



HOUSING JUSTICE LEAGUE NEWSLETTER

August 2022

TENANT WORKING GROUP AND EVICTION DEFENSE WORKING GROUP JOIN TOGETHER FOR CANVASSING AT ROYAL OAKS APARTMENTS

by Graham

This month, members of the Tenant Working Group and Eviction Defense Working Group came together to canvas Royal Oaks apartments, a run down apartment complex just outside the perimeter on Atlanta's Southwest side. Our purpose was to find tenant leaders within the complex who are ready to fight back against the property owner and management.

The conditions at Royal Oaks are egregious: plumbing issues are rampant; air conditioning is frequently not working; windows are left broken or boarded up; the pool, playground, and basketball court are completely unusable; rats and other pests infest tenants' living spaces; and some buildings are left completely vacant and abandoned. Last year, almost 200 code violations were found on the property. However, despite this indefensible neglect, management continues to raise

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rents and file evictions. The Eviction Defense team and the Tenant Working Group have been working to help tenants organize for better conditions and lower rents in the complex since early this year. Now, we are looking to bring tenants from Royal Oaks into HJL.

The canvassing was a great success: together, we were able to knock on every door in the complex within about an hour and a half. Previously, when we have had smaller numbers of door knockers, we had to go out multiple days in a week to cover that kind of ground. Tenants were overwhelmingly fed up with the conditions, and we expect to see several of them at our upcoming mass meeting and Tenant Working Group meetings.

This canvassing day was also a great step towards greater coordination between

the Eviction Defense Working Group and the Tenant Working Group. We believe that cooperation between our working groups will strengthen HJL and will make our organizing efforts much more fruitful.

AN UPDATE FROM THE EVICTION DEFENSE WORKING GROUP

by Josue

Throughout the last couple of months, the Eviction Defense team has focused on creating a more supportive hotline that can cultivate sustainable tenant organizing. They have had long ongoing conversations with the Tenant Working Group on better ways to get tenants engaged and begin the path to organizing. Reflective conversations are a common practice at their weekly meetings that allow



EVICTION
DEFENSE
WORKING
GROUP MEETS
EVERY TUESDAY
AT 5PM ON
ZOOM.

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space for change. A long-term member of the eviction defense team, Graham, reflects on the changes that have happened since joining in 2019: "Back then, we were mostly just focused on distributing ED manuals, and we were not really on the ground in apartment complexes trying to organize."

However, the shift happened at the start of the pandemic when "there was a shift focus to the hotline, " and "there was a newfound emphasis on organizing." Thus, their work is rooted in an understanding that there are many ways to organize alongside tenants and that progress isn't linear.

Despite the work evolving throughout the years, what remains the same is the ED team spirit that fuels commitment to learn and struggle alongside tenants and other organizers. In response to the question of what keeps him tied to the work, Anh-ton, another volunteer with the working group, declared, "Fighting for housing as a human right, and all of the people I'm fighting with!" Anh-ton's response echoes many who believe in the necessity of forming a community. The sense of community must be strengthened in order to ensure that tenants can trust us and to commit to long-term

organizing. After all, we can not expect tenants to trust us without listening to them, evolving in response to their needs, and most importantly, having boots on the ground canvassing and engaging with community members.

POLITICAL EDUCATION RECOMMENDATIONS

by Josue

My recommendation this month is an episode of *Millennials Are Killing Capitalism* entitled "We Make Our Community By Defending It." The podcast features Tracy Rosenthal, a co-founder of the Los Angeles Tenants union. Tracy goes into detail about issues that unhoused people in Los Angeles are dealing with, issues surrounding direct service providers, and the organizing efforts of the LA Tenants Union and the Autonomous Tenants Union Network. It is a great listen as it reaffirms many issues that have come up in our working groups' conversations. The podcast might not offer direct answers on how to confront issues, but listening to someone in a different state fighting for similar issues, gave me hope and energy to keep



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[The podcast can be found here](#), and it is also available on Apple Podcasts.



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