

DONATE OR FIND OUT MORE:
WWW.WILKINSBURGSANCTUARYPROJECT.ORG

Wilkinsburg Sanctuary Project for Peace



Over 40 youth participated in our Annual Art and Talent Show for Peace in 2020

Annual Report 2019 - 2021

PARTNERS IN PEACE



Art Work by Taneja Sheffey

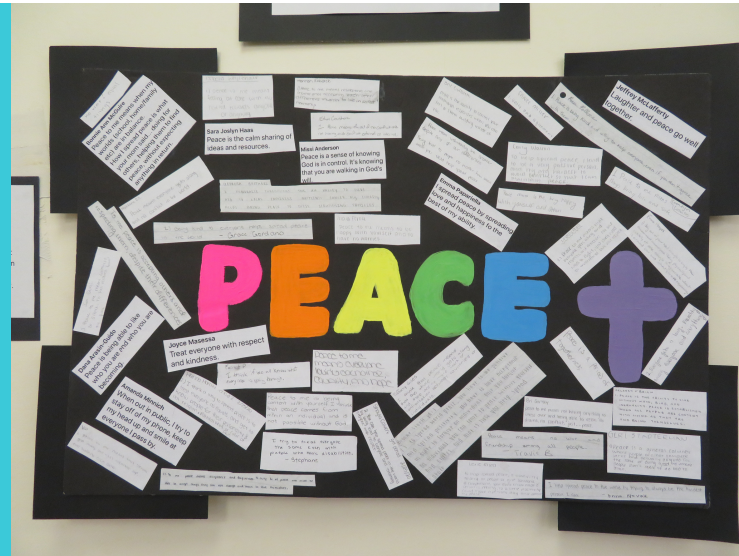
"Working with the Sanctuary Project is actually what the name implies: it is a 'sanctuary' from the harshness of the world. Each time we join with our neighbors in Wilkinsburg for MLK Day, a COVID vaccine clinic, a day of service, a time of mourning, a conversation about the future...we are reminded that no matter how protective the building in which we meet might be, that protection pales in comparison with the sanctuary we give each other.

We, neighbors, are the ultimate sanctuaries for each other."

Rabbi Ron Symons
Senior Director of Jewish Life
Director, Center for Loving
Kindness
JCC of Greater Pittsburgh

From our Board President

**We are called to be
PARTNERS IN PEACE.**



So thank you PARTNERS IN PEACE. Thank you for being a part of the great puzzle of how to end gun violence and create opportunity for the youth and young adults of Wilkinsburg. Working with you has been my honor and my joy. Your passion is contagious. Your commitment as volunteers is humbling. Never forget that the greatest gift we give to our community and youth is HOPE. Without hope, nothing changes. With hope and our faith in a God of new life and love, justice and peace, "all things are possible." Keep HOPE at the center of your heart and your work for peace. Hope is the puzzle piece at the center of our struggle for peace. Hope is the game changer.

Pastor Janet Hellner-Burris
President of the Board and Community Chaplain
WSPP: Wilkinsburg Sanctuary Project for Peace

PARTNERS IN PEACE

"Partnering with Wilkinsburg Sanctuary Project for Peace and Hosanna House ensured that we were able to bring vaccines for our Wilkinsburg neighbors. We shared so many stories from neighbors about how much they appreciated getting access to the vaccine. We are tremendously grateful and humbled by the work of the many community members and leaders from Wilkinsburg who made sure that this vaccine clinic effort was a success."

Dr. Elizabeth Miller, UPMC Pediatrician at Children's Hospital
and coordinating doctor for Community Collaboration for Vaccination

"I would like for the youth to know that from the first day our police department collaborated with you, Pastor Janet and the Sanctuary Project was a blessing. It all began out of desperation and being overwhelmed by the violence that was permeating our community. There were a lot of trials and tribulation. As a police department we were feeling desperate. The police department could not engage or handle this situation on our own. Collaborating with the Sanctuary Project was a natural fit. We initiated a Chaplains program to address social issues that may arise from a critical incident. We have an annual Gun Buy Back Campaign; which is very successful. We also participate in the Annual King Celebration. We have learned that:

"Tribulation produces perseverance and perseverance produces character and character hope."

Chief Cookie Coleman, Wilkinsburg Police Department

"The Wilkinsburg Sanctuary Project is an inspiration to me! The Sanctuary Project skillfully navigates, and intentionally celebrates, the rich diversity of its community in race, religion, age, and ability. The Sanctuary Project's volunteers have a compelling vision of the Wilkinsburg that could be — a place of peaceful streets, engaged youth, and harmonious interfaith relationships —and they work tirelessly to make that vision a reality."

The Rev. Liddy Barlow, Executive Minister
Christian Associates of Southwest Pennsylvania



HEALING OUR COMMUNITY



“I told God that I would not get this shot unless He brought it to my door. And He did!”

A Wilkinsburg resident who lived a block away from the clinic and was recruited at the last minute to receive the 970th vaccine.

COVID Vaccine Clinics

Thanks to our amazing partnership with the Community Vaccine Collaborative, we were able to offer a thousand dose vaccine clinic for our community. Hosanna House donated their space and staff, UPMC brought the Moderna Vaccine and staff, and we brought the people. For weeks ahead of time, we recruited participants from congregations, Wilkinsburg Community Ministry, St. James Social Services, Hosanna House's medical clinic, Wilkinsburg Family Support Center, the borough council as well as through other social service agencies in Wilkinsburg. We nearly reached our goal of a thousand shots of hope with 970 participating in the first clinic, and 890 participating in the second dose clinic. Many of our enthusiastic volunteers came from the Center for Loving Kindness at the Jewish Community Center. St. James social services supplied a van to pick up residents around Wilkinsburg and surrounding communities. The spirit was high and everyone felt blessed by this experience.

970

First Dose

890

Second Dose

HEALING OUR COMMUNITY

Prayer Motorcade for Peace and Healing

Shortly after the murder of George Floyd, we created a prayer motorcade to drive through our community to pray for peace and healing – both of racism and Covid 19. Over 70 people joined us in a long procession of cars as we stopped at six different locations to pray for healing and peace.



Dr.King Day Community Prayer Vigil for Peace

For many years we have gathered Christians, Jews and Muslims for our annual Dr. Martin Luther King Day Prayer Vigil. In 2020, we had the largest crowd ever gathered including a Hindu dance troupe.

Then in 2021, due to Covid, we took to our cars in a prayer motorcade as we stopped at six different locations to hear from a community leader and to pray for peace. Folks from the Jewish Community Center and from as far away as Greensburg joined us to help bring healing to our community.



Walk for Christ

In both 2020 and 2021, WSPP supported the Bible Chapel in the creation of a walk around the borough for Christ. At several locations we prayed for peace, healing, revival, racial reconciliation, as well as for our families, schools, youth, seniors, businesses, police and civic leaders. Thank you Bible Chapel for organizing this prayer walk!

HEALING OUR COMMUNITY

Prayer Vigils for Peace

Several congregations in the WSPP made a pledge to gather their folks for prayer on the steps of their churches and walk around their blocks the first Saturday or Monday of each month during the summer of 2020 as we prayed for peace in the midst of a pandemic, a divisive election and the rise of racial hatred following the murder of George Floyd.



Community Chaplains

Several ministers in our community serve as Community Chaplains. The Chaplains are on call by our Chief of Police, as well as our Mayor to respond to any incident in the community which has caused serious harm or the loss of life. This can include a fire, auto accident or shooting incident. The Chaplains are committed to praying at the site where a life has been lost within a few days after the incident. During those prayer vigils, they talk with the neighbors and offer pastoral care to the community.

After the murder of George Floyd, several of us responded to the call of our brothers and sisters in the Hill District to march on downtown for racial justice and equity. We also formed our own prayer motorcade in June of 2020 to pray down the double pandemic of Covid 19 and racism.

Knowing how stressful policing was during the pandemic, we offered an outdoor picnic for Wilksburg officers so that we could get reacquainted with them. Those critical relationships are crucial to our mission of peacemaking in our community.

Our Community Chaplains are on call to members of the community who need counseling and prayer support. Call 412-906-1179/ 412-295-8287.

Now that the borough building has reopened, the Chaplains will return to providing Bible Study and prayer to our police department, securing credentials for new clergy and training programs. Look for us at community events in our new yellow vests!

HEALING OUR COMMUNITY

Gun Buy Back

For several years, WSPP has partnered with the Wilkinsburg Police Department in a gun buy back program before the holidays. The Gun Buy Back takes place at the police department where guns are surrendered with no questions asked. The Project then provides Giant Eagle gift certificates in the amount of \$50 for hand guns and \$25 for riffles. The money for the certificates is raised by the police department and by WSPP.

In 2019, we had our largest number of guns surrendered from not only Wilkinsburg, but surrounding communities and as far away as Fayette County.

Because of Covid 19 the number of participants was much lower in 2020, but this vital program remains as we seek to get guns off our streets.



“MAD DADS was birthed out of the pain of children dying in the streets of their own community. Thus we were an automatic yes to help fulfill the mission of the Wilkinsburg Sanctuary Project.”

In Solidarity!
George C. Spencer, Sr.
President MAD DADS

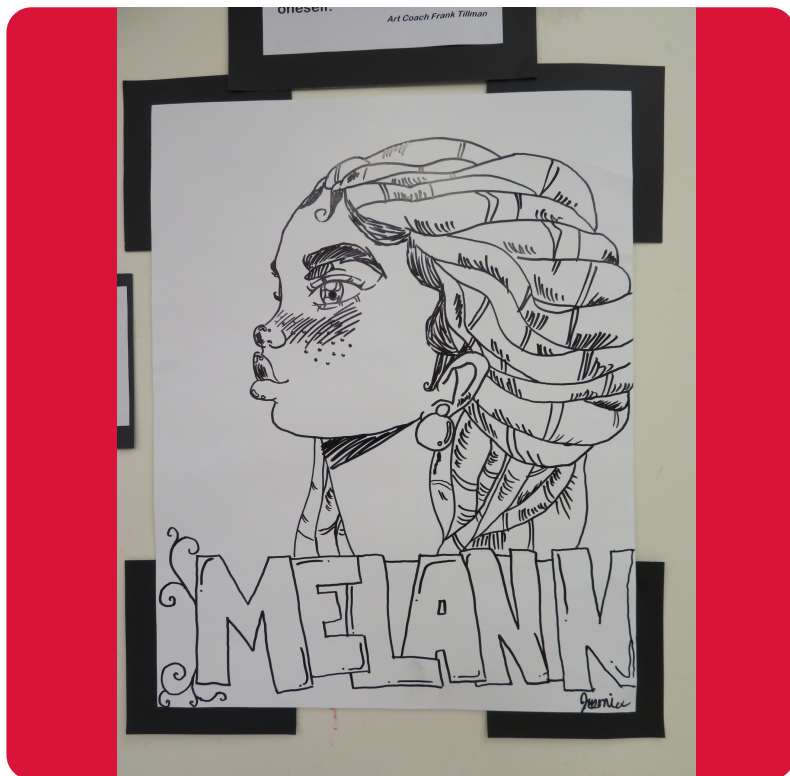
INSPIRING YOUTH

Art and Talent Show for Peace

The highlight of every year is the annual Art and Talent Show for Peace for the youth of our community. Each youth receives \$50 for submitting an art work or performing in the talent show which includes singing, spoken word, rap, dancing, mime, instrumental music and much more. More importantly, each youth receives affirmation from our enthusiastic audience, as well as mentoring from our amazing coaches: Frank Tillman for art and Andre Scott for talent. As each youth presents her or his talent or work of art, they tell us what peace means to them and how we can work for it in our community and world.

In 2020, just before the pandemic shut down, our Art and Talent Show for Peace took place at the South Avenue United Methodist Church which was our largest show ever and was preceded by a wonderful dinner by Tastefully Blessed Caterers – the father of one of our amazing artists. During that show, two of the youth had community members ask to buy their art work!

Of course, in 2021 the Project decided that THE SHOW MUST GO ON! Despite Covid 19 precautions, we worked with Off Center Studio to record the art and talent of our youth. After brilliant editing, the Livestream show became available a month later which included comments from our wonderful art and talent coaches. The show is still available to view on our website.



INSPIRING YOUTH

Summer Internships

Almost from our beginning in 2010, we have been offering summer internships for the youth and young adults of our community. At first we offered internships for teens, through the Wilkinsburg Youth Project and Learn and Earn Jobs. Then when that need was being filled through other social service providers, we focused our attention on post-high young adults ages 18-25. Though the internship opportunities have varied, our goal is to provide meaningful work and an opportunity to build a work resume and references for young adults.

In 2020, we formed a new partnership with the CENTER FOR CIVIC ARTS. Three young adult interns were hired to assist with the planting of the George Floyd memorial garden and the renovating of the former Mulberry Presbyterian Church which has fallen into great disrepair. The interns gained carpentry, as well as gardening skills during their six week internship.

In 2021, the Center for Civic Arts was given a grant by WSPSP to hire up two interns to work on Saturdays with a master carpenter in continuing the renovation of the former Mulberry Presbyterian Church into the Center for Civic Arts.



In addition, WSPSP hired two interns to participate in the GENERATION TO GENERATION STORY-TELLING PROJECT in partnership with Off Center Studios and the Christian Church of Wilkinsburg over three intensive Saturdays. This project seeks to capture the stories of Wilkinsburg and African Americans in the Pittsburgh area as we teach our youth the value of oral history and some recording technology skills. A grant from the National Benevolent Association requires the storytelling project to complete 18 short 2 - 3 minute interviews, but the hope is that we will create a 30 minute podcast of each interview. The stories are powerful and so hopeful! Look for them soon on our website.



OUR BOARD AND SUPPORTERS

Board and Officers 2019-2021

Officers

President Rev. Janet Hellner-Burris, Christian Church

Vice President/ Head of Chaplains Rev. Thomas Mitchell, Covenant Church

Secretary Cheryl Hoskens

Treasurer Rev. Thomas Mitchell, Covenant Church
Board Members

Tammy Brown Wilkinsburg Youth Places

Carol Calloway Christian Church of Wilkinsburg

Evelyn Christie St. James Roman Catholic Parish

Paulette Davis Family Support Center/ El Bethel Temple

Cheryl Hoskins Resiliency Project Trauma Ministry

Jerome Hurst Ethnan Temple Seventh Day

Adventist Church

Mary Ann Hvizdos Resident and Exec. of Blessed Be Educators

Ted Mitchell Bible Chapel

Frank Tillman Art Coach and resident

Caitlin Werth Waverly Presbyterian Church

Representatives

Malachi Pugh Representative Ed Gainey's office

Jace Ransom Allegheny County Youth and Family

Mike Wilkins Mad Dads

Jackie Cameron Community Forge

Chaplains

Chuck Espisito St. Stephen's Episcopal Church

Janet Hellner-Burris Christian Church of Wilkinsburg

Michael Golphin Deliverance Baptist Church

Jerome Hurst Ethnan Temple Seventh Day

Adventist Church

Ted Mitchell Bible Chapel

Tom Mitchell Covenant Church of Pittsburgh

Pete Smith Covenant Fellowship Reformed Presbyterian

Caitlin Werth Waverly Presbyterian Church

WSPP Supporting Partners

Allegheny County Youth and Family Services

Bible Chapel

Blessed Be Educators

Center for Civic Arts

Center for Loving Kindness,

Jewish Community Center

Ceasefire PA

Christian Church of Wilkinsburg

Community Forge

Covenant Church of Pittsburgh

Covenant Fellowship Reformed

Presbyterian Church

Deliverance Baptist Church

El BethEl Temple

Ethnan Temple Seventh Day

Adventist Church

Hosanna House

Mad Dads

Mulberry Community Church

Off Center Recording Studio

Rebuilding Together Pittsburgh

Representative Ed Gainey's office

South Avenue United Methodist Church

St. Mary Magdalene Roman Catholic Parish

St. Stephen's Episcopal Church

Waverly Presbyterian Church

Wilkinsburg Community Ministry

Wilkinsburg Family Support Center

Wilkinsburg Youth Project

Wilkinsburg Police Chief, Cookie Coleman

Wilkinsburg Mayor, Marita Garrett



WILKINSBURG SANCTUARY PROJECT

Our Mission

The mission of the Wilkinsburg Sanctuary Project for Peace is to end youth and gun violence in the community of Wilkinsburg and beyond. We seek to be a presence of peace and hope in our community as we showcase Wilkinsburg as a wonderful place to live, work, worship and attend school. Though many of us represent the Christian congregations of Wilkinsburg, we welcome and work alongside people of all faith traditions.

For More Information or to Make a Donation:

Visit Our Website at www.wilkinsburgsanctuaryproject.org

Or Contact Our Officers:

President: Janet Hellner-Burris, pastorjanethb@gmail.com

Vice President & Treasurer: Thomas Mitchell, thmitchelljr@gmail.com