

# UUJEC Economic Justice Spotlight

## Jefferson Unitarian Church, Golden, Colorado

Jefferson Unitarian Church in Golden Colorado is working with a group called the Community Action Network accomplishing important community work that focuses on housing, poverty, and nourishment. Their focus is community change, which is what many Unitarian Universalist places of worship are involved in communities across the country. We're happy to feature them and their life-changing work.

***Please be concise, in 300 words or less, what results or changes have you noticed because of your activity?***

Our work on economic Justice at Jefferson Unitarian Church is embedded throughout many of our justice teams, including Housing and Poverty, Food and Nourishment, the Unitarian Universalist Service Committee, and the Community Action Network (CAN). Here we highlight the Community

Action Network, which has systemic change through community organizing as its focus.



Throughout our justice efforts, we have an expectation that our members and leaders will work in partnership with outside organizations to increase our leverage. CAN was originally known as Just Neighboring and focused on direct service in Edgewater, one of the lowest socio-economic communities in the

metro area with the lowest performing schools and a higher immigrant population.

We helped support a weekly homeless breakfast, tutored reading with primary students with the goal of getting them up to grade level by the end of third grade, worked in a bi-weekly food bank for seniors, and helped with yard cleanup designed to help seniors stay in their homes. After several years of direct service, we decided expand our work with a focus on creating systemic change to address issues at a higher level. We chose to become an organizing congregation in partnership with Together Colorado, a PICO affiliated community organizing group with nearly 40 years of history in Denver and Colorado.

As part of our membership in TC, they provided us with a community organizer to meet with us and guide us in our efforts. (As an aside, the organizer liked JUC enough that she became a member.) Using the PICO community organizing model we engaged in 150 conversations with church members to find out what issues were impacting our community. We focused within Jefferson County where our church is located to give us greater impact by connecting Jefferson County residents with Jefferson County elected officials on the issues impacting our neighbors. After extensive congregational input, we chose the issues of affordable housing/homelessness and mental health.



***Please be concise, in 300 words or less, how is the leadership of your congregation involved in your economic justice work?***

Our Associate Minister, Rev. Eric Banner, heads the entire Justice Council. He also attends all the Community Action Network meetings, providing support and input. The past two years, he has worked to bring together a group of Faith Leaders in Jefferson County to create a larger voice for justice. He also participates in direct service activities, such as Senior Cleanup in Edgewater and Habitat for Humanity. Our Senior Minister, Rev. Wendy Williams, is a strong supporter. She references having a spiritual center with a civic circumference. She participates in Jeff County Communities That Care as a member of the Key Leaders Board.

This is a community-change process for reducing youth violence, alcohol and tobacco, and delinquency. Two other members of the congregation are on the Community Board. We pay 0.5% of our annual church budget, more than \$4,000/year, in membership dues to Together Colorado. The board has supported our efforts by making sure that this amount was worked into our annual budget. JUC has also worked hard to become a Fair Share Congregation, with the support of the board and the congregation. Two JUC members also serve on the leadership board for Together Colorado.

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We held a Jefferson County Commissioners Candidate Forum in 2016 focusing on candidates' positions on affordable housing and mental health funding. Several candidates who reflect our values were elected. With Together Colorado, we held a petition drive and got out the vote campaign to support an increased Minimum Wage in Colorado in 2016. This passed, resulting in an increase from \$8.41/hr to \$12/hr by 2020. We partnered with the Heading Home Permanent Supportive Housing Subcommittee in a campaign to persuade Jefferson County commissioners to continue accepting HUD funds. JUC members called and wrote dozens of letters and emails. Over 30 church members attended the county commissioners hearing in 2017, which helped to persuade all three commissioners to vote to continue accepting HUD funds.

Before the campaign it looked like two commissioners were going to vote against this. Because of this, our county continues to receive \$1.5M in federal affordable housing grants each year, leveraging private investment dollars for a \$4M per year annual affordable housing impact. We held a public forum on mental health/emotional wellness at school. Due to tight school budgets, Social Emotional Learning Specialists in Jefferson County Schools were in danger of being eliminated. After this, the school district announced that the positions would not be cut.



LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS®  
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We co-hosted a School Board Candidate Forum with the League of Women Voters highlighting mental health in schools. The candidates who

support our values were elected. We are currently supporting amendments to the Colorado constitution for the fall election. One amendment would increase funding for PreK-12 education spending by \$1.6B by increasing Colorado state taxes for those earning over \$150,000 annually. (Colorado is currently 41st in the country in school funding.) A second amendment would cap interest on Payday Loans at 36%. Members testify at city council meetings regarding affordable housing. Having positive voices at those hearings greatly increases the chances of a positive vote.

This article, provided by incoming administrator for UUJEC Christopher D. Sims, was written with information provided by Jefferson Memorial Unitarian Church's Jill Armstrong. Pictures were found at the Jefferson Memorial Unitarian Church website and on Google images. Jill can be reached for questions at [jarm444@gmail.com](mailto:jarm444@gmail.com).

### ***Jefferson Unitarian Church Additional Resources***

Website: [www.jeffersonunitarian.org](http://www.jeffersonunitarian.org)

JUC Community Action Network: <http://jeffersonunitarian.org/ministries/justice/juc-can/>