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Resist Newsletter, May-June 2013

Resist

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RESIST



The Long Road to Equality and Justice

In the heart of conservative Utah, Ogden OUTreach is creating a radically different space

By Marian Edmonds

Joseph wheeled his battered suitcase down the linoleum hallway of the basement of the church. He was wearing everything he owned that wouldn't fit into his suitcase and the garbage bag he had slung over one shoulder. Joseph had spent a long day hitchhiking 80 miles to make it to the OUTreach Resource Center while it was open, and the frigid February weather had made it seem even longer between rides in cars and pickup truck beds. But he had made it, finally, and looked forward to finding some help, warmth, and maybe a hot meal.

Joseph did find warmth, help and a hot meal, but not as much help as he wished for and the Outreach staff

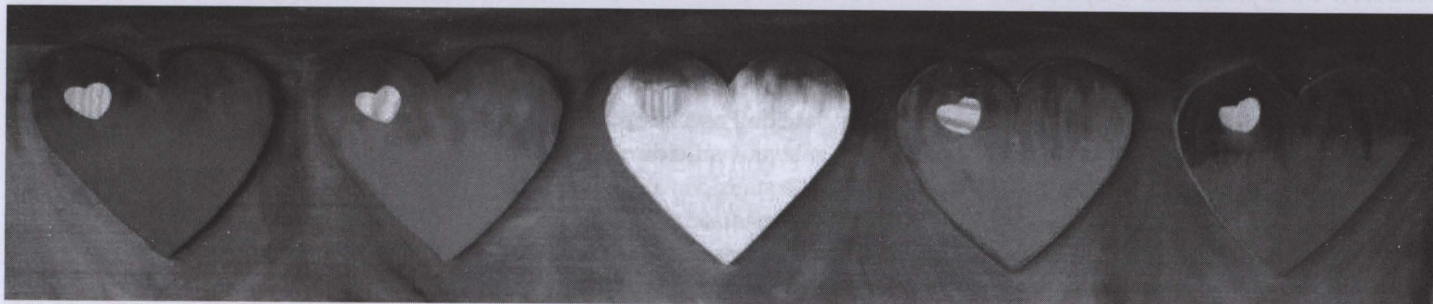
wished to give. He had been told to leave his Mormon home by his parents. He wasn't the son they wanted, he was "strange" and "queer," called himself "she" and even wore a flower in his hair. So for his own sake, to ensure his eternal place in their family, he needed to go and straighten up, and come home when he had come to his senses.

Despite the epidemic of youth homelessness in Utah, there was no place to send Joseph except to ask if there was a couch he might sleep on at a friend's house. There are about 1,300 known homeless youth that live in abandoned buildings, pile into apartments, sleep in cars and camp out in the canyons above and around Salt Lake City. About half of these youth identify as LGBT, which

means that many more probably are, but don't "out" themselves for safety. About 40 percent are from Mormon homes, kicked out for being gay, transgender or gender exceptional. The parents of these youth love their kids they say, but need them to stop thinking they are gay, to overcome the temptation and the sin of homosexuality.

Joseph did find a couch to sleep on. Jo (her new name) returned to OUTreach the following week, saying she had been assaulted that night and was living in the park for now. That lasted another two weeks before she was hospitalized for exhaustion, malnutrition, and anxiety attacks. Her most fond wish was to see her parents and to be reconciled with them. Jo

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For the past nine years, grantee Center for Artistic Revolution (CAR) in Little Rock, Arkansas has organized the Corazón (Heart) Auction, where they provide wooden hearts to artists and community members to create beautiful heart-shaped art pieces. They are then sold in a silent auction "to support CAR's work for fairness and equality for all Arkansans."

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wasn't angry with them, she just missed her family. They met at the hospital and began the long, slow process of rebuilding their relationship.

Jo is one of the lucky ones. In Utah there is one youth suicide attempt per week. In the first quarter alone, there have been 18 known completed youth suicides. All of the risk factors for LGBT youth exist here: a rejecting culture, predominated by a theocracy with leadership that has time and again condemned LGBT persons.

"There is a falsehood that some are born with an attraction to their own kind, with nothing they can do about it. They are just 'that way' and can only yield to those desires. That is a malicious and destructive lie" said

the Mormon Apostle Boyd K. Packer in 1976. *"While it is a convincing idea to some, it is of the devil. No one is locked into that kind of life. From our premortal life we were directed into a physical body. There is no mismatching of bodies and spirits.*

Boys are to become men, masculine, manly men, ultimately to become husbands and fathers. No one is predestined to a perverted use of these powers."

In December of 2012, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS) released a website called www.mormon-sandgays.org. The site features videos of families with their formerly gay children and has been hailed as a step forward by some and an affront by others. Mostly, however, it remains a resource seldom talked about in LDS wards and families, where the culture of silence, even in the aftermath of suicide, remains absolute.

Matthew was a high school student from a Mormon family. He confessed his same-sex attraction (the use of the word

"gay" is offensive to many in the LDS faith) to his parents. His father beat him, took the door off his bedroom, took away his computer and cell phone and forbade him from seeing any of his friends. Matthew continued to attend school but became more and more withdrawn. The bullies who had harassed him daily stepped up their torment of him.

One afternoon Matthew took a belt from his closet, climbed on a chair in his bedroom, and hanged himself. His younger brother and sister found his body later that afternoon, but their parents were still at a neighborhood church meeting. Unable to find them in the cavernous church building, the desperate six and eight-year-olds pulled the fire alarm, summoning emergency vehicles and helicopters into their cul-de-sac. The tragedy never made the news, but is seared into

the memories of those children, their parents and neighbors.

The goal is improved self-esteem and the prevention of suicide and homelessness. OUTreach has recently partnered with M o r m o n s Building Bridges in a unique host home project,

pairing welcoming Mormon families with LDS youth who have been thrown out on the streets. OUTreach is also working towards partnering with the local health department, the Family Acceptance Project and the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention to bring a culturally relevant suicide prevention program to the state.

While the immediate tasks of responding to emergent needs take up much of our day to day work, we are well aware that bandages don't cure the disease of homophobia. The larger goal is to change the culture of Utah from one that condemns LGBT persons and fosters suicide and homelessness of LGBT youth to communities that value and respect ALL

people, regardless of orientation and gender identity.

This is the intersection of direct service and community organizing: equipping youth and adults to advocate for change in their homes, schools, wards, and towns. OUTreach focuses on suicide, homelessness and bullying for two reasons: the immediate effects are devastat-

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Stop the Frisk

New Orleans Police Department Locks Door on BreakOUT!

By Wes Ware

On May 9, 2013, community members representing at least 18 different organizations attempted to bring a public statement to Police Superintendent Ronal Serpas at New Orleans Police Department (NOPD) Headquarters.

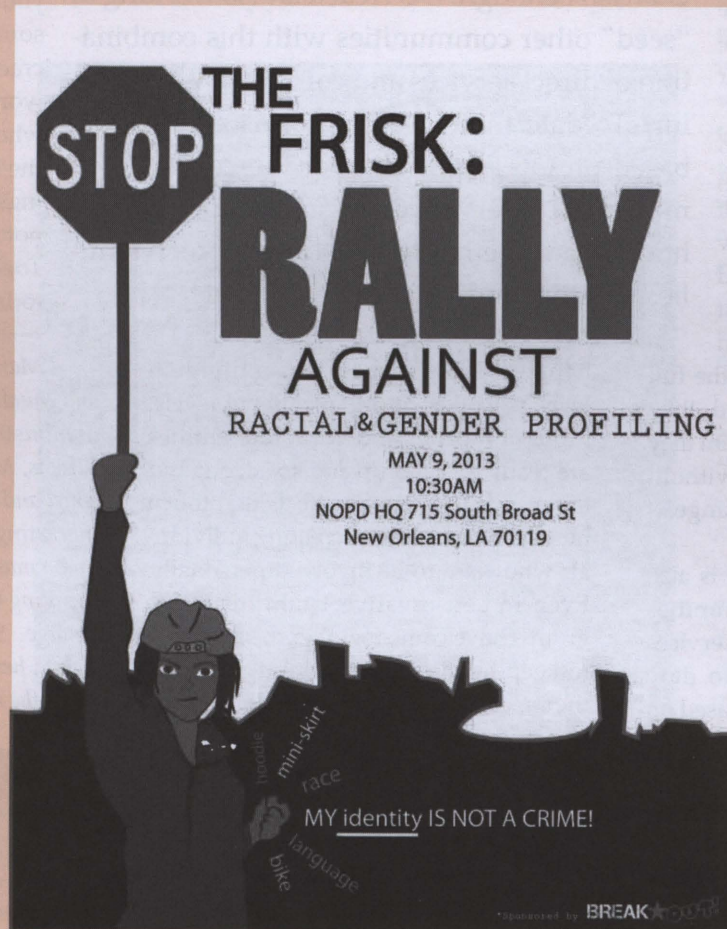
The community members, which included representatives from Break-OUT!, the Congress of Day Laborers, STAND with Dignity, Safe Streets Strong Communities, Voice of the Ex-Offender, and other organizations were denied entry into the public building. The ACLU and the National Lawyer's Guild provided legal observers for the delegation.

The delivery followed a rally of over 75 people, including undocumented Latino workers, Black young mothers, Black gay and lesbian youth, transgender women, Vietnamese-American students, and many others, who called on the NOPD to engage the community on police reform, specifically around "Stop and Frisk" practices, as well as racial and gender

profiling.

"They treated us as if we were subhuman and not worthy of a response. We came peacefully to deliver this statement, which called on the NOPD to publicly discuss draft policies to end profiling. A locked door was the only response to the community's outcry," said Jada, a Latina transgender citizen who shared her story of being profiled and falsely arrested at the rally. Others at the rally also shared their stories of racial and gender profiling practiced by NOPD officers.

All of this just further proves our point for the need for community engagement on policies and additional oversight of the New Orleans Police Department. We saw that "Stop and Frisk" affects many different people in New Orleans. We all stand in solidarity with one another to demand a voice in these reforms.



Wes Ware is the founder and director of BreakOUT!, a RESIST Hell Yes! grantee, in New Orleans, Louisiana.

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ing to youth *and* they are rallying points, an entry for what is often an unpopular stance in Utah, affirming LGBT youth, to become a common cause that anyone can get behind and in front of.

LGBT youth homelessness has been rampant and yet treated to the same culture of silence as other uncomfortable topics in Utah. But when progressive Mormons opened their hearts to

Utah's LGBT homeless youth, the invisible "throwaway" nation suddenly had a face and a voice, and thousands of champions advocating for acceptance and love. The great beauty of the Safe and Sound Host Home project is the number of passionate, engaged stakeholders who not only care, but who talk with their neighbors about the injustice LGBT youth face every day. Our goal is to have identified an ally/advocate for LGBT youth in each and every of the 4,800 wards in Utah, starting with the 500 or so "stakes" or groups of wards. This

is a sea change that has already started, and started from within. Rather than a "gay group" pushing a "gay agenda" there are Mormon moms and dads sharing their love for ALL youth, with their friends and fellow church-goers.

In a similar way, we are working with schools, local government officials and the health department to address youth suicide. A mandate from the governor to address youth suicide has energized

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governmental agencies to become engaged and to find solutions. This is the perfect opportunity to partner with organizations that are inclusive, yet provide "cover" so that the fact that OUTreach is known as a gay organization is not a barrier. Schools who have a "don't say gay" policy, where teachers may be fired not only for being gay but for "advocating" (talking about) homosexuality, now have a reason to seek training and assistance to stem the tide of suicide. These schools don't know that there is a "gay group" behind the scenes, ensuring that the best practices in the trainings and school assemblies are based on the full inclusion of LGBT youth. Instead, they see a research-based health program they can embrace, and once again, without knowledge or fanfare, a sea change is started.

Utah isn't enough! OUTreach is also working to "seed" other communities with this combination of direct services and community organizing. To date there are 22 groups and centers based on

OUTreach all over the country, but mostly in conservative areas, with two more getting ready to start in Northern Utah. The conditions in the United States are perfect for this type of organizing: publicity for injustices faced by LGBT youth plus high compassion for those youth combined with heightened resolve to make change

Utah isn't enough! OUTreach is also working to "seed" other communities with this combination of direct services and community organizing. To date there are 22 groups and centers based on OUTreach all over the country, but mostly in conservative areas...disparate groups have come together to save lives, to keep families together and youth off the streets.

happen. This is true at an individual level as well as at organizational levels. More non-profit and corporate entities are ready to stand up and speak out and the results have ripple effects that touch more and more hearts, creating individuals who want to be involved personally. Even in conservative Utah, disparate groups have come together to save lives, to keep families together and youth off the streets. It just takes a cause larger than

prejudice, and a movement is born and reborn, again and again.

Is there hope for Utah's gay youth? Absolutely. In the past 14 months there have been no suicides or known attempts among the 350 youth OUTreach works with. The hope that we see is in the resolve of supporters like RESIST, who refuse to accept the idea that some youth should be thrown away, that some cultures are "too tough" to crack open. Justice and equality is worth fighting for, wherever and whenever there are youth walking the streets with all of their belongings slung over their shoulder. Let's not wait for it to get better someday. Together, we can make it better... today.

Marian Edmonds' passion is justice and equality for all persons. She has worked in ministry and at non-profits in New York, Illinois, Maine, Michigan, Texas, Missouri and of late, Utah. She has degrees in marketing, organizational management and a masters of divinity, and most enjoys bringing communities together for positive change. She loves her four children and one fiance, her Vizsla puppy, Siamese cat, and all of the natural world.



The "Making Change Forum" featured youth from Ogden Outreach speaking about their struggles with bullying and suicide. This forum is one of five to raise awareness that there is one suicide attempt/completion every week in Northern Utah. The youth openly share their stories and have rallied adults to speak up on their behalf, challenging "Don't Say Gay" rules in local school districts.

Beyond Marriage Equality

A message about looking forward in the movement for trans rights*

By Danielle Askini

In the days following the ballot box win for marriage equality, many in the Washington LGBT community were celebrating with joy, while some of us were asking the hard question, "what's next?"

Having worked on campaigns in both California (against the onerous Prop-8) and Maine in 2009 (No on 1), I had seen the heart breaking fall out of marriage equality losses on queer communities. But the air was different with this monumental win. As trans* and gender non-conforming activists gathered, one thing was abundantly clear: there was so much work left to do for trans* people that marriage didn't even begin to feel like it scratched the surface for us.

Many of us at Gender Justice League (Washington's trans* and allied activist collective) were living at or below the federal poverty level, even those of us with four year degrees. Still more of us had faced workplace discrimination or been harassed because of our trans* status. None of us had seen any HIV prevention messages that spoke to our bodies, lives, or relationships. As the most recent research published in *The Lancet* pointed out, trans women are 49 times more likely to be HIV positive than cisgender people. These realities have lead

us to organize collectively to build leadership that will help us tackle systemic oppression like cultural invisibility with Trans* Pride.

We are building a coalition to eliminate the health care exclusions that prevent trans* people from accessing surgical or other medical interventions. We are starting to unravel and address the unemployment, homelessness, and poverty in our community that has been caused by discrimination, violence, and harassment in the workplace.

The final and ultimate goal for us is to create a community based on mutual support, love, affirmation, and solidarity with other social justice movements that affirms all people's internationally recognized human right to self determine their gender, shape their bodies as they see fit, and live their

lives free from harassment, violence, and discrimination.

Danielle Askini is the executive director of Gender Justice League, a RESIST grantee, in Seattle, Washington. You can find out more about trans* people's experiences with discrimination by reading: "Injustice At Every Turn: The National Transgender Discrimination Survey" by the National Center for Transgender Equality.



Above: Gender Justice League is sponsoring and organizing Trans Pride Seattle this year, which seeks "to raise awareness and support for the trans* community and to elevate the challenges faced by trans* and gender non-conforming people in Seattle and more broadly in Washington State, the United States, and internationally."*

Below: Members of Gender Justice League in their offices in Seattle, Washington.



Community, Affinity, and Solidarity

Trans Youth Support Network has a bold vision for the future

By Katie Burgess

After a vicious battle with the streets which included drug addiction, prostitution and jail, I had enough. One day while I was out on the avenue waiting for my next dollar, I ran into an old friend named Roxanne who told me about Trans Youth Support Network and that I should check them out. I did, and it was probably one of the best decisions of my life. I went there one day when things weren't going too well on the block and I have kind of been there ever since. – Paradise Valentino, current outreach and resource sharing coordinator for Trans Youth Support Network.

For almost seven years, Trans Youth Support Network (TYSN) has worked with trans youth, particularly young trans women of color, who are facing extreme violence and abuse in their lives, who are routinely attacked by strangers, lovers, police, and doctors, and then who are refused access to shelter, education, employment, and healthcare.

We have paid witness to countless young trans women of color being systematically dismembered by the seemingly endless machinations of racism, classism, transphobia, capitalism, and our legal system.

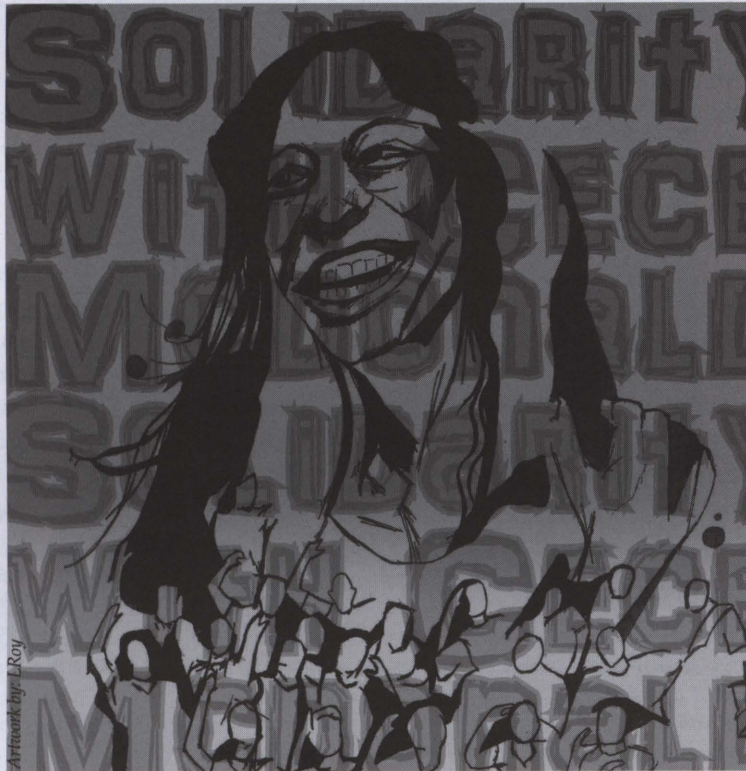
And this year, we made a new plan to fight back.

Last month we launched our Leadership Academy - a new program with a bold vision for the future of our communities.

For 21 weeks, adult trans leaders from TYSN and the community will be sharing skills with youth members on personal leadership, organizational leadership, and community leadership. We developed the curriculum in collaboration with organizations seasoned in popular education such as the School for Organizing and Unity in Liberation (SOUL) and Training for Change. We got a crash course on research, facilitation, and empowerment from Young Women's

Empowerment Project. We consulted with like-minded upstarts at BreakOUT! We continue to learn wisdom and skills from the Brown Boi Project.

With the Leadership Academy, TYSN youth members have laid out a plan that will prepare them to authentically shape our campaign goals next year using the skills they are developing in the Academy



Trans Youth Support Network organized (and still is) around the case of CeCe McDonald. CeCe is a transgender woman of color and at 12:30 AM on June 5, 2012 was harassed, called a "faggot" and "nigger", and then attacked by a group of people in Minneapolis, Minnesota. During the fight, one person was fatally stabbed. She was sentenced to 41 months in prison. For more information about CeCe and trans people being targeted by the prison industrial complex, visit www.supportcece.wordpress.com

this year.

TYSN has not relied on formalized campaigning in the past. So why the change now? We have traditionally utilized the approach of providing ongoing education and consultation services to make long lasting change in the attitudes and practices of social service agencies and other community resources. We gathered together allies in these organizations routinely to share skills, wisdom, and best practices in opening doors

to young trans people more effectively. We saw more trans youth accessing needed services such as shelter and healthcare. Our base of allies grew exponentially over the past seven years, so now we engage whole service sectors such as every youth shelter in the Twin Cities and the largest adult shelters in the state. Community-based healthcare clinics from across Minnesota are working with us to adapt accessible best practice protocol for administering trans related health services such as hormones.

The disparities are easy to quote statistically: trans women of color make up 70% of the victims of hate murder in the US; 30% are incarcerated; 20% are homeless; 46% are trading sex to survive. The disparities are less easy to grapple with in person.

We needed to expand our approach.

When I took the position and was the lone staff person, I was quickly in over my head. Young people were coming to me for support and resources in some of the most precarious situations I had ever imagined. My experiences as a white transgender street youth certainly left me with a fair share of wisdom, but not enough comprehension of the experiences of the transgender street youth of color that were coming to me now.

The wisdom, soul, community, and leadership of youth members like Paradise is not quantified and packaged for easy consumption. There is no class to take; no conference to fly to that will create authentic solidarity between me and TYSN youth members. Only a few years off the streets, I asked myself how was I supposed to lead? What was I supposed to do about these countless crises? How can I balance the needs of our growing

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Community, Affinity, and Solidarity

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base of social worker allies with the needs of our growing base of youth members?

One of the greatest difficulties I've had in my position is having authentic relationships with youth. I routinely get caught up in figuring out how to balance the check-book and respond to email. And then I look up to find the bloodied face of another youth member—fresh from a bashing at the bus stop or at the hands of her boyfriend. What do I give her, beyond a band-aid and another bus token?

Developing the professional skills of social workers and best practices of services sectors wasn't enough on its own. While it was increasing access to services and thus reducing rates of violence in our community, there was still something missing. And that something was an authentic way for youth to lead the process—not just receive the services.

During our strategic planning process this past year, with facilitation from the amazing Shira Hassan from Young Women's Empowerment Project, young people made

a proposal for what it could look like to be in more authentic leadership within TYSN. Over the next few months they had regular meetings to work out the details. I did my best to facilitate and compile information and at the end of it all we had a brand new Leadership Development Program, with three Youth Coordinator internships and a Leadership Academy at its center.



Now, in our second month of the Leadership Academy we're already seeing the effects on how we relate to each other and how young people define their roles within TYSN. With clear places for young people to engage and clear expectations for us all, more authenticity is being imbued into all of our relationships. Simply having a routine

structure to meet weekly and get to know each other makes a world of difference. We have more tools than board meetings, social service trainings, and crisis calls to build relationships with. And along with those relationships, youth members are also building the next evolution of TYSN's organizational development by asking critical questions, hosting Committee Meetings, and engaging in program evaluation.

It's about more than the Leadership Program and these skills that young people are walking away with. It's about building community, affinity, and solidarity with one another—because next year we're building a campaign together and we'll be putting these relationships to the test in a new way. While it's exciting to see us meeting our "target program goals," it's more exciting to see us authentically meeting each other with more complexity and realism.

Katie Burgess is the executive director of Trans Youth Support Network, a RESIST grantee. Katie has been a community organizer for over 12 years and has been living in the Twin Cities for over half that time.

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Inside: The Road to Equality
and Justice



Meet RESIST

GRANT RECIPIENTS

RESIST awards grants to hundreds of the most critical activist organizations across the United States who are organizing for social, economic and environmental justice. Below are four recent grant recipients.

For more information on RESIST's grant program, please visit www.resistinc.org/grants

Family Farm Defenders

P.O. Box 1772
Madison, WI, 53701
www.familyfarmers.org

Family Farm Defenders' mission is to "create a farmer-controlled and consumer-oriented food and fiber system, based upon democratically controlled institutions that empower farmers to speak for and respect themselves in their quest for social and economic justice." They support "sustainable agriculture, farm worker rights, animal welfare, consumer safety, fair trade, and food sovereignty."

RESIST's grant of \$4,000 will help them reconstruct the contemporary food system upon the principles of respect, local empowerment, environmental sustainability and social justice.

Indian People's Action

P.O. Box 113, Butte, MT, 59703

Indian People's Action works "in Montana urban areas to organize for social, economic and racial justice."

A \$4,000 RESIST will enable Indian People's Action to advance the racial and social equality of Native American people in urban areas and the border towns of the seven federally recognized tribes of Montana.

New Yorkers Against the Cornell-Technion Partnership (NYACT)

www.nyact.net

NYACT formed quickly in 2012 following the announcement that Cornell University was partnering up with Technion-Israel Institute of Technology. An ad hoc committee of activist, academics, and students was formed to demand that the city of New York not use public tax-payer monies to fund this new campus. They are also denouncing the union between Cornell University with Technion, which designs most of

the military weaponry used in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.

A \$2,000 grant from RESIST will support ongoing efforts by NYACT to pressure Cornell University and the city of New York to divest from Technion and Israel.

Student Global AIDS Campaign (SGAC)

429 W. 127th St. 2nd Flr., New York, NY, 10027
www.studentglobalaidscampaign.org

SGAC has led the way for increased funding towards the eradication of AIDS through large scale mobilizations and campaigns. Most recently SGAC started the Positive Student Network as a vehicle for HIV positive high school and college students to come together and advocate around HIV/AIDS.

A \$3,000 grant from RESIST will support SGAC in continuing to pressure politicians from diverting much needed funding to programs like PEPFAR and the Global Fund to aid in getting treatment to people all over the world living with HIV/AIDS.