

**Annual Town Report  
FY 2018**

**HUMAN RIGHTS COMMITTEE**



*Nadaa Ali*

*Abdul Cader Asmal (Clergy Association)*

*Cynthia Ganung (Clergy Association,  
IJTF, Diversity Initiative)*

*Kerry Hurwitch*

*Amelia Klein (Diversity Initiative)*

*John Kraemer (liaison – NPD)*

*Christina Mathews*

*Ashok Mehta*

*Bud Schram*

*Jennifer Howard Schroeder (Chair)*

*Matt Schroeder (NHS)*

*Marlene Schultz (Vice-Chair,  
Needham PATH)*

*Julie Venables*



**CHARGE**  
**Human Rights Committee**  
*Approved August 12, 2008*

Created in 1995 by the Select Board, the mission of the Human Rights Committee is to address matters pertaining to human and civil rights and problems related to thereto that may arise in the Town.

The charge of the Committee is to:

1. Advocate appreciation and respect for human and civil rights in our Town (Education);
2. Organize and/or recommend community events to constructively promote respect for human and civil rights in our Town (Community Outreach);
3. Provide advice and assistance to the Town Manager, Chief of Police, and/or other Town offices in response to issues that challenge the human and/or civil rights of any individual or group in our Town (Community Response)

**NHRC LOGO**

The NHRC logo design, which is universally recognized, combines the shape of a hand with that of a bird (dove). It was created by an international committee for the promotion and protection of human rights.

**MEMBERSHIP**

Official members of the Needham Human Rights Committee are Needham residents who volunteer to serve on the Committee. They are appointed by the Select Board.

*The Committee shall consist of 12 members. When practicable, the Committee should include representatives or designees of the Needham Police Department and the Needham Public School Department (ex officio and non-voting), the Needham Commission on Disabilities, and the Needham Housing Authority. Membership should also include a representative of the local clergy, a senior citizen, a tenant of the Needham Housing Authority, a realtor, and a Needham High School student.*

**MEETINGS**

Human Rights Committee meetings are usually held the *third Thursday* of each month at Needham Town Hall, Highland Room, 7:30-9:00 pm. Meetings are open to the public and all meeting dates and agendas are posted on the Town website. On occasion, guest speakers are invited by the Committee to share their expertise in the area of human rights. Guest speakers play an important role as resources for planning future NHRC events. The Committee welcomes all Needham residents who are interested in human rights to attend a meeting and to learn about the work of the Committee.

**SPONSORED COMMUNITY EVENTS**

Organizing and sponsoring community events and educational forums related to human rights plays a major role in the work of the NHRC. Following are highlights for the Fiscal Year 2018.

## ***Needham 6<sup>th</sup> Annual Diversity Summit – November 18, 2017 Pollard Middle School***



(Photo courtesy Needham Diversity Initiative, Inc. needhamdiversity.org)

The Needham Diversity Summit, an annual event organized by the Needham Diversity Initiative, Inc. brings together community leaders, friends, neighbors and students to explore, foster, strengthen and celebrate Needham's diversity - of socioeconomic status, race, sexual orientation, gender (including identity and expression), religion, ethnic identity, ability and age. The Summit attempts to empower groups that may otherwise feel unable or that lack the confidence to share their experiences and voices, and to challenge its residents to think in new ways about the Town's evolving community. The 2017 Summit featured a spoken word poet; a panel presentation by NHS students, a parent and educator, and a minister; and an interactive workshop facilitated by True Story Theater. The NHRC was a co-sponsor of the day-long event. NHRC members served on the Diversity Summit Planning Committee and attended and hosted the Diversity Summit. NHRC members also participated in workshop sessions, an integral part of the Diversity Summit program.

## ***Martin Luther King Jr. Day Celebration - January 15, 2018 Needham High School***

Justice Delayed; Justice Denied;  
Justice Now.  
- Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr.


Join us for  
Needham's Celebration and Observance of  
**Martin Luther King, Jr. Day**  
Monday, January 15, 2018  
Needham High School Auditorium  
609 Webster Street, Needham

10:00 AM – 12:00 PM  
Doors open at 9:30 AM  
Refreshments will be served

*Sponsored by the following Needham organizations:*

- Diversity Initiative, Inc.
- Clergy Association
- Human Rights Committee
- Public Schools and its METCO Program

[www.needhamdiversity.org](http://www.needhamdiversity.org)



*This program is supported in part by a grant from the Needham Cultural Council, a local agency which is supported by the Massachusetts Cultural Council, a state agency.*

Hosted by the Needham Diversity Initiative, this annual community event celebrates the legacy and the life and achievement of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. The central focus of the MLK Day is children. Most of the performances are by or for children of all ages. Middle school students conducted a ceremony of lighting candles in honor of those who have inspired them. Other program highlights included a keynote speaker, a dance ensemble presentation, and performances by the MLK Children's Choir and the Needham High School Chorale. NHRC was a co-sponsor of the celebration.

Committee members served on the MLK Day Planning Committee, organized and provided

refreshments, and attended the event. Additional co-sponsors of the event were the Needham Clergy Association and the Needham School Department and its METCO Program.

***Interracial Dialogue Potluck Dinner Jan. 28, 2018 First Parish Church UU Needham***



An evening of sharing identities and connecting over a meal with guests from diverse backgrounds was held at First Parish Needham Unitarian Universalist. This event was a continuation of previous potluck dialogues that addressed ways that communities could ensure that their Towns are safe and welcoming places for all who reside, work, study or visit there. The event was facilitated by Jackie Mulvehill, an experienced diversity trainer and graduate of Needham High School. The event provided attendees with opportunities for discussion and dialogue within small groups, who then shared their ideas with the entire group, and made suggestions for a follow-up potluck event. The event was co-sponsored by First Parish Needham Unitarian Universalist, Temple Beth Shalom, Bahá'í Community in Needham, Needham High School (NHS) All Genders and Sexualities Alliance, NHS Amnesty International Club, Needham Human Rights Committee, Needham Diversity Initiative, Needham Interfaith Clergy Association, and Cooperative Metropolitan Ministries (CMM).

***Children & the Media - February 5, 2018 Powers Hall***



Many schools across the nation, including the Needham Public Schools, have been deeply concerned about the increase of racist, anti-Semitic, and many other forms of hate and bias that appear in their classrooms, their playgrounds, and their bathrooms. Parent groups seek support and guidance in helping their children make sense of what they hear on the news. The Needham Human Rights Committee conducted a public forum that focused on the messages that children are constructing about human differences, human dignity and equality, and human rights *through*

*the news media.* Guest speaker Diane Levin – Professor of Early Childhood Education, Wheelock College and author of *Beyond Remote-Controlled Childhood, So Sexy So Soon, Teaching Young Children in Violent Times* – discussed the harmful effects of violence, war, and other societal forces portrayed in the news media, and shared ideas about ways that parents and caregivers could guide children in processing information they hear or see in the news.

***Race, Sports & Protest: A Community Conversation – April 9, 2018 Eliot School***



The role of athletes as advocates for political and social change was the focus of an event hosted by the Needham Diversity Initiative at the Eliot School Performance Center. Guest panelists Jim Hirsch, bestselling author & Needham resident; Bill Littlefield, NPR host, author and Needham resident; and William (Smitty) Smith, Executive Director of the National Center for Race Amity at Wheelock College in Boston engaged in a conversation, followed by interaction with the audience. Sponsors

of the event included the World of Wellesley, the Needham Human Rights Committee and the Needham Free Public Library.

***Community Dialogue and Potluck - May 6, 2018 First Parish Church UU Needham***



*And How Are the Children? A Conversation on Race, Equity, and Inclusion* was the theme of a community potluck event focusing on inclusivity in the Needham community. The event was hosted by the First Parish of Needham. Participants learned about how the activism of a group of parents led to the Needham Equity Audit Report. The audience then engaged in conversations about how they as members of the Needham community could follow up on the recommendations in the Report to ensure that Needham schools and the Needham community is welcoming and safe. Cosponsored by: First Parish in Needham UU Racial Justice Task Force,

Bahá'í Community of Needham, Congregational Church of Needham, First Baptist Church in Needham, Presbyterian Church in Needham, Temple Beth Shalom, Needham Diversity Initiative, Needham Human Rights Committee and Cooperative Metropolitan Ministries.

### ***Community Forum "Freedom Team" – May 17, 2018***



The NHRC organized an open forum to discuss types of efforts or programs that would enhance Needham's ability to respond to incidents of hate and bias that happen in the Town. Participants included members from the League of Women Voters, Needham Diversity Initiative, Temple Beth Shalom Social Justice Committee, Superintendent Dan Gutekanst, Rep. Denise Garlick, and 12 community members. Guest speaker Jamele Adams, Dean of Students at Brandeis University (and a resident of Natick) described a community response program in Natick called the *Freedom Team*.

Founded in 2016 through the inspiration of Mr. Adams, the Natick Freedom Team has the mission of "preserving freedom through unity in the community." A Freedom Team can consist of parents, students, educators/education network, local politicians, police representative, clergy, restorative justice practitioners, doctors who may have experience in trauma, social media experts, and lawyers who work in civil rights. Its members meet monthly with the goal of serving the community by offering dialogue and support. Participants of the Forum expressed support for further discussion about a collaborative model that would be most effective in the Town of Needham. The NHRC will follow-up with further discussion at a future community forum.

### **COMMUNITY RELATIONSHIPS**

In pursuing its mission, the NHRC seeks opportunities to collaborate - and develop on-going relationships - with groups in the Needham Community. Following are examples of ways the NHRC has made efforts to reach out to both official and non-official Town Committees and organizations.

- **NEEDHAM HOUSING AUTHORITY** Members of the NHRC have had on-going conversations with the Executive Director and the Resident Services Coordinator to discuss common interests and means of support. The Committee's goal is to learn about the needs of residents living in NHA units, and how well residents of Needham public housing are integrated into the Community. The Committee continues to seek candidates who are residents of the Needham Housing Authority to serve on the NHRC, and has collaborated with NHA officials in promoting resident representation on the Committee.
- **MEDIA SOURCES** The NHRC has developed close links with the local media. Direct contact with editors and journalists in the past has helped the Committee promote its events and generate interest in human rights. The Hometown Weekly has consistently responded to press releases and published lead articles about Committee events in a timely fashion. The Needham Times on occasion has highlighted the NHRC in guest columns. The Committee continues to reach out to the NT by meeting the staff, learning how and when to send press

releases and calendar listings, and how to present a story about their work. Additionally, the NHRC launched its own Facebook page to publicize events and promote understanding of human rights issues in the community.

- **NEEDHAM PUBLIC SCHOOLS** Members of the Committee have met with the Superintendent and Needham Public School officials to discuss ways to collaborate and to share resources. The NHRC is committed to developing on-going relationships with school personnel and students. Their input is critical in the planning of educational forums which address the challenges faced by youth in our community. Dr. Gutekanst has attended many NHRC meetings and has kept the Committee informed about major initiatives and activities in the NPS. One example has been updates related to the Needham Equity Report. The NHRC provides opportunities for NHS students to take on leadership roles as members of the Committee, and to take initiative in providing student participation and input in the planning of events. The Needham High School representative who serves on the Committee provides an important link to faculty and student groups.

The NHRC facilitated several school events during the past year.

**STA Day** April 12, 2018 *Pollard Middle School* STA (Students Take Action): A Day of Sensitivity, Tolerance, and Awareness provided a series of workshops for grade 8 students at Pollard. Members of the HRC conducted workshops which introduced and examined students' understanding of "implicit bias".

**"One Day" Workshop** January 31, 2018 *Needham High School* Members of the Human Rights Committee conducted four 35-minute sessions which focused on understanding and dealing with "implicit bias".

**Representation on NPS Committee** A member of the NHRC was invited to participate in a Needham School District conference entitled Portrait of a Needham Graduate. The goal of the conference is to shape a vision for the future of education in the Needham community. Local leaders from business and higher education were invited to share their perspectives about how to prepare students for jobs and life-long learning.

- **NEEDHAM COUNCIL ON AGING** The co-chairs of the NHRC have corresponded with the Executive Director of the Council on Aging to plan events at the Center at the Heights to accommodate the needs of older adults. The Director has been supportive in helping the Committee reserve dates and space at the Center to host key events. The Center staff members have generously given their time and energy in organizing and facilitating event activities. A public forum was held at the Center at the Heights this past year (*Community Forum "Freedom Team"* – May 17, 2018).
- **NEEDHAM DIVERSITY INITIATIVE, Inc.** The Needham Diversity Initiative (NDI) is a grass-roots, community organization of individuals who live, work, study - or whose children study - in Needham. Many are educators and have been involved with diversity training in the past (e.g., via their profession or membership in Needham's Human Rights Committee, Needham Clergy Association, or Immigration Justice Task Force). The NDI organizes on-going events, workshops, and community forums which provide opportunities for residents of Needham to learn about the diverse populations within their community, to examine diversity issues, and to build diverse coalitions. Two members of the NHRC serve on the

Board of the Needham Diversity Initiative. The NHRC has been an annual co-sponsor of the Needham Diversity Summit and the Martin Luther King Day Celebration. The NHRC has co-sponsored many of the events organized by the NDI during the past year. (See Sponsored Community Events section.)

- **NEEDHAM CLERGY ASSOCIATION** Two members of the NHRC are active members of the Needham Clergy Association. Both groups have shared information about their work with members of their respective organizations, and have supported and attended public events organized by each group. This past year, NHRC members participated in a race dialogue pot luck dinner sponsored by the Needham Clergy Association and the Cooperative Metropolitan Ministries.
- **NEEDHAM IMMIGRATION JUSTICE TASK FORCE** One member of the NHRC is a member of the Immigration Justice Task Force and has been an important link to the group. The NHRC has supported the activities of the IJTF and has attended and co-sponsored events they have organized. The work of the IJTF is relevant to the work of the Committee: both groups are advocates for human rights. The IJTF has been an important source of information about current issues and actions taken in relation to immigration policies, many that involve residents and employees in the Town of Needham.
- **NEEDHAM FREE PUBLIC LIBRARY** In October 2016, Needham Public Library Trustees and a Board Member presented information to the NHRC about the Library's desire to promote respect for diversity in the town through programming and educational forums. The NHRC has been a cosponsor of the Library Book Forum series.
  - **One Book One Community Program.** Two members of the Committee led a discussion about the implications of immigration policy in the United States, based on the book In the Country We Love: My Family Divided, by Diane Guerrero.
  - **Diversity and Discussion Book Group.** A Committee member co-led a discussion of the book The Hate U Give by Angie Thomas.
- **REPRESENTATIVE DENISE GARLICK** The NHRC continued ongoing discussions with Rep. Denise Garlick focused on how to address incidents of hate and bias that continued to occur in Needham. With generous financial support from Representative Denise Garlick and the Town of Needham, the NHRC invited Jamele Adams to share his expertise and experiences leading the Natick Freedom Team at a community forum. Mr. Adams is a community leader in Natick, race equity expert, celebrated poet, and also Dean of Students at Brandeis, who was instrumental in creating "Freedom Teams" in Natick, Waltham and Cambridge. Freedom Teams pull together leaders from existing groups in town with the focus on creating strategies to respond to instances of hate that happen in that community.

### **HUMAN RIGHTS RESOURCE GROUPS**

The NHRC has kept informed about human rights issues by connecting to regional organizations and groups who serve as resources to the Committee. These resources enhance the work of the Committee in planning educational forums, and in responding to issues that challenge the human rights of any individual or group in the Needham Community.



- **MASSACHUSETTS ASSOCIATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS AND RELATIONS COMMISSIONS (MAHRC)** The Massachusetts Association of Human Rights and Relations Commissions is an organization of municipal and local agencies responsible for promoting human and civil rights and harmonious relationships among diverse groups at a local level. The mission of MAHRC is to provide local and statewide leadership in the areas of human rights and intergroup relationships. MAHRC accomplishes this charge by promoting networking initiatives, developing educational strategies and model programs; and serving as a resource for new and existing human rights and relations commissions.
- **PEOPLE AGAINST TRAFFICKING of HUMANS (PATH)** Needham PATH's mission is to prevent human trafficking in Needham and in Norfolk County. Their goal is to raise awareness through education, advocacy and collaboration. From the beginning Needham PATH has had a strong relationship with the U.S. Department of Homeland Security Victim Assistance Program. PATH continues to develop ongoing collaboration with other agencies within our local communities. There is a great need to educate the public to be able to recognize the risk factors and indicators which exist in our communities that are "hidden in plain sight". Many Needham PATH members have been trained by organizations such as the U.S. Department of Homeland Security and are available for speaking engagements to educate and raise awareness about human trafficking. One member of the Committee is a member of the organization.

### **COMMUNITY RESPONSE**

In meeting its charge to provide advice and assistance to the Town Manager, Chief of Police, and/or other Town offices, the Needham Human Rights Committee has supported community efforts that promote inclusivity, and has participated in community initiatives in response to acts of hate and bias.

#### **Gender Neutral Language Proposal** – Select Board Hearing Mar. 20, 2018

The Committee presented a proposal to the Needham Select Board requesting that the Board change its name (Board of Selectmen) in order to remove reference to gender in its title. A NHRC member read a statement on behalf of the Committee at a public hearing along with group representatives from the League of Women Voters, the Needham School Committee, and NHS students. Arguments were made that adopting the change would promote inclusivity and equality. All members of the Needham Select Board agreed to support the change, which was to be voted upon at a future Town Meeting. Following approval, official changes will be made on a State level.

**Solidarity Vigil** The NHRC took part in a community vigil held at the Town Common in solidarity with Charlottesville, Virginia and the nation. On August 12, 2017, a car was deliberately driven into a crowd of people who had been peacefully protesting the Unite the Right rally in Charlottesville. Three people were killed and 35 injured in a day of violence surrounding a white supremacist rally.



## Statement to the Needham Community

### NEEDHAM – LET’S RESOLVE TO BUILD A NURTURING COMMUNITY

Community can be defined as a feeling of fellowship with others as a result of sharing common attitudes, interests, and goals. As our country starts down a new path, many Americans are struggling to maintain a sense of community and unity with fellow residents in their towns and cities. We, as residents of Needham, need to face the difficult challenges of ensuring that our community is indeed safe for all who live, work and come to our town.

As we ring in the New Year, please join the Needham Human Rights Committee in recommitting ourselves to the fundamental values so essential to an effective democracy in the following ways:

- Seek to find and value each other’s humanity, even those with whom we disagree;
- Consider and respect other’s perspectives and life experiences and how that shapes their points of view;
- Work with individuals who look, act and live differently than we do toward the common good;
- Demand and defend equality for every person;
- Stand up to confront bias, prejudice, and discrimination in all forms, from all sources.

Needham is privileged to have a wealth of community resources that promote respect for cultural integrity, diversity and human rights. These groups strive to enhance the well-being of all who make Needham their home. Learn more about them. Support peaceful community actions by reaching out to others in Needham - exchanging ideas, reconciling differences, building relationships, and creating a foundation for mutual understanding.

Jennifer Howard, *Chair* Marlene Schultz, *Vice-chair*  
NEEDHAM HUMAN RIGHTS COMMITTEE

**Response to Acts of Hate in Needham** The NHRC joined community residents at a vigil held at the Town Common in response to a swastika found spray-painted at the entrance to Needham High School. This was the third time racist graffiti was reported at the school.

## **We Stand With Our Neighbors**

Against Anti-Semitism  
For Peace, Freedom and Love



**Wed, May 9th, 6:30pm**  
**Needham Town Common**

Please join us as we gather in unwavering support of our neighbors and friends affected by the hateful act of vandalism this week at Needham High School.

*Organized by the Needham Diversity Initiative*

## **Statement to the Community** **NEEDHAM HUMAN RIGHTS COMMITTEE** May 9, 2018

The Needham Human Rights Committee is devastated by the latest example of hate perpetrated in our community today. The symbols and words used to express intolerance and hate do more than communicate feelings; they inflict pain and stoke fear. Real pain. Real fear. Words have great power; action has more. Act today to engage in conversation with those you love and those you don't. Teach them to recognize the humanity in all those around them and to consider how we all lose when some of us are excluded or targeted by hate. Think about what keeps you from making this the single most important conversation you can have today.