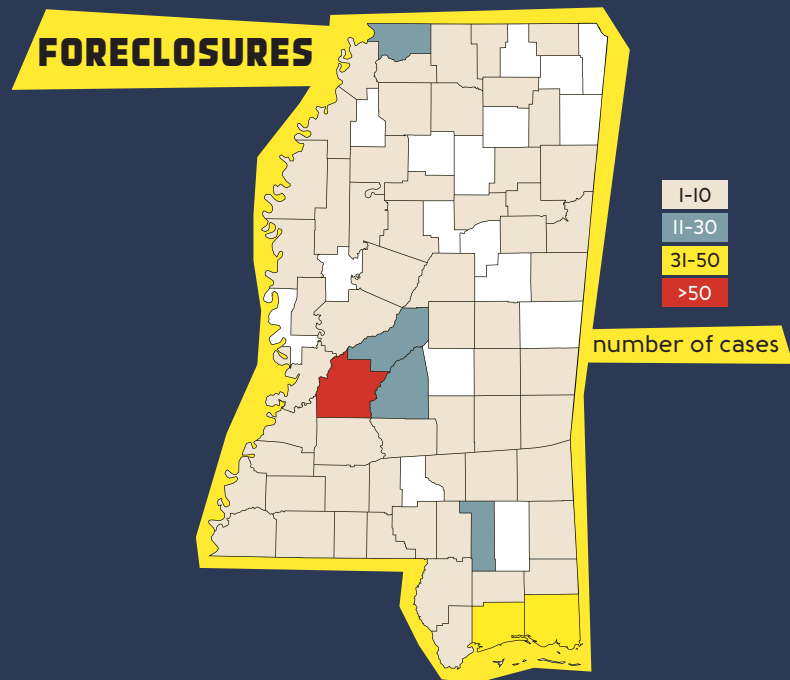
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Expanding the Frontlines





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Front Cover: **Participants in this year's Sunflower County Summer Jobs Program welcome guests to the Program's end-of-the-year celebration.**