

Needham Human Rights Committee
January 16, 2020 - 7:30pm
Highland Room, Town Hall

Committee members in attendance: Cynthia Ganung, Jennifer Howard, Christina Matthews, Ashok Mehta, Jared Pizzuto, Julie Venables, Police liaison – Lt. Belinda Carroll

Committee members absent: Kerry Hurwitch, Amelia Klein, Marlene Schulz, Bud Schram

Guest: Sophia Dedek, Needham High School Student

The meeting was called to order by co-chair Jen Howard at 7:35pm.

Minutes:

Minutes from Dec 19, 2019 NHRC meeting will be approved at the Feb. 27 meeting

Public participation - none

Membership Update:

Tracy McKay can no longer be on the committee. There are two openings on the committee.

Old Business:

Feb. 9 “Community Forum on Human Trafficking” by PATH and NHRC.

Feedback from NHRC members: Over 50 attended, including a group of high school students, parents of school age and younger children and interested adults. The two videos were well received. The speaker was a woman who had escaped from trafficking. She gave a powerful talk, including real examples and highlighting the psychological bonds that make it hard for a person to leave. She said that recruiters for prostitution can be anywhere, even schools & libraries and said that parents should supervise children closely. It was pointed out that greatest danger is within the home - from use of the computer. The high school students said that they know how to be safe using computers but were worried about their middle school sibs. People were given a hot line number to call if they see a suspicious situation and a resource for parents; Culturereframed.org

Those who attended thought that the way the program was presented was powerful, but overwhelming and scary. Some thought that the larger context was missing or incomplete.

The high school students at the NHRC meeting said they were not aware of programs at school about safety on line except for a short segment in grade 6 when they got iPads. Lt. Belinda Carroll will ask the Youth Commission about courses, etc. This might be a topic for a future program by PATH.

Program with Needham SEPAC – Jen. Showing movie “Intelligent Lives”

<https://intelligentlives.org/> March 25 or 26, 2020, *looking for co-sponsorship*. We have not yet received the video.

Meeting with Tom Denton at NHS. Tom has not contacted NHRC yet. Ashok will contact him.

Diversity and Discussion Book Club. Jen reported that NHRC is responsible for finding a leader for the June 10 meeting on the book “Educate” which is about a woman growing up “off the grid”.

The REAL Coalition (Needham Race Equity Access Leadership) - Report by Jen

Purpose of REAL is to implement the goals of the NPS work on racial equity, (based on the March, 2018 Equity report). Members are teachers, administrators, students, parents and community members. There are six committees:

1. Policies and Practices – Dan Gutekanst, Supt. - Revise language in handbook to make it more inclusive, how to assign students to classes, how students are disciplined, look at race.
2. Curriculum and Instruction - Culturally responsive teaching and curriculums, identify bias in curriculums and revamp what is taught,
3. Professional Learning – Mary Lammi, Asst. Supt.- professional development - make work more cohesive across the district, had Simmons professor work with REAL Coalition.
4. Hiring and Employment Practices. Recruit and retain a diverse staff. They will bring students with them to recruiting events
5. Culture & Climate. led by Keith Ford, vice principal Needham High School. Will meet with committees in all buildings and students. SAFE (Students Acting For Equity) is using Courageous Conversations with students.
6. Communications and Community Engagement - Diane Simmons
Website and performance report, build more inclusive parent models, outreach to parents. Put REAL goals into strategic plans, work with ELL parents, develop culturally responsive special education. NHRC has been asked to be part of no. 6

New Business:

MLK Day – Jan. 20 The NHRC is providing the refreshments for the Jan. 20 program at Pollard. Three members have offered to help with picking up the food and beverages donated by Needham businesses. Cynthia is coordinating. The NHRC is not presenting a statement at the program this year.

Feb. 9 -Interfaith Pot Luck Dinner and Conversation about Restorative Justice

5:30-7:30pm, Temple Beth Shalom. NHRC is one of the sponsors.

Pollard STA Day - May 20 Students Taking Action to make a difference for 8th grade. Cynthia and probably Julie will participate. Jen will confirm NHRC participation with the principal.

Community Response Network Update by Jen - Jan. 10 Meeting with Kate Fitzpatrick, Town Manager and Cindy Gonzalez Public Information Officer with reps from the sponsoring groups NHRC: Jen, Christina, Cynthia and NDI: David Summergrad, Rebecca Young and Dr. Nichole Argo Ben-Itzhak, Project Over Zero.

Planning a day of Training to be led by Nichole and a Facilitator from Over Zero.

Goals (from summary by Jen):

- “ - To provide existing groups in Needham a tool to communicate quickly in the aftermath of acts of hate, bias, and exclusion.
- To provide existing groups in Needham a platform to coordinate efforts to promote inclusion, equity, and community resilience.
- To expand the reach of existing groups in Needham by creating opportunities to build relational infrastructure.”

One day training – March 27 - Nichole: condensed from the usual three day training, materials and design are being developed.

Want to target different sectors in town, get more groups – listed the groups. We need to also recruit people from targeted groups who are not heard and people who have negative reactions.

Nichole said that this is the first time Over Zero has done this training in a US town - it can be a model for others.

Responses and concerns:

Kate - Positive response from Select Board about being part of this. We will not know what the model will look like. Concern – want to make people aware of limits of what town groups can do, Police and others need to weigh risk of responding and not responding. Police Dept. is tracking incidents of hate crimes. Gov. Baker mandated statewide. Belinda Carroll – concern about “rapid” response, need facts first, not spark outrage, and don’t want investigation compromised.

We need to challenge our assumptions of who hate acts like graffiti impact –be aware of others, in addition to the targets.

Other concerns – What does the town stand for? – we need a vision, a reason for people to become involved, a motivating statement.

Possible new name. Belinda suggested: “Needham’s network for a more inclusive community: communicate, coordinate & create”

Next planning meeting on Jan. 22, Town Hall, Select Board Chambers.

Reports:

Town Issues – nothing to report.

Needham High School – Jared reported that the Courageous Conversation program went to a few freshmen classes last year. This year it is being presented to all the freshmen classes during biology. He thought it would be good to bring this and other efforts to all the classes, maybe thru a whole school assembly. Sophia, also a junior at NHS is glad that CC is part of the curriculum because it has often been up to individual teachers. She and Jared praised a history teacher who uses her personal experiences to illustrate issues in history.

Jared suggested that students from SAFE (Students Advocating for Equity) might work with NHRC. It is better to bring programs to the students than to have them come to community events. He will talk with Mr. Denton about this.

Schools – nothing to report

Announcements:

MLK Day Celebration – Jan. 20, Pollard Middle School, 9:30am refreshments, 10am-noon Program.

Next Diversity and Discussion Book Club: Jan. 30, ***We Are Here to Stay***, Susan Kuklin
Pollard STA Day will be May 20

The meeting was adjourned at 9:35pm.

Upcoming meeting dates:

February 27

March 19

April 16

May 21

June 18

Recorder – Cynthia Ganung