



Live the Legacy Podcast

Live the Legacy podcast captures bold conversations between civil rights icons and today's student activists. These conversations bridge the past and the present in order to move forward together. Listen today on our [website](#) or your favorite podcast app.

Season 4- Episode Six Annabelle Bangs, Binghamton University

The final episode of Season Four, Andrew Goodman Vote Everywhere alumna Annabelle Bangs discusses civic engagement on campus at Binghamton University and her role as the Civic Engagement Coordinator today.

Transcript

Mia: Hello and welcome back to another episode of the Live The Legacy Podcast, a project brought to you by the Andrew Goodman Foundation. This is your co-host Mia Matthews, and today we are joined by Annabelle Bangs, a former Andrew Goodman Ambassador and the current Civic Engagement Coordinator at Binghamton University. We hope you enjoy today's episode.

So would you please introduce yourself, Annabelle?

Annabelle: Yeah, hi everyone. So as Mia just mentioned, I am an alumni of Binghamton University. I graduated my undergrad in May of 2023 and I'm actually still at Binghamton University getting my master's in public administration. I was an Andrew Goodman Ambassador for two years and I worked through their Center for Civic Engagement Office. I am actually still at the Center for Civic Engagement as their civic engagement coordinator in the fall of 2023 at this moment in time where I'm doing my MPA internship, which is really good. So I'm kind of working with the AGF Ambassadors working to fulfill my MPA degree as well in a little bit of a dual enrollment kind of role. And then just on some other notes, I also have a podcast for the

MPA program, so it's called [Do Good Well](#), where we promote the Binghamton MPA program and all things public administration.

Mia: I love that. I love the name Do Good well too. And I also love how you're able to work with the Ambassadors now on the other side of things, it must be such a cool transition to be able to be in that position first and give your insight having been in their shoes. So knowing all of that, we're curious what you do in your free time?

Annabelle: So definitely my free time is a little limited, being a full-time student working, being involved in some extracurriculars. One of the favorite things that I like to do in my free time, I bake a lot. It's definitely one of my favorite things to do. I just, because it's fall, it is apple cider season, so I just made a couple of batches of homemade apple cider donuts. Made some pies because I went apple picking this past weekend. But some other things that I enjoy doing, I like to read, I like to draw and paint, and every week my friends and I will have some form of movie night. We actually have a running list of movies where we keep track of everything that we watch and where the platforms are because we have so many different ones. So we like to make sure that we get everything on our list crossed off. And right now we're in all of our Halloween movies as well.

Mo: That sounds like how I spend my weekends honestly, baking fall treats and watching Halloween movies. That's been the vibe. Well, we really appreciate you joining us at the end of this season. We've had some incredible guests and different organizations talk about voter education materials, but we really wanted to chat with somebody who was a recent Ambassador and had spent some time previously as a young person working on a campus to try to get your peers civically engaged. So can you tell us a little bit about your experience as an Andrew Goodman Ambassador and maybe specifically what were some of the biggest barriers that students faced on your campus when trying to vote?

Annabelle: Yeah, I think that one of the biggest barriers that we faced at Binghamton was building back from covid. So I became an ambassador in the fall of 2021, which was really difficult because in the spring of 2020 everything went online, and that was the same for my first year as a student. My freshman year, a lot of my classes were online both in the fall and the spring. So when I became an Ambassador, a lot of things were moving back in person, but that included a lot of our connections with student organizations. And we didn't really know the new leadership of these clubs because their executive boards had a complete overhaul. Basically in those two years, we also always had a connection with new student programs and orientation, but with orientation being still on an online basis, we couldn't always register those students right from the get go. This year, we were able to get our voter registration numbers back up actually, and we're already at over 900 students registered to vote because we were able to get back into those orientations. But some other barriers that we faced were we had to move our polling place on campus from our university union, which is a central place on campus to the event center, which is way off and out of the way. Or we had to go from one place in the union in 2021 to a completely different place that was less accessible to students. So those were some

of our major barriers, especially in the get out the vote effort. And again, this is just focused on 2021, this is my first year, but with it being an off election year, students weren't as aware. But as we progressed and as the university as a whole built back from covid, we were able to build these connections back with our student orgs. And this year we were able to do that as well. And we're planning and we're doing partnerships not only with other offices on campus, but with these student orgs as well. And we have now connections with our student association. So with both the president and with various levels of our student association, including our vice president of Multicultural Affairs and our Vice President of Student Success.

Mo: Those are some pretty big barriers. I would say that a lot of the campus teams experience very similar effects from the COVID-19 pandemic. And I know that it's been a difficult process trying to bring institutionalized voting and civic engagement on college campuses. How did The Andrew Goodman Foundation support your efforts as you were trying to rebuild after such a devastating pandemic that not only was a health crisis, but it also caused a lot of civic engagement issues on your campus?

Annabelle: Well, the AGF first of all is great, and I love working with Caroline, especially now that I'm working with her more directly. And I mean now I was working with her as an Ambassador first, and now that I'm working with her, our Executive Director of the Center for Civic Engagement just came back from maternity leave, so she is our Campus Champion. So I was working kind of in Allison, who is our executive director of the CCE, I was kind of fulfilling her role originally. But the AGF really helped support us by providing resources and providing kind of a guideline on how to reestablish these connections with organizations on campus. And as we almost reins institutionalized, The Andrew Goodman Foundation helped by providing those resources and through our Ambassadors, we were able to do that because as an Ambassador I was like this, I didn't really even know before I became an Ambassador, this was something that I could do and it allowed me to get into a niche role. And I was like, there was essentially the way that our team was structured, there was someone that was focused just kind of on student work connections. There was someone that was focused just on event planning and it was just the way that AGF helped us kind of set up this structure in our team that allowed us to be able to do this. And it was working with Caroline and working with other AGF professionals that allowed us to be able to structure it that way.

Mia: I love that. And it really shows the power of the youth voice when you're equipped with the resources and tools you need. We love that our program makes it so we can just give you what you need and you take it and run from there and can do so much or just there are so many folks to vote and recruit all these poll workers and it's just outstanding to see what you all can do. So yeah, this season of the podcast we have from several different organizations that are working to provide easily accessible voter education materials so that young people feel prepared to make their voices heard during elections. So we've covered topics from voting early, to voting by mail, to all the money complexities of the voter ID laws, and data shows that when young people have access to these educational resources and materials, they're more likely to vote and become lifelong voters. So do you remember how you first heard about voting or being simply

engaged? Was it on social media, your family on campus? How did you first learn how to vote in an election?

Annabelle: So my family is a very civically engaged family. Both my parents are lawyers, so I knew about the voting process very young. My mom is also a judge now. So I have a very civically engaged family. And again, I'm going into public service, but I actually registered to vote in my AP government and politics class in high school. So I knew about voter registration then, but I didn't know until basically coming to college, coming to Binghamton that I could become active in the voter registration process. And it was through kind of my job and through my work as an AGF ambassador that I was like, oh, I can actually make a difference and I can make an impact on the other people around me. And that's what I really enjoyed and I really wanted to be able to make that impact. And I feel like I was able to do that over the past two years and now over, I guess the past two and a half I would say. And going forward, I feel like I'm able to make that difference, not only just by talking with my peers, but I guess talking with people that are younger than me now and influencing not the next generation, but the next couple of a GF ambassadors that are working at the CCE now that have succeeded me.

Mo: That's really cool. I like that you grew up in a family that was already kind of civically engaged and you had access to being able to register to vote in high school. I know that that's definitely not the experience of everybody. And so it's really cool to hear whenever folks do have that in their lives, the impact that it makes early on. I mean, that's really huge. And I know that I was reading some data recently that talked about whenever kids are raised in the household that does talk about voting, that does talk about the importance of staying up to date in politics and understanding how these laws and policies impact day-to-day life. It really does make a huge difference. So I think it's cool that we had an example on the podcast of the ways in which that's true. So we have quite a few young listeners or young people who listen to our podcast. What would you want to tell them about voting and being civically engaged? Do you have any advice, any encouragement, just really anything that you'd like your peers to know about voting, especially ahead of such a crucial election year?

Annabelle: I think that it is always, well, obviously voting is always important. That's why I'm here. That is the entire purpose of my job. But never discount the local elections as well because, and this is something that obviously I work for a state senator, I'm very involved in local government. I am getting a graduate certificate in local government management. It's where I can see my career potentially going forward if I don't end up working in the voting rights field. But your local government is what also impacts you directly on a day-to-day basis. And while we do have a very crucial presidential and federal election coming up, and those are the ones that get super publicized, your local government is what is impacting often your day-to-day lives. It's the legislation that is impacting your roads. It's impacting the health and safety policies in your county, in your town, in your village. So make sure to always go out and vote in your local elections as well. Also, in terms of advice and encouragement, don't be scared to ask questions about voting, especially on a college campus. For any listeners in the SUNY system, every SUNY campus has an office like the Center for Civic Engagement that will have open

office hours. So go ask questions, they're there to help you. That is again, the entire purpose of my job. That's what I say to all of the class presentations that I do, all of the orientation presentations that I know that my colleagues have done. That is our purpose is to be able to help students. So for any young individuals that have questions about voting, there are individuals there to be able to help you. So make sure that you go and ask those questions because it's better to get the issues resolved now than to be discouraged and not want to vote later.

Mia: Absolutely. And so important local elections, I feel like it's always a great point to bring up whenever folks are feeling like their vote doesn't count or matter as much, they say, *oh, I live in whatever state. I know it's going to be blue or red.* Well, local elections, that's really not the case. You can have a direct impact in the community you live in and it's so understated. So thank you for bringing that up in this episode. So as you know, this is a Live Legacy podcast. In every episode we like to remember the why behind the podcast. And part of our mission is continuing the legacy of Andrew Goodman, James Earl Chaney and Michael Schwerner, three men who were murdered by the Ku Klux camp for trying to register black people to vote in Mississippi in 1964. Rooted in their legacy., we aim to continue the efforts of making young voices and votes a powerful force in our democracy. So when you hear the story of Goodman, Cheney, and Schwerner, how are you inspired to continue your work to help young people be civically engaged?

Annabelle: I've heard their story a couple of times, not just through the AGF actually. So in addition to my undergraduate degree, and it was majored mainly in philosophy with a little bit of political science, I got a minor in human rights and for some of my human rights classes, I took history classes and I learned about Andrew Goodman, James Earl Cheney, and Michael Schwerner and when I was an AGF ambassador, I was like, *no way.* And every time I hear their story and I hear about the story of the civil rights movement, I just kind of think about how almost recent it was in terms of a timeframe and how much further we also still need to go. And it always just inspires me to keep pushing for what needs to happen and especially in a diverse field of where I can go. And I know that I have the opportunity to be able to bounce around in my future careers, and I'm 21 years old, so I have so much time to be able to grow. I have so much time to be able to explore. I like to be able to think back on this and use it as, and use their story as inspiration of maybe I'll spend a couple of years in government, but I would like to move into activism maybe further or vice versa. But I would like to be able to, to help the younger generations. And I would like to always maintain some aspect of civic engagement because I feel that it is essential and it's not just my civic duty, but it's what I want to do. And again, I think that my background growing up does influence that a lot, but learning about these three through not just my classes, but also my work experience has boosted that

Mo: For sure. Yeah, and you mentioned it wasn't that long ago. This summer is actually the 60th anniversary of 1964 Freedom Summer, and we'll be celebrating that as an organization and honoring that, obviously. But it's always interesting when I slow down and I think about how old the men were. They were 20, 21, right in your age range, whenever they were starting to really

get out there and try to make a difference in the voter suppression that was happening in Black communities and really joining this larger civil rights movement. And it's really cool to be able to sit down and talk with young folks who are that same age, who are already interested in being civically engaged and going into this social activism and using their voice beyond just the ballot box. And that's just really cool. I appreciate you taking the time to reflect on that question and for just being involved with the Andrew Goodman Foundation in the first place. It's amazing to have such young people, so passionate, so early on and not willing to give up. This is, you see the long-term trajectory of your work, and I think that's really inspiring and really cool. So I appreciate you being on!

Annabelle: I love the Andrew Goodman Foundation.

Mo: Yeah, it's mutual. It's mutual. Well, we've mentioned before, this is a really monumental election cycle year. We know that local elections are important. We've talked about that. Please everyone go out and vote in every election, make your voice heard anytime that you can. That's what's so beautiful about being able to participate in our democracy is that there are lots of different ways to do that and lots of different elections to do that. But this year is a pretty monumental one with all the different elections coming up. And as young people, there's probably a lot on your mind. There's climate change, there's gun control, there's LGBTQ rights, there's so much that's going on that makes it very difficult and heavy at times to think about how much there is to really fight for and what's at stake during elections like this. And I love talking about hope on this podcast and what brings people hope. I think it's really important that we practice that. I think it's something that it's easy to get down and really have to fight through finding sometimes the good that's out there, but I know it's there and I like to talk to people about it. So what's something that's giving you hope? As we begin 2024, we're looking forward to this pretty monumental election cycle. And this can be related to the elections, but there's lots of things that could be giving you hope at the moment. It could be having great conversations with your colleagues and friends. It could be a really good book or a nice playlist you've been listening to, but really anything that's bringing you hope and giving you life lately, let's chat about it.

Annabelle: Yeah, really, even though 2020 is really scary, it's really daunting. The year 2024 since 2020 has been really daunting for me because that was the year that I originally was supposed to be graduating undergrad, I graduated a year early. But it's also really exciting because I'm going to be graduating in May. I don't know where I'm going yet, but I'm excited for that. And I'm going to either probably be going to grad school, I'm going to work, who knows where, anyone hiring? But I'm excited to be able to explore more. And I'm excited to be able to, I'm always, I love all of my friends and all of my family, and I'm really excited to be able to, I'm planning a couple of trips I know. So I'm excited to travel. I'm excited to get a master's degree, which is oh, so daunting, but also oh so exciting. And I'm really excited to see what's coming next. And again, even though it's really kind of anticipatory and really, I don't want to say scary, but scary in a way because I don't know what's coming next. And again, this next election cycle is going to be a lot. And there's a lot of issues at stake. I know that there's also a lot that is

coming up again on a personal level that is exciting, and I'm ready to kind of see where the next year kind of takes me.

Mia: How exciting. I love that. And from this conversation and beyond, all we know is that the Vote Everywhere team is very happy or lucky to have your guidance. So yeah, before we end the episode, any final thoughts you want to share with our audience? And we know you have your own podcast, feel free to let our audience know about it.

Annabelle: Yeah, I think that everyone should listen to Do Good Well, so the Binghamton MPA, I will talk about it because I love it. The Binghamton MPA program has, and this was launched back about a year ago, little over a year ago, and it wasn't mine originally. I inherited it. The Binghamton MPA program has a podcast called Do Good Well, and I don't remember where the name originated from, but it was originally to help promote the Binghamton MBA program. But it talks about public administration as a whole. And basically the idea is that with a public administration degree, you can, it's not just about doing good for your community, but it's about being able to do good for your community, but you're able to do it well. So I think that's where the name came from. And we highlight local nonprofits. We highlight actually some MPA programs. We have highlighted government officials. And I really, I love it. And I'm really honored to be able to be featured on the Andrew Goodman Podcast as well, because this is something that I have a passion for and I'm really happy to just be able to speak with you guys today. And I would like to thank you for being able to speak with you guys today.

Mo: Thank you so much for joining us.

Mia: Thank you so much for joining us, Annabelle.

This concludes this week's episode of the Live Legacy Podcast. Thank you so much for listening. If you enjoy this episode or any of the others, please consider leaving us a review, rating us, or becoming a subscriber. All of those help other people find our podcast that much easier. Special shout out to Tabeeek Music for all the music that you heard on today's episode. Once again, this has been your co-host, me and Matthews joined by Mo Banks with The Andrew Foundation. Thanks a lot for listening.