Gillian Prater-Lee
Northeast Ohio Coalition for the Homeless Intern
Wellman Hill Recipient 2018

   This Summer I had the opportunity to intern at Northeast Ohio Coalition for the Homeless (NEOCH), thanks to the Wellman Hill Grant. The financial support of this grant allowed me to devote my summer to this internship and related activism in Cleveland without getting a paying job.

   When I first stepped into the NEOCH office, I liked what I saw. The room was filled with people laughing, comfy couches, and loads upon loads of donations stacked all around. This was the type of environment that I wanted to work in: a community of kind and laid-back people working together to fight a difficult battle. These people have made doing the difficult work of outreach, advocacy, and organizing against oppressive systems an enjoyable time. In fact, the people and experiences I have had at NEOCH have shaped me as a social justice activist, but, more importantly, as a person. I've worked in the past to organize around affordable housing, but NEOCH gave me the human perspective on how unjust systems shape people's lives by systemically denying them housing. Talking to and working with NEOCH has made me a better advocate and, I'd like to think, a better person.

   At NEOCH I did direct outreach to Cleveland's unsheltered homeless community, organized a "Homeless Congress," and planned and implemented a protest advocating for affordable housing in Cleveland. My favorite project was the protest. This event (dubbed a "Funeral for Affordable Housing") allowed NEOCH to go out into the greater community and amplify the voices of people experiencing homelessness and others who have had struggles with finding quality, affordable housing. The event did what I see as central to my advocacy: centering the voices of people oppressed by systemic forces to create change. This internship has strengthened my resolve to advocate for affordable housing and against gentrification, and was only possible for me to complete because of the Wellman Hill Grant Program.