

Topeka Center FOR Peace & Justice



Donna Gilchrist

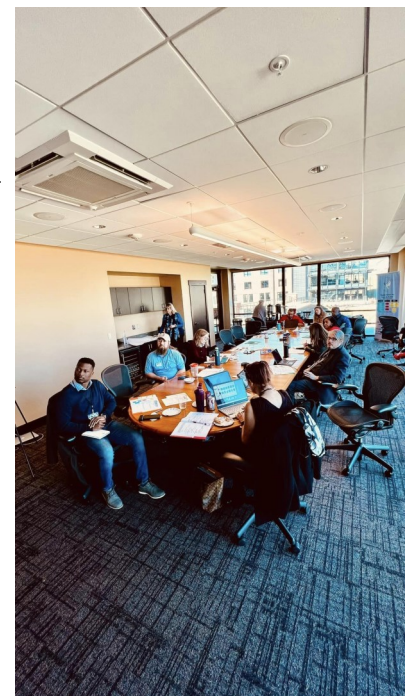
Board Chair

On a Friday morning in February, new and existing Topeka Center for Peace and Justice Board (TCPJ) members gathered for a Board Retreat. The Sunflower Foundation hosted the event at the beautifully renovated Menninger Power Plant.

After finding out basics about the work of TCPJ Staff, board members shared a little bit about themselves. Following introductions, the group worked with enthusiasm to develop a long term goal along with objectives and short term goals for the Center's Restorative Practices program. As TCPJ moves into the future, the 2024 board is committed to enhancing their knowledge of peace and justice work as well as engaging the community with the work of TCPJ.

TCPJ Executive Director, Carl Frazier, and I left the retreat filled with excitement for what 2024 will bring. I am so appreciative of the collaboration and positive energy present at the retreat. Thank you, board members and staff, for the vitality you bring to this work of making the world a more peaceful place!

With Joy,
Donna Gilchrist
TCPJ Board Chair





Carl Frazier
Executive
Director

Wow! I cannot believe that next year Topeka Center for Peace and Justice (TCPJ) will be celebrating our 40th Anniversary. We have already started establishing our anniversary committee for this special occasion. We will be fundraising and adding exciting new sponsors or friends to our community of support. Please stay tuned for more information coming soon.

As we are partnering with local and state-wide organizations in advocacy, we are spending more time at the Kansas State Capitol. Recently, we supported the KanCare Expansion Rally at the Capitol, which was a great success. There were many great speakers, including my daughter, Emersen, who is Director of Health Equity and Policy at Stormont Vail Health. When Emersen was in middle school, she and her older sister, Carleigh, advocated for Medicaid expansion at the Capitol by holding signs (left photo). Ten years later, she was at the podium representing Stormont Vail Health and the Kansas Hospitals Association (center photo). She spoke on the benefits of the expansion for her employer and other hospitals, including those throughout rural Kansas, if the legislators passed the KanCare Expansion (Medicaid Expansion). I believe it is important to speak up for people who cannot speak for themselves, those who have been silenced, and those who have been ignored. Just like my family is speaking up, all organizations, including TCPJ, should be using our voices to help those who cannot help themselves.



Additionally, we continue to research and find funding for TCPJ to work with youth *before* they touch the criminal justice system. We are partnering with the YMCA and other community organizations and expanding our reach outside Shawnee County by co-sponsoring the Restorative Conference at Bethel College in Newton, Kansas.

On the next page two pages, there are some pictures of the connections made and the events attended this winter!

Topeka Center FOR Peace & Justice



1



2

First photo: Steve Willis and Erin Hicks visited us for Shawnee County Corrections. **Second Photo:** Executive Director participated on a panel with KIPCOR and other Statewide Restorative organizations at Bethel along with Christina Swarns, Executive Director of the Innocence Project of New York.

First Photo: Executive Carl Frazier was invited to Kansas Wesleyan University in Saline to speak with students about careers and met their guest speaker, Dr. Marlene Carson (current and previous president's sex trafficking consultant). **Second Photo:** Regina Platt was honored at Robinson Elementary School for her work at the school. In the picture are, Regina Platt, the Sophia Ellington (beautiful singer), Jesamyn Ellengton (Sophia's mom), Robinson Elementary Principal Relyn Strom, and Carl Frazier.



1



2

Topeka Center FOR Peace & Justice



1



2

First Photo: Attending Rotary meeting with my guest Nyalia Lui, picture was taken with the current President Vince Fryer. **Second Photo:** Love Thy Neighbor Rally at the State Capitol, sponsored by Alliance for Healthy Kansas.



1



2

First Photo: Attended Promotion ceremony for Detective Warfield along with Mayor Padilla and Chief Wheeler. **Second Photo:** All individuals participated in the Governor MLK Day at the Capitol.



Governor Kelley signed 2024 MLK proclamation with Key leaders.



Hello, my name is Annie Buckland and for the past 15 years, I have worked in the medical field, both in the emergency and public health fields. I have a passion for community education and injury prevention. I am very active in several coalitions and committees at the state and local level. In recent years, I have developed a great love for older adult education and resource development. I graduated from Washburn University with my Bachelors in Nursing Science in 2012, and I have been a certified emergency room nurse for the past six years. In my free time, you can catch me chasing after my three young children or out in the garden playing in the dirt. I was raised in Topeka's College Hill Neighborhood and remain an active neighbor.

Mahin Para-Cremer is a member of the Baha'i Faith Community of Topeka. Professionally, Mahin is a Board-Certified Behavior Analyst and currently works as the Director of Clinical Outcomes Data for a large, multi-state behavioral health provider, and as an Adjunct Instructor for Masters-level coursework in Behavior Analysis and Special Education. She has worked to support individuals with challenging behaviors to be successful in school, home, and community settings and now works to support professionals in achieving the best outcomes for those they serve. Personally, Mahin grew up in Kansas and has returned to the area after living with her husband and two children in Wisconsin for 17 years. Mahin is excited to join the Board of Directors of the Topeka Center for Peace and Justice to support the mission and work promoting justice and peace through education and action for social change. "Justice and equity are twin guardians that watch over men. From them are revealed such blessed and perspicuous words as are the cause of the well-being of the world and the protection of the nations." -Bahá-u-lláh.



Peace Outreach Project (POP)



Greetings from the Peace Outreach Project Manager, I'm extremely excited to share some of our most recent achievements and updates with you. I'm proud to announce that we have had two more referrals to complete the Peace Outreach Project (POP). The two were successful at completing the 16 week Youth Initiative Program under the direction of Tish Taylor, Assistant Director of Family Peace Initiative (FPI) and her two group facilitators, Hope Thompson and Payton Gengler. In the next coming month, there will be more referrals who are very close to completing the Peace Outreach Project (POP). We are making progress with developing healthy families and relationships within the Topeka community. Another update is that the Peace Outreach Project (POP) started serving groups on Tuesdays and Thursdays. Currently, we have progressed to five days a week, Monday through Friday. Nancy Kelley, the State-Approved Mediator, continues to hold mediation sessions for our court-involved youth on a weekly basis, as scheduled. Together as a partnership, we will continue to provide youth with the tools they need to manage their behaviors in a healthy and productive manner, making them safer to themselves, their families, and to the whole community.

Peace and Love, Mrs. Brown

Pastor Donna Gilchrist with Westside Christian Church hosted this year's 2024 Martin Luther King Jr. Celebration. This year marks the 39th Anniversary of Living the Dream's, Inc. (who partners with Topeka Center for Peace and Justice, Inc.) celebration of the life of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Even winter weather was not going to hinder our annual celebration of the life of this great community leader and social justice icon.

With the temperature outside below zero and the entire city on a boil water notice, many celebrations had to be rescheduled or canceled. We are pleased to say that we did not reschedule, and while we did not have the number of attendees we had originally anticipated, we still had a wonderful evening of celebrating with about 70 to 100 people who were able to brave the cold to celebrate with us.

Chili and cinnamon rolls (with a vegetarian option) were served for a dinner that filled our bodies with warmth on this cold night and prepared us to receive the message of love, compassion, and understanding being delivered by speakers from several religious groups.

Dr. Venus Lee, CEO of GraceMed Health, was the keynote speaker and delivered a special message to the crowd on this year's theme, "Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that." Her message was that everyone needs to feel that there is a purpose to their life and that we need to fight together rather than pull each other apart. Everyone deserves to know their history so they may stand firm in their present.

This annual event is a collaborative effort by members of the Topeka Center for Peace and Justice, Inc. Board and was organized by a group of people who collectively represent several different religious groups, races, and cultures who come together each year to celebrate Dr. King's life work. Despite our differences, we can work together with love to accomplish the work of the late Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

To assist those who needed a little extra help during extreme temperatures, all leftover food and bottled water were donated to the Topeka Rescue Mission's Warming Center.



Paster Donna Gilchrist



Dr. Venus Lee



Topeka Center FOR Peace & Justice



During December, we gifted 150 snack packs to students at Ross Elementary, International Academy, and Robinson Middle School. TCPJ was represented in three national restorative dialogue circles working with college students across the United States as well.

TCPJ implemented the five R's of Restorative Justice: relationships, respect, responsibility, repair, and reintegration accredited to Beverly Title, founder of Resolutionaires, into the department language in January 2024. Vision and clarity are very important in making an impact on those we serve. TCPJ finds it valuable that all those serving at TCPJ have an understanding of the Restorative Justice language and principles. We held space with students weekly and covered subject matter connected to Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

“Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter.”

-Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

It was an exciting time in February 2024. The #BTBY (Becoming the Better You) Kansas Youth Summit was held at Topeka Performing Arts Center following the impacts of gun violence in 2023. On February 13, 2024, in Topeka, KS, students received sponsorships to attend an extraordinary event. These individuals and organizations, including the City of Topeka, the Topeka Police Department, and Big Bob's Flooring Outlet played a crucial role in the Youth Summit. At the Topeka Center for Peace and Justice, Inc. and Becoming the Better You (#BTBY), we acknowledge that we could not have undertaken this endeavor alone. Partnerships were the cornerstone that bolstered and enveloped our youth to sustain a lasting impact. Attendees included Topeka High School (JAG), Shawnee Heights High School (JAG), Washburn Rural High School, Tonganoxie High School, Robinson Middle School, and Crossroads Restoration. Our vision for this day came alive as more than 230 participants entered the Topeka Performing Arts Center with handshakes and encouraging messages to connect with each student individually before entering the auditorium. The comprehensive program was filled with music, engaging activities, and powerful presentations. We understand that our youth need help being equipped for success. This assembly was one step in the right direction toward investing in the mental health of our youth. This summit inspired attendees through teaching, discussion, and support while building healthy communities within the educational sector.



On February 14th, TCPJ hosted #BTBY at Ross Elementary serving approximately 100 fifth grade students. Students remained engaged with presenters as they were challenged to think deeply and communicate from their hearts.



Feb. 14th : Ross Elementary #BTBY ^



Feb. 21st : Topeka High School Assembly



On February 21st, this same partnership engaged students at Topeka High School (in their first all-school assembly since the devastating isolation of COVID) on topics catered to the mental health of students.

We have remained consistent in our service within the educational environment as we continue to form partnerships and develop programming that will fan into flame the spirit of excellence in the service of our youth, families, and educators.



We look forward to partnering with Robinson Middle School for a “Stop the Violence Panel” in March as well as attending the “Unheard Conference” at the Sunflower Foundation (<https://bgctopeka.org/s/unheard>) and hosting a Women's Empowerment Circle. Please be on the lookout. We value your voice, presence, and participation!