



**VALLEY INTERFAITH ACTION**

# Impact Report 2022-2023



## **Dear Community Leaders, Residents, and Institutional Members,**

On March 21st, at Bridgewater Church of the Brethren, we heard these words from the Reverend Jennifer Scarr:

*“Here on the hill it’s easy to see where we are – hugged by the Blue Ridge and the Allegheny Mountains, nestled in the Shenandoah Valley where generations have come seeking peace, a place for their families to thrive and put down roots.*

*Where families have been torn apart by slavery and civil war, where grief runs deep and winding like the Shenandoah River.*

*Where a resilient people have come together to overcome challenges like fighting for public schools and establishing a poultry co-op...*

*As Valley Interfaith Action we are living into the vision of our ancestors to till the soil and plant seeds so that future generations will reap a mighty bounty in this place.*

*This future bounty requires a present day organization that can build, wield, and maintain power, so that we can act on our collective values consistently and persistently over time.”*

Her words marked the opening of the founding of Valley Interfaith Action (VIA), a broad-based, non-partisan, multi-issue, volunteer, leader-led power organization made up of dues-paying member institutions in Harrisonburg and Rockingham County. 561 people gathered from throughout the city and county that night, including elected officials, corporate, medical, and educational leaders, along with discerning institutions and member institutions, and said ‘yes!’ to working together to make Harrisonburg and Rockingham County an even better place to live and work.

The pages ahead tell you more about what VIA is, who these member institutions are, and what we’ve done. We encourage you to read them fully so you can learn and share our excitement about where we’ve been and where we’re heading.

In addition to what you read, you should know that VIA has provided a space for us to know our community more fully, to have meaningful conversations with residents our ‘regular’ travels may not allow us, and through this, to deepen our love and commitment to the Harrisonburg and Rockingham Community.

Reverend Jennifer Scarr’s words on March 21st are both a reflection of where we’ve been and a vision for where we desire to go.

Thank you for your commitment to the Valley.

Thank you for your love of our community in all of its beautiful diversity.

Thank you for joining in the work of both seeing our community as it is, and imagining what it can be.

Grace and peace,

Adam Blagg & Ann Pettit

Co-Chairs, Valley Interfaith Action

# Table of Contents

**3**

**Highlights**

**5**

**Who We Are**

**9**

**Listening Together**

**11**

**Acting Together**

**17**

**Learning Together**

**18**

**Financials**

**19**

**Thank you!**



# VIA is...

**561**

Leaders at our  
March 2023  
Founding

**Non-Partisan**

**26**

Dues-Paying  
Member  
Institutions

Representing  
**10,000**

Residents of  
Harrisonburg &  
Rockingham County

**Building  
Relationships**

**Broad-Based &  
Representative  
of the Valley**

**Acting "with"  
not "for"**

**\$292,884**

Raised from  
2020-2022

**Accountability**

**2**

Campaigns  
for Childcare &  
Transportation

**332**

Individual  
donors in  
2022-2023

**1,403+**

Face-to-face  
conversations

**Organized  
People  
& Organized  
Money**

# Timeline

January –June 2022: Leaders meet face-to-face with 1,076 residents of Harrisonburg & Rockingham County

June–October 2022: Research Action Teams begin to meet with experts and directly-impacted residents to learn more about childcare and transportation

November 19, 2022: 71 leaders host JAUNT for a Community Briefing about door-to-door, demand response transit

**March 21, 2023: Founding**  
561 VIA, corporate & elected leaders join together to publicly launch Valley Interfaith Action

**July – August 2023: 1st Door Knocking**  
85 leaders meet our neighbors through 5 Neighborhood Walks

November 2023: VIA gathers 343 surveys for the Transit Feasibility Study demonstrating the need for door-to-door, demand response transit.

**December 7, 2023 :Take the Next Step!**  
Hundreds of VIA leaders will ask elected and corporate leaders to take the next step with us for door-to-door, demand response transit and access to quality pre-k that pays a living wage.

June 14, 2022: 182 leaders vote to prioritize areas of childcare and transportation

October 27, 2022: 330 leaders ratify VIA's Childcare & Transportation Campaigns

January 12, 2023: 109 VIA leaders gather to share campaign updates & commit to turnout 500 members for VIA's Founding

March 22, 2023: Rockingham County Board of Supervisors vote unanimously for Transportation Feasibility Study

June 22, 2023: 151 VIA leaders gather to kick off the Feasibility Study with County Supervisors Dewey Ritchie & Rick Chandler

September 2023: VIA Brings together 8 corporate leaders to discuss transit proposal  
Commitment made to stand together for door-to-door, demand response transit.

**October 23, 2023: 1st Candidate Assembly**  
209 VIA leaders demonstrated our vision for meaningful, local politics



# Who We Are

Valley Interfaith Action is a broad-based, non-partisan, multi-issue volunteer, locally-led power organization made up of 26 dues-paying member institutions in Rockingham County and Harrisonburg. Our members include faith-based congregations, childcare centers, immigrant, neighborhood, and other associations. We bring leaders together across political, city-county, race, and faith divides to take action to improve the lives of Valley residents.

We build power by building community.

We meet people face-to-face and build relationships that help to re-knit the frayed social fabric of our lives. We don't seek justice and social change for people, we seek change with people. We stand shoulder to shoulder with directly-impacted leaders. Our power comes from the number and diversity of people we bring together and the institutions they represent.

We tackle big problems by breaking them down into issues that can be addressed. We listen to what's needed, find like-minded people to work with us for change, and bring together hundreds of diverse, regular people, so we can effectively engage corporate and elected leaders to help us to achieve our goals.



Valley Interfaith Action is affiliated with the Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF), a national network of 55 independent locally-led organizations with an 80-year track record of nurturing citizen-led action and making meaningful change in local communities. While each organization has its own issue campaign agenda, IAF organizations share an understanding of the tools and culture of relational organizing.

Through our relationship with IAF, VIA leaders:

- Participate in trainings with organizers and leaders from around the country.
- Receive 1:1 mentorship and support from organizing professionals with 30+ years of on-the-ground experience.
- Become part of a broader network of organizations and relationships.

# Strengthening Institutions

We believe in people's institutions.

They are places where people gather on a regular basis to relate, learn, worship, and find meaning. These institutions bind individuals together and can provide not just refuge from isolation but a check on larger economic, political, and cultural forces. While VIA member institutions are diverse, they all value the sacredness and dignity of the individual.

Institutions have the components of power – organized people and organized money. VIA leaders understand that if we act through our institutions and aggregate our collective power, we can more effectively engage and push back on the pressures affecting our families.

While pressures on families have increased, institutions are in decline.

The tools of relational organizing that help us win meaningful change in our communities can also be used within our institutions to help them thrive – whether that's developing the next generation of leaders or a capital campaign.

*My church has 2,500 members and 4 different services. 60% of our parish is Latino and we have a large population of refugees from around the world.*

*VIA is my vehicle to get to know members of my parish I otherwise would never know and together, act on the values of our shared faith for the common good.*

*~Bob Corso, Blessed Sacrament Catholic Church*





# Our Members

## Member Institutions:

- Beth El Congregation
- Blessed Sacrament Catholic Church
- Bridgewater Church of the Brethren
- Childcare & Early Education Centers
  - Roberta Webb Early Education Center
  - Shenandoah Valley Child Development Center
  - Tots 'N Toyland Preschool and Daycare
  - Lisa Will Home Daycare
- Community Mennonite Church
- COSPU
- Emmanuel Episcopal Church
- Harrisonburg Mennonite Church
- Harrisonburg Unitarian Universalists
- ICWU-UFCW Local 94C
- Massanutten Presbyterian Church
- Muhlenberg Lutheran Church
- Northeast Neighborhood:
  - Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church
  - Immanuel Mennonite Church
  - John Wesley United Methodist Church
- Otterbein United Methodist Church
- Park View Mennonite Church
- Shenandoah Valley Faith and Climate
- Sudanese Association
- The Church of the Incarnation
- Trinity Presbyterian Church
- Valley Muslim Community Foundation
- Zion Mennonite Church

## Supporting Institutions:

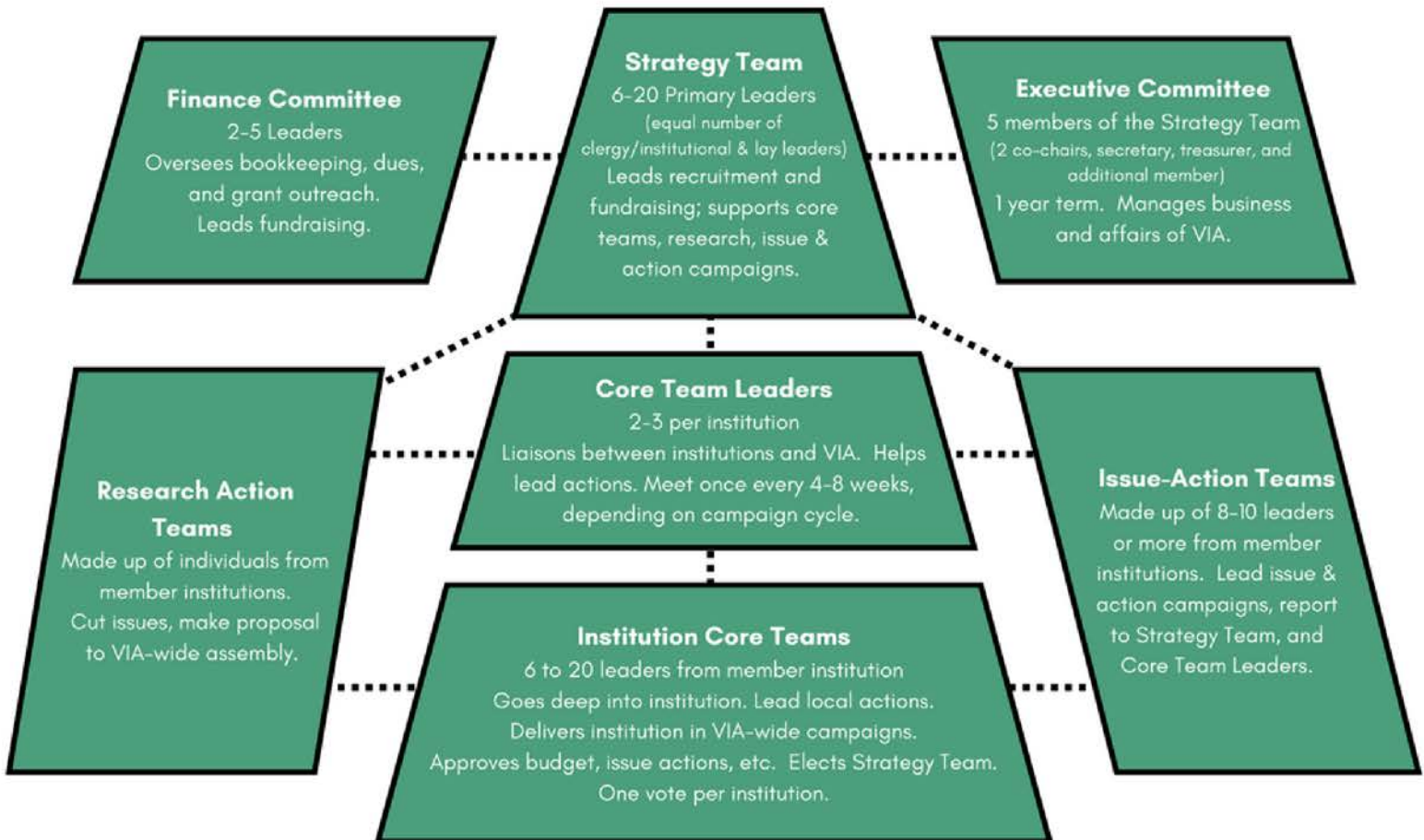
- Family of Hope House Church
- Harrisonburg First Church of the Brethren
- Islamic Association of the Shenandoah Valley
- Our Community Place
- Shalom Mennonite Congregation
- The Table
- Valley Friends Meeting

### Each member institution:

- Organizes a “core team” of 8–20 leaders who represent a cross-section of their institution
  - Build and deepen relationships within their institution and across VIA
  - Define & share issues of importance for their members
  - Discover new leaders, develop local actions, and engage in VIA-wide actions.
- Pays dues equal to 1% of their institution’s operating budget
  - Minimum of \$1,500 and maximum of \$15,000



# How We're Organized



## Strategy Team

- Rev. Adam Blagg, Otterbein United Methodist Church (Co-Chair)
- Rev. Ann Pettit, Massanutten Presbyterian (Co-Chair)
- Nadia Dames, Valley Muslim Community Foundation (Treasurer)
- Rev. Jennifer Scarr, Bridgewater Church of the Brethren (Secretary)
- Art Stolfus, Community Mennonite Church
- Barb Melby, Blessed Sacrament Catholic Church
- Rabbi Jeffrey Kurtz-Lendner, Beth El Congregation
- Rev. Jennifer Davis Sensenig
- Nasser Al Sa'adum, Valley Muslim Community Foundation
- Rev. Moriah Hurst, Park View Mennonite Church

## Staff

- Katie Cohen, Lead Organizer
- Melissa Miller, Administrative Coordinator

# We begin by Listening...

We know that relationships – not issues – form the basis for organization. Democracy requires continuous investment in open-ended, reciprocal public relationships. Knowing another person's interests requires listening to and understanding their stories, passions, and throughlines. We reject substitutes and shortcuts for that critical work – e.g., ideology, assumptions about one another's identities and life experiences, electronic data gathering, and the mere airing of opinions and empathy.

Our most important day-to-day tools are one-to-one and small-group meetings where participants listen to one another's stories and concerns and find shared interests. We use these tools outside of our organizations too – building productive, mutually respectful, and accountable relationships with powerful actors from both the private and public sectors of society.



During the first half of 2022, Valley Interfaith Action leaders met face to face with 1,067 residents across Harrisonburg and Rockingham County. We asked everyone the same question: *"If you could change one thing to improve your family's life or the lives of your neighbors, where would you start?"*

We heard what was on people's hearts and minds -- struggles to get to doctor's appointments and church, limited mental health services for loved ones, the lack of quality and affordable childcare, and the difficulties of young adults to buy a first home and stay in the community they love.

Through listening, we also find leaders and potential leaders who, like us, have a hunger to take action and be part of the solution.

With a deeper understanding of our community and new leaders to join us, we brought back what we heard to our core teams to vote on areas to move forward with and research.



# & Meeting our Neighbors

In the Summer of 2023, VIA voted to meet our neighbors through a series of neighborhood walks. We went to low-income, immigrant, and refugee neighborhoods where VIA leaders already had some relationships and where residents invited us in.

## 2023 Neighborhood Walks

5 walks in Cedar Hill Estates  
I & II and Mosby Heights

- 85 VIA leaders
- 170 volunteer hours
- 200 doors knocked
- 91 conversations



### **A Reflection by Bill Reinhold, Trinity Presbyterian Church**

(07/22/2023, Cedar Hill Estates I)

*A warm reception awaited a group of about a dozen volunteers from Valley Interfaith Action (VIA) at the Cedar Hill Estates off West Mosby Road this past Saturday. We represented a number of congregations and other members of VIA as we visited with residents of the mobile home park to introduce VIA and listen to the residents' concerns about transportation and child care and to inquire about particular concerns the residents might have.*

*With the assistance of a number of persons in our group who are fluent in Spanish, we were able to engage with the residents in deep conversations about their lives here in Rockingham County and their hopes for themselves and their children.*

*We learned about their transportation and childcare patterns (part of VIA's core actions in this cycle), but we also learned of concerns particular to Cedar Hill. With small yards and narrow streets, one of the recurring concerns was for speed control, sidewalks, and attractive play areas for the children. Other concerns included dealing with feral cats and dogs and the lack of a fire hydrant system in a community where houses are very close to one another.*



# Acting Together

VIA brings together diverse leaders and their institutions together to engage elected and corporate leaders around our interests. Tired of endless committee meetings and dialogues, VIA leaders spend their time in action – whether that’s a large assembly to hold elected leaders accountable or a handful of leaders running a research action to learn more about an issue or institution.



*Bus ride to meet those relying on public transportation in Harrisonburg*

## Research Actions

In the summer of 2022, VIA leaders voted to explore how problems with childcare and transportation affect residents and employers in the Valley and what we might do about it.

We kicked off a series of research actions – meeting with experts, taking field trips, collecting data through surveys, and having deeper conversations with directly-impacted leaders.



*Tour of Roberta Webb Early Education Center*

## Candidate Action

On October 26th 2023, VIA leaders held their first Candidate Assembly Action with candidates for Rockingham County School Board and Board of Supervisors. Leaders shared testimonies around transportation and childcare and asked candidates if they would work with VIA to address these issues, beginning with a commitment to meet with VIA leaders within 60 days of the election, if they win. Candidates unanimously agreed.



*Candidate Assembly*



# “Bringing Ordinary People Together”

Daily News Record headline, March 22, 2023

## Valley Interfaith Action’s Founding

On March 21st 2023, VIA leaders led their first large-scale action. Valley Interfaith Action publicly launched as an organization and kicked off campaigns to address gaps in childcare and transportation.

VIA leaders brought together 561 residents, corporate, and elected leaders. Senator Obenshain, Senator Hanger, Delegate Wilt, Board of Supervisors Chair Ritchie, Mayor Reed, and representatives from Sentara, JMU, and poultry industry, made commitments to work with VIA to address gaps in childcare and transportation.





“On behalf of the Coalition in Solidarity of Immigrants United – COSPU – I want to express our gratitude to Valley Interfaith Action for the opportunity to learn and take action on important issues in our community, such as transportation and childcare. COSPU, as a grassroots organization, recognizes the power-building process of a collective effort and the opportunity for change by providing platforms that give voice and meaningful action. Yes, We Can!”

Nelly Moreno Shenk  
COSPU



“Valley Interfaith Action is a powerful connector. In my 33 years as a pastor in the City of Harrisonburg, VIA is the only faith-based organization I’m aware of that has had much success at bringing such a large number of people from such a wide range of faith communities into one conversation space. Not saying we can’t do more. There are plenty of faith groups yet to join our conversation. We need to keep being invitational. Because no matter your faith tradition, if you believe in God, you believe God loves justice. And on that conviction we can all come together in one voice, and have an impact on issues in our community. Some of our neighbors suffer because there is injustice in our city and county in terms of equal access to the things that make for a good and secure and healthy life. Those in positions of power in our community are now paying attention to the voice of VIA. Their ears have perked up. I think some real change is on the horizon.”

Rev. Phil Kniss  
Park View Mennonite Church



“As a supporting member of the VIA action community, it is most encouraging to see so many volunteer institutions, organizations, and individuals addressing much-needed services of transportation and childcare in Harrisonburg and Rockingham County. It is exciting to see so many diverse people and businesses, local and state governments joining together to make these goals become a reality for these most needed services in our area. I encourage others to become an active VIA member and add your voice to the vital needs of our community.”

Patsy V. Liskey  
Otterbein United  
Methodist Church



“VIA works with communities on issues of concern at the local level. This approach benefits our multicultural, multi-ethnic community to encompass and address the diverse issues of our such community. The association with VIA benefits our Muslim community (the majority of them are refugees) in eliminating/improving stereotype images of Muslims. As a result, the community at large becomes more inclusive of differences which reflects positively on the well being of the community. VIA addresses REAL issues of concern to our diverse community and PROPOSES solutions in collaboration with DECISION-making entities.”

Dr. Abdel Rabie  
Valley Muslim Community  
Foundation





"In the past 2 years education has been even more isolated than ever. One day out of the blue, VIA knocked on the doors of our center asking, how can we help? As the leader of a very vulnerable group of teachers, I was shocked and relieved all at the same time, that the community had chosen ECE to care for.

We were a part of VIA 's action.

VIA came in and announced who they were, what they were about, and needed to know if we were ready for change.. Then they invited me as a leader in the community to learn how to lead in a new capacity that involved local, and state leaders to make systemic changes in the field of ECE.

VIA is a teaching tool, as we learn that People, Power and Action create real change."

Angela Rouse  
Executive Director  
Roberta Webb Early Education Center



VIA has the potential to be a strong resource for our community. It can listen to the needs and address them, often more effectively than through local politics. I am especially thrilled about the opportunities for improved transportation for our folks in need to make it to appointments, grocery stores, emergency visits, basic needs shopping, etc. This has been a longstanding concern. As a member of the health care team for OBGYN, a need is evident, both for prenatal concerns and for gynecological problems visits and annual exams. We need to support VIA to make a difference here in our home.

Cathy Slusher, MD



"I am honored to support the mission of Valley Interfaith Action and the work they are doing to bring affordable and accessible childcare and transportation to all Harrisonburg and Rockingham County residents.

I understand the power of community building so that all voices can be heard and considered before taking action. As an architect, whose firm's mission statement is "through design we can build a better future for all," I understand the work it takes to make positive change in our world.

Together as a community, through building relationships, as VIA has and continues to do, we can move the world from the way it is towards the way it should be."

Charles Hendricks,  
The Gaines Group Architects



"Valley Interfaith Action means a lot to me. It's not just an organization; it's like a guiding light for our community What I really like about being part of VIA is that everyone here truly believes in making things better.

I've seen how it's changed my own life, our community, and even beyond. It's a place where our ideas turn into action, voices are amplified, and change becomes tangible. It shows us that when we work together, we can do incredible things.

Being part of VIA is a promise to help create a brighter future that we can all be proud of for years to come."

Monique Tshibola  
Congolese community





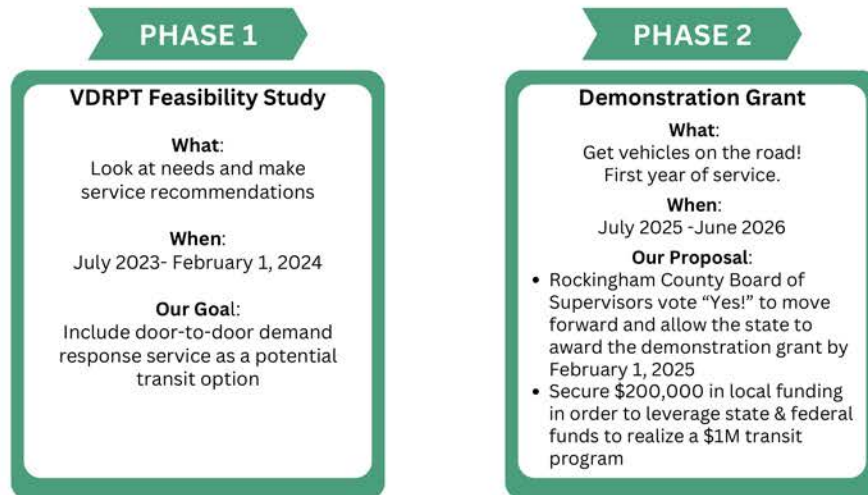
# Current Campaign: Transportation

Because transportation is essential for our community's public health, economic development, and the health of our voluntary associations. We propose:

For Harrisonburg:

After-hours microtransit ("public uber") with HDPT. Stay tuned for next steps in Summer 2024

**For Rockingham County: Bring door-to-door, demand response public transit run by a qualified transit operator**



## Door-to-Door Demand Response Transit

**What is it?** A public transit rideshare. You call up to 24 hours in advance and make a reservation to get picked up at a location and taken to your destination. The reservationist makes a route, sends an appropriate sized vehicle and driver. This kind of transit service is especially fit for rural areas. It already exists in places like Albemarle and Greene Counties, as well as Roanoke Valley, and Southwest Virginia.

**Who can ride?** Anyone - regardless of age, income, or status. And for any reason.

**Where?** For any trip starting in or going to Rockingham County. Live in Harrisonburg and need to go to Sentara? Live in Bridgewater and need to get to downtown Harrisonburg? This is for you!

**When can I ride?** The exact schedule will be determined by need and resources available. Our proposal is for 4 vehicles operating Monday-Friday from 6am-7pm.

**But, who would operate it?** An existing, qualified transit operator would extend their services to Rockingham County. The operator would apply to and be awarded funding by the state transit agency.

**How much does it cost?** It's up to the operator, but many in our area are fare-free!

**Ok... but who pays for it?**

70% of all public transit comes from long-standing federal and state funds. Right now, *our* tax dollars are funding transit in *other cities*. We are leaving money on the table! The 30% local match can come from private or public sources. We have been talking with area employers, retirement communities, and nonprofits to estimate their current transportation costs and explore whether this service would provide better service for their buck.



# Current Campaign: Childcare

Every child should have access to affordable, quality early education. But, the childcare system is broken and hurts children, families, and employers.

In Harrisonburg & Rockingham County:

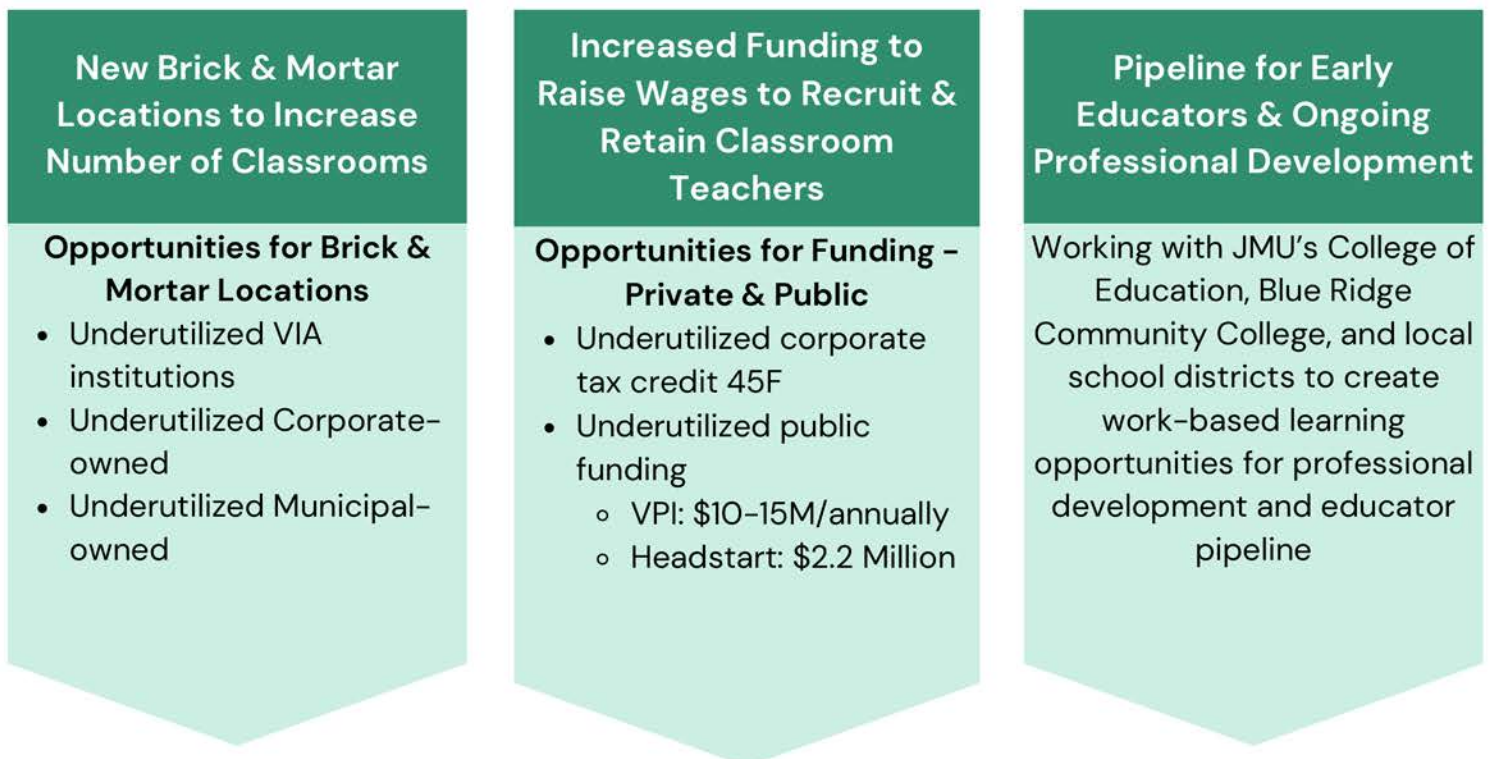
- 50% of 4 year olds have access to quality pre-k.
- Less than 10% of 3 year olds eligible for tuition-free pre-k are in a quality center.

Key Tension:



We cannot simply raise costs for families, nor can we simply train new educators. Long-term, it will require a statewide approach to transform the broken model of childcare. But together, we can take the first step and create a model for what a new system of early education can look like.

**Fixing the broken system requires a 3-part approach:**



# Learning Together

Through collective evaluation, individual reflection, text study, and training, VIA leaders learn together. In addition to local trainings, VIA leaders have the opportunity to participate in multi-day regional and national IAF trainings with leaders doing similar work in their local community. Trainings help leaders sharpen their skills of relational organizing and reflect on their own leadership.

*Attending the National Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF) Training was the best decision I made this summer. Those 7 days afforded me and my colleagues the gift of focused time to delve deeply into the why and the how of relational broad based organizing. Prior to the training I held a vague understanding of terms like "1:1" and "Core Team", "house meeting", and "power analysis." I had witnessed an action or two in the year and a half I've been involved with Valley Interfaith Action. I'd seen the spark of energy cultivated by this work fanned into a flame at the March 21st Refounding. It was inspiring, sure, but still I felt as if I were trying to help build a ship already sailing. Overwhelmed and forever a step behind.*

*In the wake of this training, however, I have a sense of clarity and purpose for organizing in the Valley. I've seen the throughline from the individual meeting to significant change toward the common good. On the Sunday evening of our training in Baltimore, MD, we joined an action orchestrated by the leaders of B.U.I.L.D., which pulled together major power players in their context to declare with one voice their commitment to the end of redlining. The action was a testament to the power of nonpartisanship, intentional relationships, and public accountability. The coming end of redlining in Baltimore is the result of organized people consistently over time, and organized money. It made me excited and hopeful for the work we are only just beginning in the Shenandoah Valley.*

*We are organizing people across religious, political, race, gender, and class divides in order to cultivate the kind of goodness that is accessible to all of us. We want to create a Valley in which everyone in Rockingham county can get from point A to point B without a hassle. We want to create a Valley where every 3 and 4 year old has a spot in daycare. Thanks to this training, I believe we can do it. And when we do, we will be well positioned to tackle whatever comes next.*

*Friends, I highly recommend the 7 Day National IAF Training to anyone who is curious about this work and interested in deeper involvement. It's worth every hour.*

Pastor Jennifer Scarr, Bridgewater Church of the Brethren





# Financials

| 2022 Actual Income   |          |
|----------------------|----------|
| Dues                 | \$42,500 |
| Individual Donations | \$76,922 |
| Great Community Give | \$10,956 |
| Grants               | \$60,000 |

| 2022 Actual Expenses |           |
|----------------------|-----------|
| Staff                | \$106,361 |
| IAF Dues             | \$28,820  |
| Training             | \$2,500   |
| Campaigns            | \$1,000   |

| 2023 Expected Income<br>(actual as of Nov 20) |                                   |
|---|-----------------------------------|
| Dues  | \$50,000-<br>60,000<br>(\$55,560) |
| Individual Donations                          | \$100,000<br>(\$73,627)           |
| Great Community Give                          | \$10,000<br>(\$12,584)            |
| Grants  | \$60,000<br>(\$60,000)            |

| 2023 Expected Expenses<br>(actual as of Sept 30) |                         |
|--|-------------------------|
| Staff  | \$106,750<br>(\$77,924) |
| IAF Dues   | \$35,000<br>(\$22,500)  |
| Training   | \$7,500<br>(\$11,149)   |
| Campaigns  | \$1,000<br>(\$2,099)    |

# Thank You to Our 332 Individual & Corporate Friends!



## Become a Friend of VIA!

Donations Can be Mailed to:

PO Box 964  
Harrisonburg, VA 22803

or

Donate Online:  
[viavirginia.org/donate](http://viavirginia.org/donate)



## Acknowledgements:

Photographs courtesy of  
Tiffany Showalter & Brent Finnegan



Gaines Group Architects is committed to designing for the future and having a positive impact on the lives of the people who live, work, learn, and play in the communities we serve.

[thegainesgroup.com](http://thegainesgroup.com)  
434-979-5245



PROUDLY SUPPORTING VIA





Valley Interfaith Action is a strictly non-partisan, multi-issue, volunteer leader-led, broad-based organization that brings together diverse leaders and their institutions across political, race, faith, and city-county divides to improve life for families in the Shenandoah Valley. We are affiliated with the Industrial Areas Foundation, a national network of 55 independent, locally-led organizations and an 80 year history of making meaningful change in people's lives.

PO Box 964  
Harrisonburg, VA 22803  
[viavirginia.org](http://viavirginia.org)



Valley Interfaith Action is a nonprofit in Virginia and has 501(c)(3) tax-exempt status with the IRS.