

Building Relationships

Great Plains Action Society and
Midwest Quakers

Jeff Kisling

What follows is a history of the development of relationships among people of the Great Plains Action Society (GPAS) and some Quakers in the Midwest. I've had a lifelong concern for our environment and always wanted to learn more about Indigenous peoples and their spiritual and sustainable ways of living. But I hadn't known how to make that happen. My intention in writing this is to share my recent experiences, and show various ways I've found to make such connections, so you might make your own.

Friends are involved with Indigenous peoples in a number of ways in the Midwest. Many members of my Quaker meeting have been involved in the annual Prairie Awakening/Prairie Awoke celebration at the Kuehn Conservation Area for many years. Other Friends have lobbied legislators. Friends are involved with Friends Peace Team's program Toward Right Relationship with Native Peoples.

The reason for my focus on the Great Plains Action Society is because of the many friends I have there, and the many wonderful things they do. Things I have been led to join in, when appropriate for a white person.

As a Quaker I know that everything is grounded in faith and I believed that was true for Indigenous peoples, too. I was truly blessed when opportunities started to appear about seven years ago that began to teach me about these things. What follows is an account of how I have been led on this journey thus far.

[NOTE: this is not about calling attention to myself. At the end of this post is a statement about humility.]

Fundamentally, relationships can only be made by spending a lot of time together over an extended period. And only when this is something you are led to do. It doesn't work if you are only doing this out of a sense of obligation and/or not able or willing to spend a lot of time in the endeavor. And White people, such as I, must constantly guard against bringing along an attitude of White superiority. I find it helpful to try to move outside myself, to evaluate the situation I'm in and what I'm doing from a distance. The less we say and the more deeply we listen, the better. You will often feel vulnerable. That's part of the process, how you grow, and how relationships deepen.

It is urgent now to develop relationships to support each other as environmental devastation will continue to collapse economic, political, and social systems. The only choices will be to return to Indigenous ways or violent tribalism.

Damage to Mother Earth from extreme extractive industries and fossil fuel infrastructure is a focus of much of the work of Indigenous peoples, and of the new coalition, the Buffalo Rebellion. It is because of these shared concerns that I began to make connections. I was trained as an Action Lead in the Keystone Pledge of Resistance in 2013 and have been involved in resistance to the Keystone XL, Dakota Access, and Coastal Gaslink pipelines. And now against carbon (CO2) pipelines.

TRUTHSGIVING

The concept of **truthsgiving** is why I'm writing this extended article. To share the **truths** that I have been learning. My intention is to show the variety of ways we can become involved, or more involved, in building relationships with native peoples. And to show the reasons why the **Mutual Aid** work that has been my focus for the past three years is so important.

It is time for Quakers, for everyone to acknowledge the atrocities of the Indian Boarding Schools. Which must begin with truth telling. "The Truth will not be Whitewashed" calls out those, not only many Quakers but most White people who don't want to face these truths. Locating the remains of thousands of children on the grounds of Indian Boarding Schools in this country and Canada is bringing attention to these atrocities. And opening wounds.

Truthsgiving is a concept of my friend, Sikowis Nobiss, who is the founder of the Great Plains Action Society (GPAS). GPAS created the website [TRUTHSGIVING. The Truth will not be Whitewashed](#). The **Truthsgiving** Collective includes GPAS, Des Moines Mutual Aid, and others.

*Truthsgiving is an ideology that must be enacted through **truth telling** and **mutual aid** to discourage colonized ideas about the thanksgiving mythology—not a name switch so we can keep doing the same thing. It's about telling and doing the truth on this day so we can stop dangerous stereotypes and whitewashed history from continuing to harm Indigenous lands and Peoples, as well as Black, Latinx, Asian-American and all oppressed folks on Turtle Island.*

<https://www.truthsgiving.org/about>

Mutual Aid

Mutual Aid comes up frequently in these stories because this is the framework to escape the colonial capitalist system that is oppressing all of us now. Mutual Aid communities exist all over. You can search for “mutual aid” on the Internet and social media platforms. The website [Iowa Mutual Aid Network](https://iowamutualaid.org/) is an excellent resource. <https://iowamutualaid.org/>

You can read much more about my mutual aid story here: [Mutual Aid in the Midwest](#)

Dean Spade has written an excellent book, *Mutual Aid, Building Solidarity During This Crisis (And the Next)*.

Mutual Aid is important because it provides an alternative to the capitalism and white superiority that mainstream society is built upon. Mutual aid can help us *Walk a Path of Doing the Truth* as my friend Ronnie James wrote in [“Doing Truth When the World is Upside Down.”](#)

Mutual Aid is important because it truly builds community. These are troubled times with many people in despair, feeling hopeless. Mutual Aid communities help people help each other and restore a sense of self-worth. Opportunities to make a difference.



What we have is each other

It was not always this way, which proves it does not have to stay this way.

What we have is each other. We can and need to take care of each other. We may have limited power on the political stage, a stage they built, but we have the power of numbers.

Ronnie James

Ways of war

Mutual aid is not only a tool of survival, but also a tool of revolution.

*The more we take care of each other, the less they can fracture a community with their **ways of war***

Ronnie James



I've often written about my first meeting with Ronnie James as being Spirit led. February 2020, I posted an event to support the Wet'suwet'en peoples who were trying to stop a pipeline from being built through their territory. I didn't expect anyone to attend who wasn't already involved in this issue. Thank God, literally, Ronnie James, an Indigenous organizer, saw the event and joined us. He was surprised anyone beyond those he knew was aware of the struggles of the Wet'suwet'en. That meeting changed my life. It makes me sad to think I would have missed everything that came from this meeting if it had not occurred.



How I learned about Mutual Aid

Spirit led

Vigil for Wet'suwet'en

Ronnie James attends

- Indigenous organizer
- Mentor – teaching me about Mutual Aid

Queries about Mutual Aid

- How are we working to deal with existing chaos and preparing for further collapse?
- Do we provide for everyone'?
- What is our relationship with Mother Earth? Do we honor and conserve the resources we use?
- What systems of dominance, of vertical hierarchies are we involved in?
- Do we work to ensure there aren't vertical hierarchies in our communities, in our relationships with all our relatives?
- Do we have the courage to follow what the Spirit is saying to us? To not force those messages to conform to our existing beliefs and practices.
- How do we connect with communities beyond our Quaker meetings? What are we learning about spiritual connections beyond our meetinghouses? Are we sharing these spiritual lessons with others?

Some of my writing about Mutual Aid:

<https://quakersandreligiousocialism.com/mutual-aid/>

And my mutual aid booklet here: [Mutual Aid in the Midwest](#)

You can read much more about my mutual aid story here: [Mutual Aid in the Midwest](#)

There is an aspect of self-determination and ethical engagement in organizing to meet our peoples' material needs. There is a collective emotional lift in doing something worthwhile for our peoples' benefit, however short-lived that benefit might be. These spaces become intergenerational, diverse places of Indigenous joy, care and conversation, and these conversations can be affirming, naming, critiquing, as well as rejecting and pushing back against the current systems of oppression. This for me seems like the practice of movement-building that our respective radical practices have been engaged with for centuries.

Maynard, Robyn; Simpson, Leanne Betasamosake. Rehearsals for Living (Abolitionist Papers) (p. 39). Haymarket Books. Kindle Edition.

Building Relationships

What follows are some of my stories about how such relationships developed. It takes time to build these relationships, which is why it is important to begin now.

Guidelines

I begin with some general guidelines that I, as a White person, have learned about making connections with communities of Black, Indigenous, and other people of color (BIPOC).

This graphic summarizes some of what I have learned from my own experience. I learned much of this during the years I spent in the Kheprw Institute youth mentoring community in Indianapolis. A community of people of color. And these guidelines have been very helpful in the context of the last five years as I was led to connect with my Indigenous friends.

I also learned a great deal from participation in the American Friends Service Committee's (AFSC) Quaker Social Change Ministry program and recommend it. <https://www.afsc.org/quakersocialchange>

How to create connections between different communities or cultures?

- 🕒 Do NOT ask or expect to be taught
- 🗨️ Don't be a burden
- 👂 Listen deeply—this is how you learn
- 🙏 Do NOT offer suggestions/leadership until invited to do so
- 👉 When invited to do so, speak from your own experience
- 👤 Focus on building friendships
- 🕒 Be honest
- ✓ Accept being vulnerable

Jeff Kisling

Don't be a burden

From that initial meeting, Ronnie and I began to exchange text messages. Related to “don't be a burden”, text messaging is far less intrusive than phone conversations, for example.

Do NOT ask or expect to be taught

This can be one of those gray areas. There is a difference between expecting to be taught and accepting what someone is offering to teach you. Ronnie was/is very generous with his time and encouragement. He is what I would call a very effective organizer. He recognized our Wet'suwet'en vigil would be a chance to find allies for the work he does. Since then, I've seen how often, and how well he writes to educate others. And he always shows up. In the nearly three years I've known him, he and I have rarely missed being at our weekly food giveaway. And those times when he isn't there, it is often because of other things related to his activism. He is involved in many things besides our food project.

Listen deeply-this is how you learn

Think about what is being said. Learn the language, so to speak. Pay attention to body language and facial expressions. This is hard when people are wearing face masks, which are always required at our food project. No face mask, no participation. This is done to reduce the chance of any of us passing the virus on to others.

Observe common tasks and help do them. For example, every Saturday morning tables need to be set up outside, where the food boxes will be put for distribution. So do that if there is idle time. You don't need to ask for permission. It is expected that you will use your own initiative. Because of everyone being aware of what needs to be done, and doing it, our work is done really efficiently. As Ronnie says, at the end of the hour you will be tired, sweaty and feeling good. And that's true.

Do NOT offer suggestions/leadership until invited to do so

It can take a long time (months) to understand all that is involved in the work you are participating in. It has taken a lot of work, trial and error, for those involved in the community you are connecting with to get things to function well.

The rest of the list is self-explanatory. Accepting being vulnerable is likely the most difficult part of this. You are being vulnerable just by doing what it takes to join in the work, to show up. When uncomfortable things happen, they are often not your fault. Try not to take things personally.

Great Plains Action Society and Iowa Yearly Meeting (Conservative)

A number of Friends (Quakers) in the Midwest have had opportunities to work with the Great Plains Action Society (GPAS) and the people who are part of that organization. My first connection was being present at a panel discussion at Iowa Yearly Meeting (Conservative) about building bridges with Native Americans in 2017. Sikowis (Christine) Nobiss, Donnielle Wanatee and Peter Clay were on the panel. ([See: Iowa Panel Looks at Building Bridges with Native Americans | American Friends Service Committee](#))

Great Plains Action Society (GPAS)

Sikowis was involved in Indigenous Iowa, and Seeding Sovereignty, then moved on to establish the Great Plains Action Society (GPAS). My friends Ronnie James, Trisha Cax-Sep-Gu-Wiga Etringer, Mahmud Fitol, Regina Tsoisie, Foxy and Alton Onefeather, and Jessica Engelking are among [the people of GPAS](#).

I only mention that I took this photo as an example of building relationships. With time, people learn what you have to offer. During the Buffalo Rebellion Climate Conference we were all attending, there was a spontaneous opportunity for a group photo of GPAS. I was glad to be asked to take the photo.



photo: Jeff Kisling

Resist and Indigenize

GPAS started to build in 2014 and became an official non-profit in 2017 with two full-time staff, two part-time staff, and two youth interns. Founder, Sikowis Nobiss, who started organizing over twenty-five years ago during the Burnt Church Indigenous fisheries crisis in New Brunswick, Canada, saw that Iowa needed more Indigenous voices to speak up for the Earth. During the NoDAPL resistance movement in 2016, she created a platform for Great Plains Action Society to empower Indigenous voices in Iowa concerning extreme resource extraction perpetuated by the fossil fuel industry. During this fight, GPAS worked tirelessly in both Iowa and North Dakota, bridging the gap between Indigenous communities and rural landowners. This led GPAS to form Little Creek Camp, an Indigenous-led resistance hub in Iowa and to finally register as a 501(c)4 that is 100% Indigenous run. Our efforts have truly brought the voice and actions of Indigenous Peoples to the forefront of Iowa's climate movement, which is much needed in the most biologically colonized state in the country and the number one contributor to the dead zone in the Gulf of Mexico due to colonial-capitalist farming practices. By uplifting traditional Indigenous ecological knowledge, we are making it clear that Iowa needs to rematriate prairie, bring back first foods and increase Indigenous land stewardship.

Great Plains Action Society's Vision

"We are a collective of Indigenous organizers of the Great Plains working to resist and Indigenize colonial institutions, ideologies, and behaviors. Our homelands are located in the vast grassland of Turtle Island, situated between the Rocky Mountains and the Mississippi River and stretching from the Northern Tundra to the Gulf of Mexico."

Great Plains Action Society Mission Statement

Great Plains Action Society addresses the trauma Indigenous Peoples and our Earth have faced and works to prevent further colonial-capitalist violence through education, direct action, cultural revival, mutual aid, and political change.

Gatherings and actions

What follows is a history of my experiences with my Indigenous friends. Although each episode is with at least one person who is part of the Great Plains Action Society (GPAS), many are not official GPAS actions or events.

US Bank, Super Bowl weekend, 2/3/2018

February 3, 2018, Super Bowl weekend, Ed Fallon organized a van trip to Minneapolis to call attention to USBank's funding of fossil fuel projects. USBank's headquarters are in Minneapolis, and the game was played at the USBank stadium. Sikowis, Donnielle, Trisha and I were among those who attended.



Missing and Murdered Indigenous Relatives MMIR

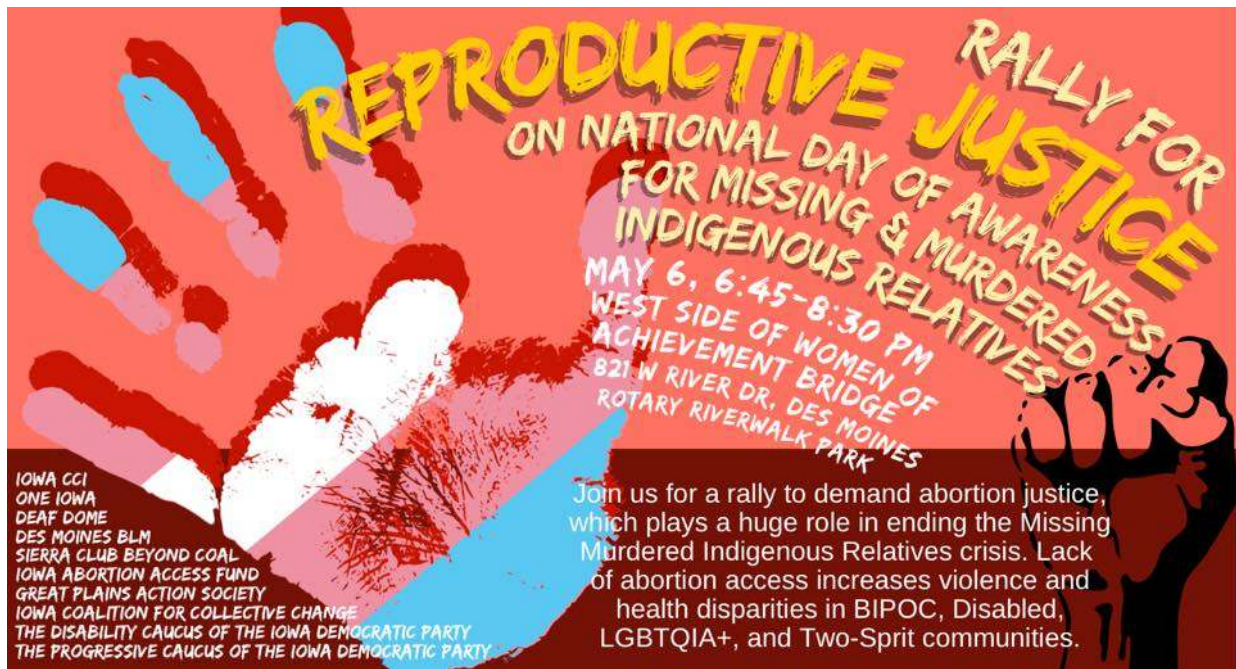
One lesson I learned from the trip to Minneapolis was to be aware of the interrelationships among justice issues. The epidemic of the kidnapping and murder of Indigenous women, men and children is something I had not known about prior to getting to know native people. But this happens to a shocking number of people. I heard a story about a family member from a new friend on the First Nation-Farmer Climate Unity March.

This is yet another consequence of building pipelines. Many are built near native lands—another example of environmental racism. The “man camps” of pipeline construction workers are thus found near native lands. Adding to the problem was that native law enforcement could not arrest nonnative people. Recent Federal legislation that several of us lobbied for has changed that.

When in Minneapolis, Sikowis Nobiss and Donnielle Wanatee both spoke about MMIR. During the First Nation-Farmer Climate Unity March, Foxy Onefeather carried this sign.



This spring, MMIR was part of a GPAS rally for reproductive justice.



This sign was erected at the event, with the Wells Fargo Arena in the background. Wells Fargo is one of the banks that fund pipelines.



First Nation-Farmer Climate Unity March, Sept 1-8, 2018

September 1 – 8, 2018, Sikowis, Donnielle, Trisha, Mahmud, Regina, Peter Clay (Iowa Quaker) and I and others participated in the [First Nation-Farmer Climate Unity March](#). We walked and camped together from Des Moines to Fort Dodge (ninety-four miles) along the path of the Dakota Access pipeline.

Some Iowa Quakers had worship sharing each morning of the March to support us. Also, each evening there was a discussion on various topics. My friend and Scattergood Friends School schoolmate and member of Iowa Yearly Meeting (Conservative), Lee Tesdell, talked about his progressive agricultural practices. Sikowis had something to say about Indigenous agriculture.



Lee Tesdell speaks during First Nation-Farmer Climate Unity March, 2018

The purpose of the March was to create a community of native and non-native people who began to know and trust each other so we could work on things of common concern. That was really successful, and we have done many things together since.



[First Nation-Farmer Climate Unity March website](#)

Lobbying Senator Grassley, December 2018

One of the first was when several of us from the March, including Sikowis (in the center of this photo), Iowa Quakers Shazi and Fox Knight, and I lobbied Senator Grassley's staff to support several bills related to native concerns.



Sunrise, Green New Deal, Des Moines, 2019

The Sunrise Movement was launched as a national campaign for a Green New Deal (GND) in 2017. From the beginning I heard my native friends talk about the importance of a GND to be Indigenous led. In 2019 Sunrise's Green New Deal tour began with a stop in Des Moines. There my friends Trisha Cax-Sep-Gu-Wiga Etringer and Lakasha Yooxot Likipt spoke about Indigenous leadership as a requirement for a GND.



Trisha, Lakasha and I at Sunrise Green New Deal Tour, Des Moines, 2019

National Network Assembly, summer 2019

The summer of 2019 Sikowis suggested I attend the National Network Assembly at the Des Moines YMCA Camp near Boone, Iowa, that she helped organize. I was aware that if I wanted to build on relationships with native peoples, I should respond when invited to do something like this. I don't usually attend conferences, but seeing this as one of those opportunities, I did attend. And I got a lot out of it. This was a conference for justice organizers.

Climate Crisis Parade in Des Moines, Feb 1, 2020

Many of us participated in the [Climate Crisis Parade](#) in Des Moines, Feb 1, 2020.



Wet'suwet'en Vigil, Feb 7, 2020, Des Moines

As I began to discuss above, in early 2020, I began to hear about the struggles of the Wet'suwet'en peoples in British Columbia, as they worked to prevent the construction of a liquid natural gas pipeline (Costal GasLink) through their pristine lands and waters. There was little being written about this in the mainstream media, so supporters were asked to write about what was happening on our social media platforms.

This photo is from a post about a rally I organized to support the Wet'suwet'en in Des Moines on February 7, 2020. Iowa Friend Peter Clay attended.



As I wrote earlier, I'm sure my meeting with Ronnie James was spirit-led. We've become good friends in the three years since this Wet'Suwet'en rally. Ronnie is one of the people involved in GPAS, the person who leads the Mutual Aid efforts.

We are both at the food project almost every Saturday morning. Although it doesn't take much space here, DMMA is the focus of my justice work. And I have found it to be healing. At the end of this is **A Love Letter to Y'all** about the work of DMMA.

This is a link to a booklet I wrote about the Wet'suwet'en. [Wet'suwet'en and LANDBACK](#)

Indigenous People's Days (annual)


As often happens, once people know I love photography, I get invited to events for that purpose (even though I'd want to go, anyway). This photo of Sikowis was taken at last year's [Indigenous People's Day](#). She's holding a Great Plains Action Society bag.



“Fourth of He Lies” (annual)


Another event where I took photos was a gathering on the State Capitol grounds related to racist statues. On July 4th, 2020 and 2021 we gathered for the “Fourth of He Lies”. In this photo on one of those days, Sikowis is speaking at the Pioneer statue. Ronnie James and Donnielle Wanatee also attended.

**STOP
WHITEWASHING
GENOCIDE & SLAVERY**



**BRING BACK CRITICAL RACE THEORY & REMOVE
MONUMENTS TO WHITE SUPREMACY IN IOWA**

July 4th, 2021 ^ 1 pm-3 pm
West Terrace ^ Iowa Capitol
1007 E Grand Ave ^ Des Moines, IA

 Put Your
Logo Here



FOURTH OF HE LIES
Community Potluck

Sunday, July 3, 2022
Cheatom Park
1100 Day St, Des Moines
4:00 - 7:00 PM

Join us for a community potluck hosted by Iowa organizations while we speak truths about July 4th. Plenty of food, music and fun will be provided as local leaders uplift issues they are facing in their communities.

Bring chairs, blankets, and fun stuff!
Children are welcome!

**How smooth must be the language of the whites, when
they can make right look like wrong, and wrong like right.**
- BLACK HAWK, SAUK -

Iowa CCI, Cedar Rapids Sunrise Movement, Onelowa, Great Plains Action Society, Satanic Iowa, Buffalo Rebellion, Iowa Abortion Access Fund, The Iowa Jane Collective, DSM Black Liberation Movement, Iowa Coalition for Collective Change

December 2021 Summit Carbon pipeline

Last December, Sikowis asked me to come to Ames to take photos of a rally at the office of Summit Carbon, one of the companies that want to build a CO2 pipeline.



Buffalo Rebellion



I'm blessed to have been invited to join the newly formed Buffalo Rebellion, a new coalition of Iowa organizations that are growing a movement for climate action that centers racial and economic justice. Peter Clay, my friend and also a member of Iowa Yearly Meeting (Conservative) was also invited.

Buffalo Rebellion is a new coalition of Iowa organizations that are growing a movement for climate action that centers racial and economic justice. The Earth Day Rally will be an afternoon of honoring Mother Earth through sharing stories and visions for climate justice and taking action together for a world that puts people and the planet before profits for a few.

Following the Earth Day Rally, Buffalo Rebellion will be holding two days of immersive training to develop 100 grassroots leaders who will build local teams to take on climate justice issues in their community and come together to create a thriving state-wide movement.

Formed in 2021, Buffalo Rebellion is comprised of seven Iowa organizations: Great Plains Action Society, DSM Black Liberation Movement, Iowa Migrant Movement for Justice, Sierra Club Beyond Coal, Cedar Rapids Sunrise Movement, SEIU Local 199, and Iowa CCI.

Link: [Buffalo Rebellion](#)

Iowa Citizens for Community Improvement (Iowa CCI)

Iowa Citizens for Community improvement is very active in environmental and many other concerns and a member of the Buffalo Rebellion. “We talk, we act, we get it done” is their motto. I’ve participated in several environment related actions led by my friend Jake Grobe, ICCL’s Climate Justice Organizer. He has focused on getting MidAmerican Energy to close their five coal burning plants in Iowa. And Jake is very active in the resistance to carbon (CO2) pipelines.

This is a photo I took of Sikowis and Jake at this summer’s Earth Day Rally in Des Moines. After the speakers we marched to the offices of MidAmerican Energy.

In an example of interconnections, the mural below is by GPAS and made during the First Nation Farmer-Climate Unity March in 2018. In another connection, Jake often comes to our Mutual Aid food project.



Sikowis Nobiss and Jake Grobe at Earth Day Rally 2022

EARTH DAY RALLY

Join up for an afternoon of honoring Mother Earth through collective action. We will gather for lunch with local food trucks at Cowles Commons, rally around stories and visions for climate justice, and take action together for a world that puts people and the planet before corporate profit.



Mural by Great Plains Action Society and made by the Indigenous crew of the Iowa First Nation/Farmer Climate Unity March in September 2018. For more information email iowaBuffaloRebellion@gmail.com

The Buffalo Rebellion coalition in action

The resistance to carbon pipelines continues. This flyer and the photo I took below are about an action by the Buffalo Rebellion at the time a national meeting of those promoting carbon pipelines was occurring in Des Moines. In the photo Jake is speaking using a bullhorn, in the street that we blocked temporarily to call attention to the pipeline meeting. He said these people (in the cars) are impatient and angry, but we're angry and impatient, too, at the decades of inaction to respond to climate devastation.

RALLY AGAINST FALSE CLIMATE SOLUTIONS
CARBON CAPTURE LIARS,
WE DON'T WANT YOU HERE!

NO CO2 PIPELINES
GREAT PLAINS ACTION SOCIETY

November 9
1 PM -3 PM
Cowles Commons
221 Walnut St
Des Moines

Join thousands of Iowans to tell Big Ag, Big Oil, and corrupt politicians to stop siphoning public tax dollars into the false and dangerous climate solution of carbon capture and sequestration! Register at bit.ly/stopccsliars

Organized by Buffalo Rebellion



Jake Grobe (ICCI) speaks against carbon pipelines in Des Moines, Nov 2022

Forced Assimilation/Indian Boarding Schools and Quakers

One of the tensions between Indigenous peoples and Quakers is the tragic history of forced assimilation of over 100,000 native children in the Indian residential schools. And the deaths and abuses that occurred there. Some Friends were involved in such schools. Several times I was led to speak about this with Sikowis, Ronnie and other Indigenous friends. We could not develop much of a relationship if this went unacknowledged. It is important to not do this until you have a relationship with who you talk to about this.

This became personal when one of my friends introduced me to his teenage son. I could not imagine the conversations they must have had about forced assimilation. Continue to have as the remains of thousands of children are located on the grounds of so many of the sites of forced assimilation.

Last year I was clerk of Iowa Yearly Meeting (Conservative)'s Peace and Social Concerns Committee. The committee had a small budget to support organizations doing justice work. Last year we were led to a choice of rather than giving token amounts to a number of organizations, to instead see if an opportunity arose to give the entire budget to make an impact on the work that presented itself. I believe because of our discussions about the residential schools, Sikowis asked if Quakers could support showings of the film "They Found Us" that had been made about the residential school of her nation, the George Gordon First Nation. Our Peace and Social Concerns Committee gladly agreed to donate our budget to this.

<https://quakersandreligioussocialism.com/2022/04/13/they-found-us/>

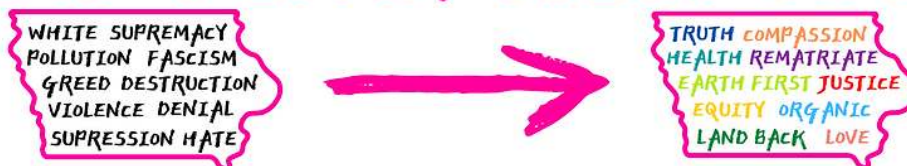
Orange Shirt Day is Canada's Day of Truth and Reconciliation—a time of mourning and remembrance.

Great Plains Action Society has felt this pain firsthand, as many of our close family members attended these schools, and we are rising to meet the needs of our communities. Last year, in Sioux City, we hosted a large community feast and ceremony to honor nine children whose bodies were reMatriated back to Sicangu Oyate lands from the grounds of the Carlisle Boarding School. We have also raised funds to help one of our relatives, Curt Young, show his film, *They Found Us*, about the search for children's bodies at the George Gordon First Nation. If we can raise enough funding, we would like to get his film shown throughout Iowa and the Midwest.

Your Invitation to be an Ally

A fundamental principle of justice work is to make sure that your (i.e. ally) work is directed by those impacted by injustice. “Nothing about us without us.” Great Plains Action Society’s Open Letter Campaign is such an opportunity, an invitation for non native peoples to support their work.

NEW YEAR, NEW IOWA



AN OPEN LETTER CAMPAIGN TO RACISTS AND CLIMATE CHANGE DENIERS TO END DUSTY, IGNORANT ATTITUDES AND ACTIONS

Resolutions are not just for January! As we are gathering momentum for the daunting work 2022 has in store for us, we would like to **invite you to join us** in ushering in a New Year/New Iowa. Things need to change. The harm we are doing to the environment is devastating. The attack on truth in public education is a contributing factor to our attempted erasure. The ongoing use of racist mascots harms children, and perpetuates dehumanization. Iowa has a lot of issues. The work we need to do to make Iowa better is not going to be easy. But it can be done, and the best chance we have is working together. And that is why we are coming to you with our Open Letter Campaign.

Over the course of 2022, we will be sharing with you Open Letters we're addressing to those who are in positions of power. We're doing this in the format of an Open Letter for a few reasons. First, these issues are important, and this is an opportunity to explain the issues to a broader audience. The more people who understand what is going on, the better. Second, we need numbers. We are mighty, but we are few. The more people we have putting pressure on those with power, the more likely we are to see results. And finally, it's something that you can do that doesn't require much of you. Although it's only February, 2022 can already feel exhausting. The thought of having to leave home to do things can be overwhelming, even frightening as COVID is still a very real threat. But this is something you can do from home, without investing energy you are probably running low on. Working with us can be as simple as tweeting out a hashtag. But it can be more too, if you'd like. It's an opportunity to write the words that express your frustration and join them in an agitated choir. This is a chance to remind yourself that you deserve to be heard and that you are capable of taking action that affects change.

We have always appreciated when allies and accomplices approach us to ask how they can be of help. Things can be complicated, and it is considerate to be mindful of how one engages. This is absolutely a situation that we request your help with. We need your voices to make something happen. Our land, our water, our children are under attack. The truth is under attack. We need to stand strong together to create the change that so desperately needs to happen. This Open Letter Campaign is a means for us to unite our voices to call for change. You are welcome to use the words we share, or to express your own. If all you have it in you to do is share an article or use a hashtag, every little bit helps. If you have letters of your own you'd wish to share with us, we'd love to hear from you! Again, we look forward to putting our voices together with you, to call for the New Year/New Iowa we so desperately need. Thank you.

The New year, New Iowa Open Letter Campaign is led by Jessica Engelking. If you have ideas or thoughts to share, please contact her at jengelking@greatplainsaction.org

We look forward to putting our voices together with you, to call for the New Year/New Iowa we so desperately need. Thank you.



<https://www.greatplainsaction.org/newyearnewiowa>

One of the Open Letters I've been involved with is Truth and Healing with Friends



Jessica Engelking of the Great Plains Action Society is the contact person for the Open Letters campaign. Fortunately, I met Jessica when we both attended the Buffalo Rebellion Climate Justice Summit this summer. A lot of networking occurred at the summit.

When she asked what Quakers were doing related to the Indian Boarding Schools, I was very glad to share the Friends Committee on National Legislation's letter writing tools. And specifically, to the one to support the establishment of a Truth and Healing Commission on Indian Boarding Schools. This became one of the Open Letters of the GPAS.

Support the Establishment of a Truth and Healing Commission on Indian Boarding Schools: Friends Committee on National Legislation (FCNL)

As children are returning to school, we are reminded that school has not always been a safe place for Native children. For many years, Native children were taken from their homes and placed in government and religious run institutions with the aim of stripping away their Native language, culture, and identity. We are only now beginning the painful process of bringing home the children left in unmarked graves at the boarding schools they were sent to ([U.S. report identifies burial sites linked to boarding schools for Native Americans](#)). We are still working on healing the damage of boarding school and intergenerational trauma ([American Indian Boarding Schools Haunt Many: NPR](#)). Healing from the damage caused by the boarding school system will require effort by not just those harmed, but the institutions that did the harming. There is great work being done by our comrades at the Friends Committee On National Legislation ([Native Americans | Friends Committee On National Legislation](#)). For this edition of our Open Letter Campaign, we are directing you to a [letter](#) from our friends at FCNL to help you in urging your representatives to support the Truth and Healing Commission on Indian Boarding School Policies in the United States Act (S. 2907/H.R. 5444).

The following is courtesy our much appreciated Quaker friends

Support the Establishment of a Truth and Healing Commission on Indian Boarding Schools

48662 actions taken

1338 needed to reach ...

It is long overdue for the United States to acknowledge the historic trauma of the Indian boarding school era. In the 19th and early 20th centuries, Christian churches collaborated with the government to create hundreds of boarding schools for Native American children. The conditions at these schools, some of them Quaker-run, were unspeakable.

Now we must work with tribal nations to advance congressional efforts to establish a federal commission to formally investigate boarding school policy and develop recommendations for the government to take further action. Although the wrongs committed at these institutions can never be made right, we can start the truth, healing, and reconciliation process for the families and communities affected as we work to right relationship with tribal nations.

Remind your members of Congress of their responsibility to tribal nations and urge them to support the Truth and Healing Commission on Indian Boarding School Policies in the United States Act (S. 2907/H.R. 5444).

Act now!

Enter your contact information to be connected to your elected officials.

When entering your address below, please click on your address when it appears in the list. If you do not click on your address from the list, you may encounter an error.

First Name

First Name

Last Name

Last Name

Email

Email

Email Opt-in (required) ⓘ

Yes

No

Street Address: Begin typing & select your address. Do not include apt/unit. PLEASE LOOK CAREFULLY & click the correct address.

Street Address, City, and State

If you are encountering issues with your address, please email us at support@fcn.org.

Submit

<https://fcn.quorum.us/campaign/35660/>

National FCNL Network Mobilizes for Indigenous Justice

A diverse cohort of grassroots advocates are driving support for a Truth and Healing bill to address the Native boarding school era



By Alex Frandsen and Bobby Trice | November 17, 2022

>> [Native Americans](#)

Quaker Lobbying at Work

Carla Main wasn't the only Quaker to kickstart their advocacy during FCNL's August Recess campaign, which encouraged in-district lobbying on the Truth and Healing Commission bill and other issues during the August congressional recess.

Like Carla, Jeff Kisling from Iowa also joined the August Recess campaign. After the first FCNL briefing, Jeff shared FCNL's action alert with the indigenous-led Great Plains Action Society who encouraged their supporters to use this tool to call on lawmakers to pass the Truth and Healing Commission bill. Building on this mobilization, Jeff worked with other Quaker advocates in the state to organize lobby visits on the bill with Iowa senators' offices.

As another way to encourage the passage of this legislation, David and Jean Hansen of Ames Meeting, Iowa Yearly Meeting (Conservative) and my friend activist Rodger Routh, and I went to the Des Moines office of US Senator Joni Ernst. Jessica Engelking of the GPAS had planned to attend but was unable to do so.



Lobbying US Senator Ernst to support legislation to create a Truth and Healing Commission on Indian Boarding Schools

The Great Plains Action Society recently published their Theory of Change. <https://www.greatplainsaction.org/single-post/great-plains-action-society-theory-of-change>.

MUTUAL AID is one of the METHODS.

Great Plains Action Society addresses the trauma Indigenous Peoples and our Earth have faced and works to prevent further colonial-capitalist violence through education, direct action, cultural revival, **mutual aid**, and political change. We believe that Indigenous ideologies and practices are the antitheses of colonial capitalism, and we deploy these tools to fight and build on our vision—tools that are deeply embedded in a culture of resistance.

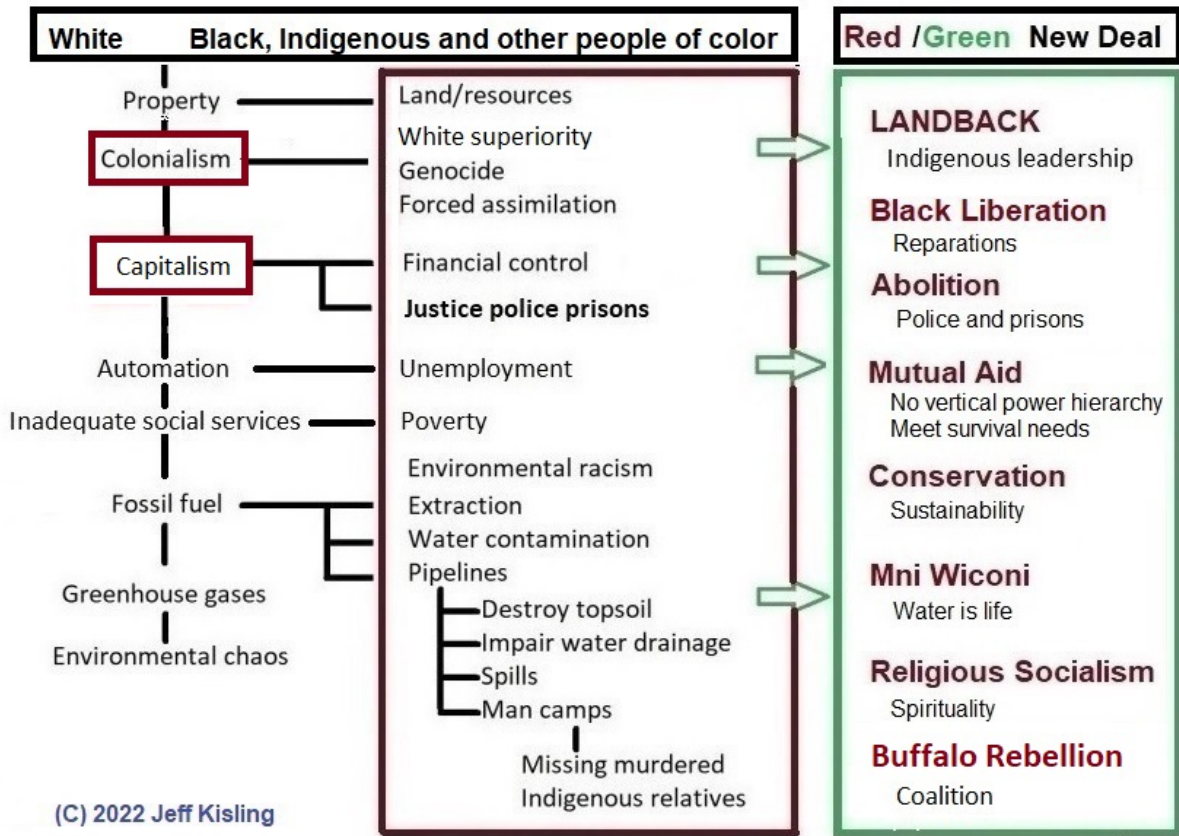
Indigenous Peoples in the US and around the world have created a culture of resistance, built on the frontlines, that is now a way of life. It can be found in our dancing, singing, clothing, art, and in our political motivations. For instance, the American Indian Movement (A.I.M.) song was created out of the Red Power Movement and is sung at many of our cultural events and in our movement spaces, which are often one and the same. It began with the need to protect our homes and way of life from settler invaders, colonial militias, and imperialist governments. There is over a 500-year history of Indigenous resistance to the violent nature of colonial-capitalist genocidal and extractive practices. As stewards of the land, our ancestors saw right away that settler invaders, who were directly harming us, were also harming the environment and throwing the ecosystem off balance. The resistance is ongoing as long as genocide and colonization are perpetuated by the nation-state and its settler citizens. To be in a constant state of resistance is traumatic, hence why we suffer from intergenerational and historical trauma. Yet, it is necessary to protect our land, our people, and our ways from colonial-capitalist forces.

Great Plains Action Society Mechanism of Engagement



<https://www.greatplainsaction.org/single-post/great-plains-action-society-theory-of-change>

I've been working on this graphic for several years, to visualize the connections I see. Mutual Aid and the Buffalo Rebellion are part of this.



A Love Letter to Y'all (a thread)

One year ago yesterday Des Moines Mutual Aid participated in a march protesting the potential for war or increased hostilities with Iran that followed the fallout of the assassination of Qassem Soleimani by drone strike in Baghdad.

This was our first “public” event since adopting the name Des Moines Mutual Aid, a name we gave our crew during our growing work with our relatives at the houseless camps throughout the city and our help with coordinating a weekly free grocery store that has a 50 year history, founded by the Des Moines Chapter of The Black Panther Party For Self Defense.

A year ago we started laying the foundation for work we had no idea what was coming.

As we were adjusting our work with the camps and grocery re-distribution in response to the Covid-19 pandemic, both that continued to grow in need and importance, the police continued their jobs and legacy of brutality and murder.

This nation exploded in righteous rage in response to the pig murders of Breonna Taylor and George Floyd.

DMMA realized we were in a position to organize a bail fund to keep our fighters out of jail, both to keep the streets alive as a new phase of The Movement was being born, and because jails are a hotspot of Covid-19 spread.

Not to mention the racial and economic oppression that is the cash bail system.

In the past year DMMA has expanded it's work in multiple directions and gained many partners and allies.

We partnered with the Des Moines Black Liberation Movement (@DesMoinesBLM) to create the DSM BLM Rent Relief initiative to help keep families in their homes in the midst of a pandemic and the winter.

The camp work has grown exponentially, but is being managed with our collaboration with Edna Griffin Mutual Aid ([@egma_dsm](#)), DSM Black Liberation Movement ([@DesMoinesBLM](#)), and The Great Plains Action Society ([@PlainsAction](#)).

The bail fund remains successful because of desire from the public and a partnership with Prairielands Freedom Fund ([@prairielandsff](#)) (formerly The Eastern Iowa Community Bond Project).

The weekly free food store has maintained itself, carrying on the legacy it inherited.

Every one of our accomplishments are directly tied to the support of so many people donating time, talent, and funds to the work. We are overwhelmed with all of your support and hope you feel we are honoring what we promised.

All of these Mutual Aid projects are just a few of many that this city has created in the last year in response to the many crises we face, not only confronting the problems and fulfilling the needs directly in front of us, but creating a sustainable movement that will be capable of responding to what's next and shaping our collective futures as we replace the systems that fail us.

These last 12 months have been wild and a real test of all of our capabilities to collectively organize.

But it is clear that we as a city have what it takes to do what is needed in 2021, no matter what crisis is next.

Much gratitude to you all.

In love and rage,
Des Moines Mutual Aid

Originally tweeted by Des Moines Mutual Aid ([@dsm_mutualAid](#)) on [January 6, 2021](#).

0. We believe in working shoulder to shoulder and standing in solidarity with all oppressed communities.

We ourselves are oppressed, and our mutual aid work is a fight for our collective liberation. We do not believe in a top-down model of charity. Instead, we contrast our efforts at horizontal mutual aid, the fostering of mutually beneficial relationships and communities, to dehumanizing and colonizing charity.

1. We believe in community autonomy

We believe that the communities we live and organize in have been largely excluded from state social services, but intensely surveilled and policed by the state repressive apparatus. Capitalism is fundamentally unable to meet people's needs. We want to build self-sustaining communities that are independent of the capitalist state, both materially and ideologically, and can resist its repression.

2. We are police and prison abolitionists.

Abolition and the mutual aid that we practice are inextricably linked. We don't rely on capitalist institutions or the police to do our work. We believe in building strong and resilient communities which make police obsolete, including community systems of accountability and crisis intervention

3. We work to raise the political consciousness of our communities.

Part of political education is connecting people's lived experiences to a broader political perspective. Another component is working to ensure that people can meet their basic needs. It is difficult to organize for future liberation when someone is entrenched in day-to-day struggle.

4. We have open disagreements with each other about ideas and practices.

We believe there is no formula for resolving our ideological differences other than working towards our common aims, engaging with each other in a comradely manner, and respecting one another, whether or not we can hash out disagreements in the process.

POINTS OF UNITY

**DES MOINES
MUTUAL AID**

Resources

You can read much more about my mutual aid story here: [Mutual Aid in the Midwest](#)

This is a link to a booklet I wrote about the Wet'suwet'en: [Wet'suwet'en and LANDBACK](#)

First Nation Famer Climate Unity March website: [First Nation-Farmer Climate Unity March](#)

Great Plains Action Society

Web – greatplainsaction.org

FB – [@GreatPlainsActionSociety](https://www.facebook.com/GreatPlainsActionSociety)

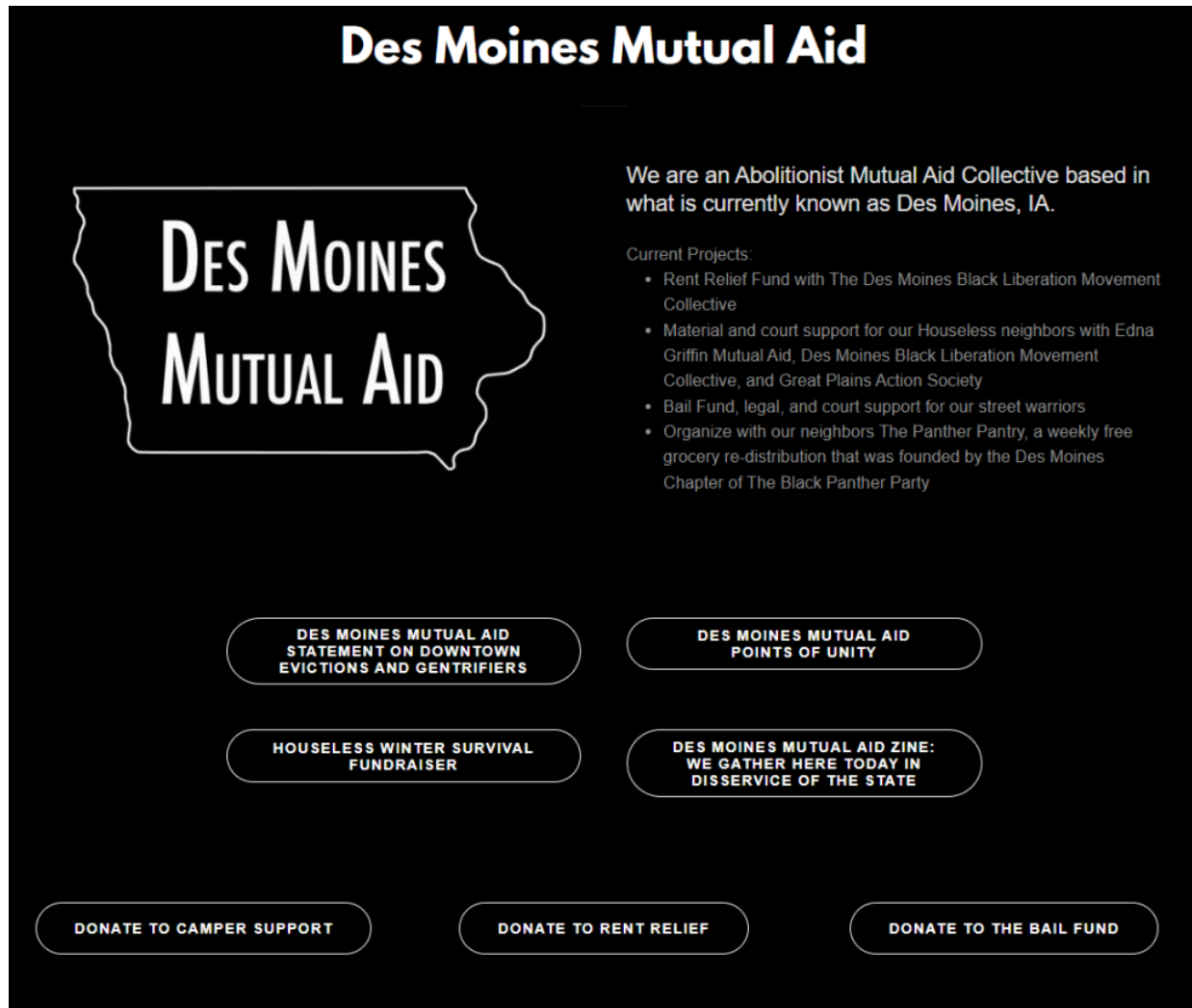
IG – [@greatplainsactionsociety](https://www.instagram.com/greatplainsactionsociety)

Tw – [@PlainsAction](https://twitter.com/PlainsAction)

Des Moines Mutual Aid

Facebook – <https://www.facebook.com/DesMoinesMutualAid/>

Iowa Mutual Aid Network – <https://iowamutualaid.org/>



Des Moines Mutual Aid

We are an Abolitionist Mutual Aid Collective based in what is currently known as Des Moines, IA.

Current Projects:

- Rent Relief Fund with The Des Moines Black Liberation Movement Collective
- Material and court support for our Houseless neighbors with Edna Griffin Mutual Aid, Des Moines Black Liberation Movement Collective, and Great Plains Action Society
- Bail Fund, legal, and court support for our street warriors
- Organize with our neighbors The Panther Pantry, a weekly free grocery re-distribution that was founded by the Des Moines Chapter of The Black Panther Party

DES MOINES MUTUAL AID STATEMENT ON DOWNTOWN EVICTIONS AND GENTRIFIERS

DES MOINES MUTUAL AID POINTS OF UNITY

HOUSELESS WINTER SURVIVAL FUNDRAISER

DES MOINES MUTUAL AID ZINE: WE GATHER HERE TODAY IN DISSERVICE OF THE STATE

DONATE TO CAMPER SUPPORT

DONATE TO RENT RELIEF

DONATE TO THE BAIL FUND

<https://iowamutualaid.org/des-moines-mutual-aid>



**Iowa Citizens for
Community Improvement**

We talk. We act. We get it done.

<https://www.iowacci.org/>

Buffalo Rebellion

Facebook – <https://www.facebook.com/IowaBuffaloRebellion/>

Quakers and Religious Socialism

Intersection of Mutual Aid, Abolition and Socialism

Home – <https://quakersandreligiousocialism.com/>

Mutual Aid – <https://quakersandreligiousocialism.com/mutual-aid/>

Buffalo Rebellion – <https://quakersandreligiousocialism.com/buffalo-rebellion/>

Abolition – <https://quakersandreligiousocialism.com/abolition/>

Forced Assimilation – <https://quakersandreligiousocialism.com/forced-assimilation/>

Friends Committee on National Legislation (FCNL)

FCNL – <https://www.fcnl.org/>

Native Americans – <https://www.fcnl.org/issues/native-americans>

We need to be careful when we talk about humility. The kind of humility this work brings isn't the kind that would have us reject or repress our gifts. This kind of false humility leads us to oppress each other in the name of preventing pridefulness. This happens far too often. Real, life-giving humility means living up to the light that we have been given without judgment of how bright or dim that light is. False humility is hiding this light under a bushel for fear of jealousy or judgment. The challenge is to be faithful right where we are—no more, no less. This takes courage. To be faithful, we have to make space.

Prophets, Midwives, and Thieves: Reclaiming the Ministry of the Whole by Noah Baker
Merrill