

2024 END-OF-YEAR REPORT

IN SPIRIT AND STRATEGY, WE **BUILD** NEW WORLDS



S  **NG**
SOUTHERNERS ON NEW GROUND

A Letter from the SONG Co-Directors

DEAR SONG KIN,

As the first year of our Co-Directorship quiets into winter, the old world is crumbling around us. And here we are—dreaming up new worlds. To build while surviving collapse and repression, our relationships, creativity, and resilience will be our strengths. We must exercise our hope muscle.

We need to get real about what time it is. It's been time to organize, to show up for each other, to put aside our differences, and to fight for ourselves and generations to come. It's been time to relentlessly engage in principled struggle for the sake of real, tangible change in the material conditions of our people. It's been time to come back again and again when we get it wrong, to forgive, and to be accountable when we have forgotten to be clear, gentle, and devoted to one another. It's been time.

We see the mandate of our time as Co-Directors as gathering our kindred, developing brass tacks organizing skills, and practicing movement building to grow spiritual fortitude toward advancing our spiritual imperatives. From day one of our tenure, we have been putting resources in the field; your porches, streets, and gay bars are our organizing grounds—where we gain our sustenance and build our power. In 2024, we traveled all over the South, recruiting new members, convening our people, and training up a new cohort of local Free From Fear organizers.

We know that the SONG of these times will not be what it has been before: these times are different. But our role as a legacy organization means we have a great deal of wisdom to lean on that is needed in this moment. We know how to find our people, keep each other in, and dig deep when times are hard. In these times, we still admire the heartiness of our families' collard greens, the sticky kisses of our babies, and our yelps of joy when reuniting with an old friend.

In 2025, we will focus on building a deeper and wider bench of organizers and we will put our organizing power to work to meet local needs and wage local campaigns. In the coming year, we will practice real listening in order to have real talk about Southern political strategy, a strategy that holds community organizing, political education, base building, strategic communications, and cultural organizing as the foundation that promotes and supports action.

We seek to act in unison with other Southern freedom fighters and build a container with one another that fosters connection among queer and trans organizers and allies from the South, reppin' the South, and beyond the South. Our political reality requires

that of us. By strengthening our networks of support and collaboration, no longer are we strangers to one another—instead, we are kindred fighting for liberation, building Beloved Community. We may fuss, we may fight, but we must find ways to come back together to advance our organizing.

As always, we ground in the wisdom and strength that intergenerational organizing feeds us, living with both hindsight and foresight. Win, lose, or draw, we never forget that there is honor in the struggle, there is honor in our work.

We pledge to continue to take care of ourselves, each other, and our people—through care and through fighting for what we so deeply need and deserve.

In spirit and for the fight,

Carlin and Jade

SONG CO-DIRECTORS





Preparing for a New Verse at SONG

“This moment poses critical questions for organizers: How do we love and protect each other amid collapse? How do we expand the circle of who is protected and cared for in these times? How do we organize, not just in resistance to the bleak future offered to us by existing systems, but such that the shape of our organizing plants and nurtures seeds that will birth a different future?”

—SONG STRATEGIC ALMANAC

SONG entered 2024 on the tail end of a rigorous strategic planning process, which we capped with the release of our [Strategic Almanac](#). The Almanac reflects our assessment of current conditions, grapples with the contradictions impacting organizing in these times, and provides strategic direction for our organizing in the seasons to come. As the terrain continues to shift under our feet, it has provided the grounding we need to move forward collectively. The Almanac was written collectively over the course of three years through an organization-wide process of community engagement.

The Strategic Almanac is the product of many hands and was stewarded under the leadership of outgoing SONG Co-Directors aesha rasheed and Wendi Moore-O’Neal. Longtime staff and members Carlin Rushing and Jade Brooks, at that time SONG’s Membership and Political Directors, accepted the mantle of Co-Directorship in April 2024. As key architects of and contributors to the Almanac and the strategic planning process, they stepped into their roles ready to walk out the work and vision of the Almanac alongside SONG membership.

Throughout 2024, SONG used the Strategic Almanac to guide our work, implementing recommendations such as grappling with structures for decision-making and governance with our members, making substantial financial investments in member leadership development, and launching our Firekeepers working group, a space for those who want to hold and shape the culture of conflict transformation within SONG.

In addition to implementing the Strategic Almanac, SONG began 2024 by evaluating the outcomes of our terrain mapping project. This project was led by a cohort of 7 lead organizers representing 7 different formations: the Richmond, Nashville, Houston, and Floyd SONG chapters; the Small Town & Rural and the Political Education Working Groups; and an ad-hoc statewide formation representing Georgia.

Over the course of 4 months at the end of 2023, the goals of this project were to:

- **Identify, document, and regionally share out local experiences** of anti-trans and anti-queer oppression, criminalization, and militarization for the purposes of local and regional campaign development throughout the South;
- **Identify community resources** and possible action steps to address issues raised;
- Build towards a South Free From Fear by **re-energizing SONG's existing list, base, and partnerships** and;
- **Contribute a read of local political context** towards a regional synthesis to support Free From Fear campaign development.

The terrain mapping project affirmed the aspiration of our people—Black and Indigenous people, immigrants, people of color, and LGBTQ+ people in Southern towns and cities—to live Free From Fear. *“What could be born in our communities if LGBTQ+ people and people of color were not afraid to walk our streets, lead our towns, and fully lean into our bodies and lives?”* was the question that grounded our Free From Fear (F3) campaign work. While our campaigns before the start of the COVID-19 pandemic centered around demands to End Money Bail and Pre-trial Detention and to Melt ICE (Immigration and Customs Enforcement) in the South, the outcomes of the terrain mapping project identified an expanded scope of priorities for our membership.

The new Free From Fear Pillars that emerged from our terrain mapping project are:

**HOUSING
AND LAND
LIBERATION**

**PROTECT AND
DEFEND QUEER
AND TRANS
KINDRED**

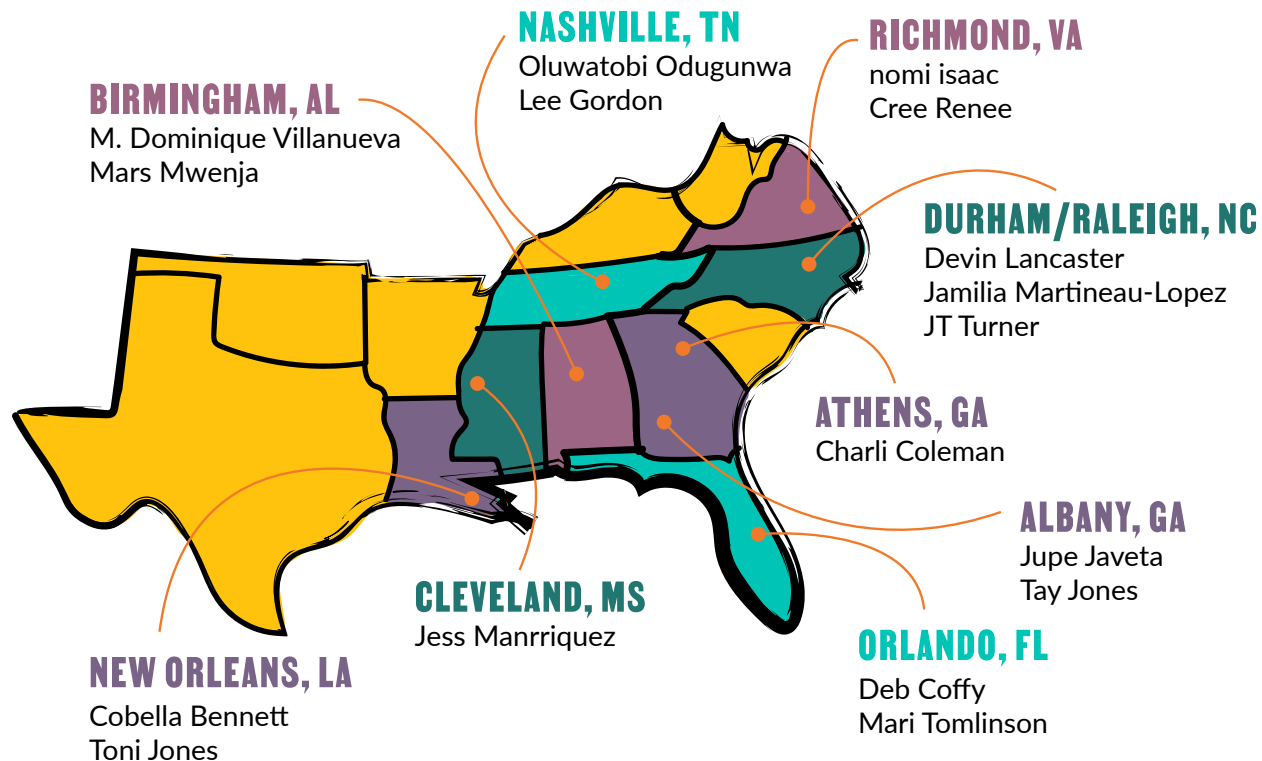
**CONFRONT
CRIMINALIZATION
IN OUR
COMMUNITIES**

In 2024, we placed these demands at the forefront of our campaign development work and experimented with them in our chapters and with our 2024 Free From Fear Cohort. By living beyond our fear, we organize, not only to secure our survival, but to embody our joy and our love and longing for each other.

Launching the Fear From Fear Cohort

This year, SONG invested in re-igniting our Free From Fear campaigns by launching the Free From Fear Cohort. The Free From Fear Cohort was our answer to the call for more Southern LGBTQ+ freedom fighters with the bold and visionary campaign organizing skills needed to build power and transform our communities. Over eight months, 17 members in nine sites, supported by OG SONG campaign heads, gave themselves over to rigorous political education and training. From May through December, the F3 team took up the mantle of 10+ years of waging campaigns that address the death-dealing issues targeting Southern LGBTQ+ people.

F3 Cohort Sites and Members



The Cohort was made up of Black, Indigenous, and people of color members in Richmond, VA; Nashville, TN; Durham, NC; New Orleans, LA; Cleveland, Mississippi; Birmingham, AL; Athens, GA; Albany, GA; and Orlando, FL. After an intensive organizing and political education training program, the Cohort set about designing their own campaign plans. The F3 Cohort honed their base-building skills and connected with lapsed and long-time members, partners, community members, and organizations. Some worked closely with existing chapters, like Richmond, Durham, and Nashville, while others seeded work to activate towns with few or no SONG members.

The Free From Fear Cohort held local events and actions aligned with their campaigns and conducted outreach to recruit new members into the movement and into SONG. They also worked together to host regional Free From Fear calls, including virtual and in-person film screenings and discussions of the film *Riotville, USA* as part of the National Day of Protest Against Police Brutality, Repression, and the Criminalization of a Generation. Alongside the Coalition to Stop Cop Nation, the Cohort participated in the National Day of Protest as a way of building and testing organizing capacity to challenge the Cop Cities being proposed nationwide.

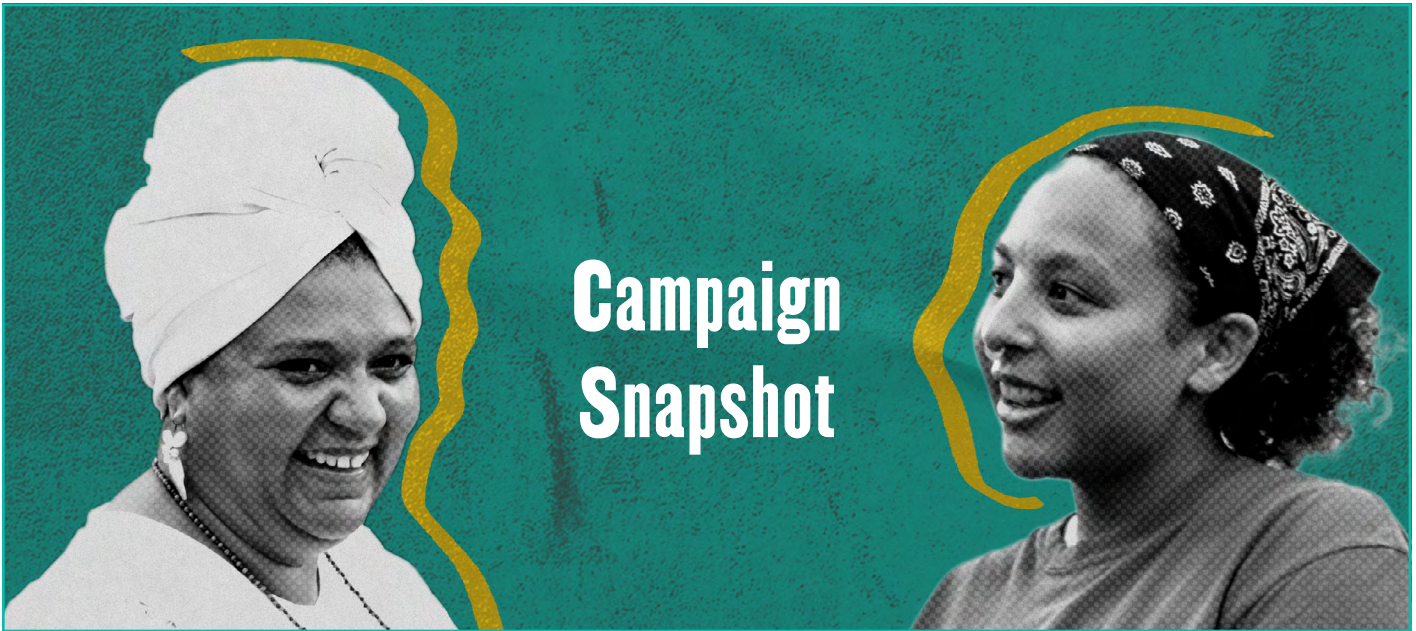
Most F3 sites participated in a coalition, alliance, and/or partnership as a part of their local organizing efforts. We worked with over 18 organizations and formations at the local level this year. Our fellows in Durham plugged into ceasefire coalition work with Mothers for Ceasefire, Jewish Voice for Peace, and others in support of Palestinian liberation and fundraised for Trans Mutual Aid and Emancipate NC. Orlando fellows connected with LGBTQ+ and homeless advocacy organizations like All Black Errrythang, Florida Access Network, Central Florida Queers for Palestine, Homeless Services Network, Youth Action Society, and the Queer Trans Project. Albany fellows connected with several groups and informal networks as a part of their vital hurricane relief efforts in Valdosta. Richmond fellows partnered with VA Student Power for a housing workshop. Our fellow in Mississippi partnered with Delta State University's Pride Alliance and Community Health. And our Nashville fellows participated in a South Central coalition made up of individuals with loved ones in prison, Free Hearts, Abolition Works TN, and the Bridges to Freedom Movement.

Crews of SONG regional staff conducted site visits at each of the nine F3 Cohort locations to offer in-person communications and organizing skills training and to support Cohort members with campaign development and base-building. We connected with our people in backyards and on porches, at farms and during Friday night football games, Black Prides, drag shows, and gay bars. At this stage of the COVID-19 pandemic, these site visits were an opportunity to collectively recalibrate and evaluate how we nurture connection and tend the fire. SONG is in the field—with hearts and minds ready to till the soil and rekindle the Kindred.

The F3 Cohort was a powerful opportunity for SONG to explore our newly expanded Free From Fear Campaign scope. We asked ourselves,

“What resonates most with our broader membership and base? How do we identify, develop, and talk about campaigns related to the three pillars? How do we understand the ways that these pillars intersect? More specifically, how do we understand and fight for land liberation in relation to an overall campaign scope that focuses on ending state violence?”

We will spend the rest of the year evaluating the Cohort, synthesizing what we've learned, and developing recommendations to support SONG moving powerfully in our campaign work in 2025.



Campaign Snapshot



LOCATION: Birmingham, Alabama

COHORT MEMBERS: M. Dominique and Mars

COACH: R'yana

PROBLEM: The Birmingham Land Bank Authority (BLBA) is stealing land from the Black community by seizing ownership of tax-delinquent properties and developing the land in ways that do not serve the community.

LONG TERM GOALS:

- Create a Black queer and trans land project
- Halt tax delinquencies to preserve the neighborhood and stop the displacement of residents
- Shift power so that the BLBA is elected by the people and prioritizes residents' stewardship of the land

INCREMENTAL GOALS:

- Residents understand their rights regarding properties in tax delinquency
- Resources are available, and residents know how to access them, to support people in holding onto their land
- BLBA begins to shift focus toward meeting community needs, not developer priorities

SHORT-TERM GOALS:

- Create zines and host workshops about tax delinquency and people's rights
- Understand decision makers' stances and identify pressure points
- Establish and get the word out about a tax delinquency fund to block immediate harm
- Work with the community to develop a set of demands

Reflections from the Cohort

“Over the past few months, I’ve really been challenged to lean into organizing values and practices like holding space for different voices, navigating tough conversations, and finding ways to work through conflicts that sometimes feel like they’re pulling us apart. Pushing myself out of my comfort zone has been huge—it’s made me a lot more aware of the dynamics and power structures within our group and within myself. I’ve had to be intentional about balancing my feelings while showing up in ways that center the work we’re all here to do.

WHAT I’M MOST PROUD OF is my growth in building resilience and staying committed to the vision, even when things got rough. I think I’ve managed to stay grounded and keep sight of why we’re doing this, despite frustrations or setbacks. Working with the cohort has been a test of patience and empathy, and I’m proud that I’ve been able to hold my own, keep the conversations moving forward, and learn to adapt to the needs of the group. It’s not always been easy, but it’s been worth it to see us come together in our shared purpose.”

—**JT TURNER**, RALEIGH/DURHAM, NC MEMBER



“I’VE GROWN IN MY CAPACITY to ‘just do it.’ As a new organizer (I still feel pretty new), I was told by a mentor that organizing is just doing it—it’s not sitting around thinking about it or doing admin work—it’s going out and talking to people and making connections.”

—**JESS MANRRIQUEZ,**
CLEVELAND, MS MEMBER

“I’VE GROWN TO TRUST MY LEADERSHIP again after a work experience that was deeply harmful (misogynist, ableist, etc) and created a lot of doubt and disempowerment within me for years, which was one of my biggest goals in this experience. I am most proud of the collaborative zine project I facilitated, designed featuring everyone’s contributions, printed, assembled, and ‘sold’ for donations to support those impacted by Hurricane Helene.”

—**CREE RENEE,**
RICHMOND, VA MEMBER



GayCation 2024 : Stirring the Soul of SONG

For the first time in five years, SONG hosted our eighth annual GayCation, fulfilling a collective longing that has been delayed since the start of COVID-19. We gathered for GayCation under the banner of GayCation: Sowers' Survival School—a nod to Octavia E. Butler's 1993 novel, Parable of the Sower, which was written in 1993, the year SONG was founded, and begins in the year 2024. **The vibe was part big gay family reunion, and part welcoming of newer members into a core SONG tradition of camping out in the pine forests of the rural South and celebrating joy, culture, kinship, and collective power.** This year, we brought together 80 SONG members from across race, class, culture, gender, age, and sexuality for three rowdy, raunchy, and rigorous days.

Like the worlds we are trying to build, GayCation is a deeply co-created space. Some of our member-led skill shares included water catchment, fire starting, and brewing Revolutionary Tea to honor SONG ancestor Kifu Faruq. Staff facilitated workshops like Scheming on Governance and Comrade vs. Kinship Structures for Organizing. We launched our Firekeepers working group with a discussion about cultures of conflict at SONG. Together, we assessed conditions in our hometowns and brainstormed campaign possibilities around our new Free From Fear pillars before a golf cart car show and late-night pool party. The space for disaster preparation, organizing skill development, and relationship building was more timely than we knew. These workshops grounded our people as we moved into a tumultuous hurricane and political season.



“OUR PEOPLE need places to be in our fullness and be together. We’re not curating an experience for our members, we’re building containers that we can all take responsibility for stewarding together. GayCation is a laboratory to practice governance and Beloved Community.”

—KATE SHAPIRO,
ATLANTA, GA
MEMBER

“QUEER LIBERATION looks like GayCation. GayCation is a model for a freedom dream. It is a place to practice what liberation looks like in our lifetime.”

—WILLA CARTWRIGHT, ATLANTA, GA MEMBER



“Bringing back this seminal convening felt like **STIRRING THE SOUL** of SONG.”

—HIEU TRAN, SONG OPERATIONS MANAGER

Where We Go, Love Follows: SONG Disaster Response

After Hurricane Katrina hit New Orleans in 2005, SONG surveyed our membership about what would have made the most difference for our folks on the ground. The answer, resoundingly, was more trained organizers locally and across the South. In response, SONG pivoted to invest more heavily in organizing schools. In 2024, we saw both the fruits of that labor and a heightened need for it as climate disasters continue to intensify and our people continue to be excluded from, criminalized by, or direly underserved by state-led and institutional disaster response.

Only a few weeks after hosting a GayCation convening that centered around disaster preparedness, our region was hit by two back-to-back catastrophic hurricanes. These storms devastated major parts of the Southeast, particularly areas of Southern Appalachia once considered to be climate havens.

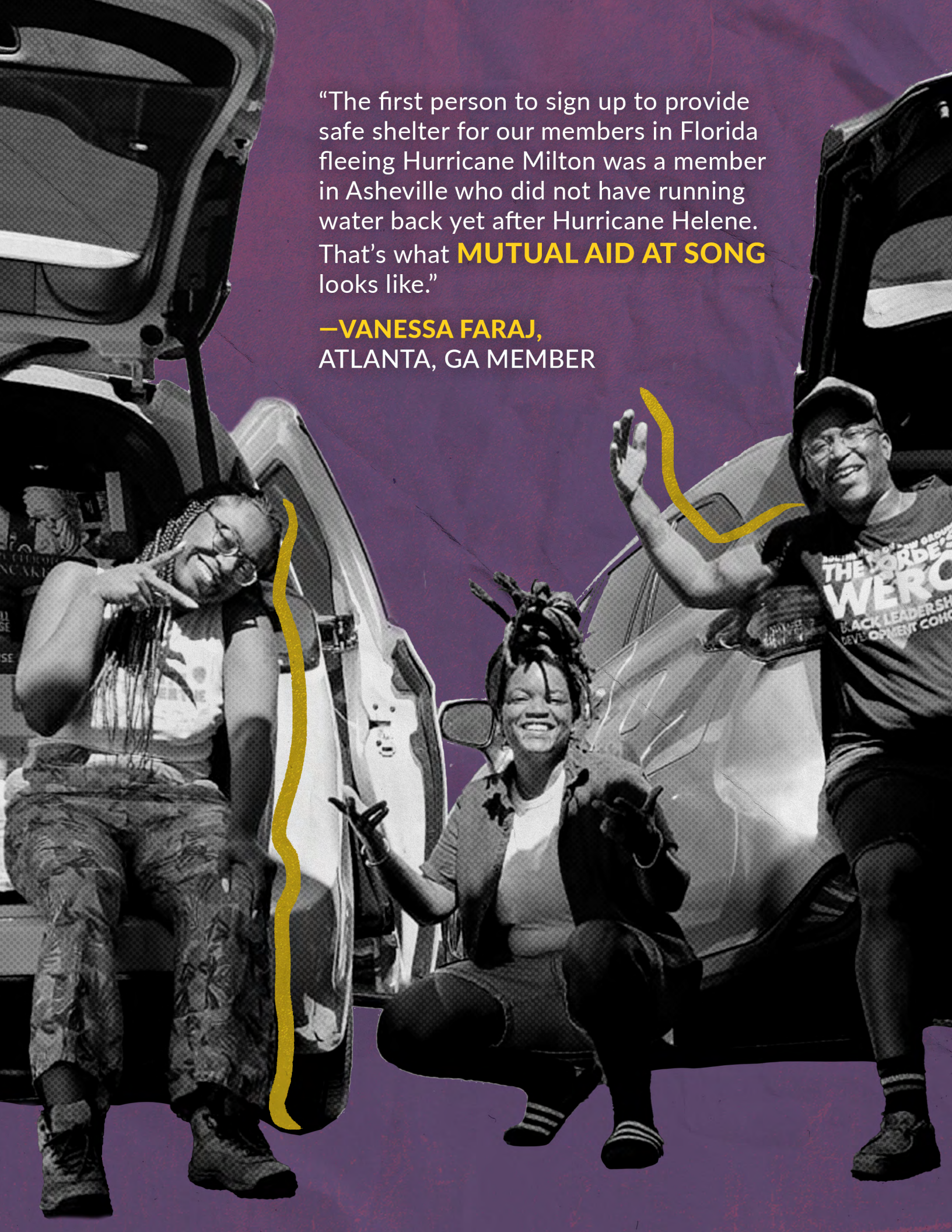
And so we did what we do in times of crisis—we cast the spell:



And we got to work. We drove carloads of supplies, held fundraisers, hosted tri-weekly phone banks to check on our folks, created resource guides, distributed donations to kindred organizations, and offered our homes and our hearts to our people. Our members in Asheville traded advice about setting up distribution systems with our folks doing wellness checks in Southern Georgia. We learned to adapt our strategies for responding to the different conditions in cities and in rural areas. Everywhere we went, we brought our fierce queer and trans love and our joy. In caring for each other and watching our communities come together, we saw what liberation in our lifetime could look like. We met not only immediate needs but built the groundwork for networked, resourced, and resilient communities prepared to not only take care of each other in times of disaster, but also to liberate ourselves and our people.

“The first person to sign up to provide safe shelter for our members in Florida fleeing Hurricane Milton was a member in Asheville who did not have running water back yet after Hurricane Helene. That’s what **MUTUAL AID AT SONG** looks like.”

—**VANESSA FARAJ**,
ATLANTA, GA MEMBER



Our Year in Numbers

9 site visits to Free from Fear (F3) cohort

↳ **200** local contacts brought in by the F3 cohort

839 wellness calls made post Hurricane Helene and Milton

↳ Carloads of supplies delivered to Hurricane Helene impacted areas in NC & GA: **11+**

↳ **100+** composting toilets delivered to Western NC

80 steady and ready queers at SONG's 8th annual GayCation

↳ Number of toddlers attending GayCation: **5**

↳ **4** golf carts decked out in GayCation car show



350+ hours of local cold outreach in neighborhoods, libraries, schools, bars and clubs, courthouses, concerts & more

Become a Member or Renew Your Membership



songsouth.info/membersignup



songsouth.info/renewal

At SONG, we believe that in order to transform the South we must build our collective power, our people power, which comes from thousands and thousands of us uniting to make the South the home our communities need it to be. To stay connected to our work for liberation, please renew your SONG membership or sign up to become a member by using this QR code. Memberships expire each year so that we can keep up-to-date records of our political fam. Help us make sure that we have the correct address and contact information for you!



THANK YOU