

**Annual Town Report
FY 2020 (July 2019-June 2020)**

NEEDHAM HUMAN RIGHTS COMMITTEE

*Cynthia Ganung
Sophia Dedek (NHS)
Kerry Hurwitch
Amelia Klein
Belinda Carroll (liaison – NPD)
Christina Mathews (Co-Chair)*

*Ashok Mehta
Jared Pizzuto (NHS)
Bud Shram
Jennifer Howard Schroeder (Co-Chair)
Marlene Schultz
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.

COMMUNITY EDUCATION

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 2020:

*Free At Last: Wrongful Conviction of Needham Student Sean Ellis
November 15, 2019
Center at the Heights*

Free At Last!

Friday November 15th
7:00-9:00 pm
 The Center At The Heights
 300 Hillside Ave, Needham
 FREE

Hear Sean's incredible story, then celebrate his freedom with a dessert reception!

* 22 years spent in prison for a crime he did not commit

* Join our discussion about wrongful convictions in Massachusetts, the continued role of racial bias in our criminal justice system

* Learn about the critical work of the New England Innocence Project

RSVP for this free event @
<https://seanellisfreeatlast.app.rsvpify.com/>

SPONSORED BY:
 NEW ENGLAND INNOCENCE PROJECT
 NHRC
 Needham Diversity Initiative




The NHRC teamed up with the New England Innocence Project and the Needham Diversity Initiative to bring Sean Ellis, a former Needham student back to Needham to tell his story of his wrongful arrest and exoneration 22 years later. Mr. Ellis generously shared his very personal perspective and experiences, bringing to light the great injustices created when racial bias permeates our criminal justice system. Mr. Ellis shared the stage with Northeastern University Law professor and New England Innocence Project board member Stephanie Hartung. *"You just can't stand silent, because once you stand silent - I believe you embolden the proponents of racism."* – Sean Ellis

Needham Diversity Summit 2019
November 16, 2019
Pollard Middle School



The theme of the 8th Needham Diversity Summit was ***"Restoring the Rhythm of Life"***. NHRC was a co-sponsor and had a display at the program. It was attended by over 150 people and described as a very powerful and inspiring day. This annual event brings together community leaders, neighbors, friends and students to join in conversations to support the goals of exploring, fostering, strengthening and celebrating Needham's diversity of race, ethnic identity, religion, sexual orientation, gender, gender identity & expression, socioeconomic status, ability and age. The program included a panel discussion by Needham residents, music by local groups and break-out sessions. Highlights of the summit included the presentations by keynote speaker Judge John T. Broderick, Jr. *"Changing the Culture of Mental Health: It's Way Past Time"* and by Dr. Nichole Argo Ben Itzhak, Project Over Zero, *"Getting Back on Track after Trauma - how does a community respond to words or acts of hate?"* The NHRC facilitated the attendance of several Needham

town government leaders to Dr. Argo Ben Itzhak's breakout session to learn about how communities organize to respond to hate incidents.

Needham Transgender Day of Remembrance Vigil
Nov. 20, 2019
First Parish in Needham, Unitarian-Universalist Church

The Needham Human Rights committee was one of the sponsors of this interfaith service to honor and mourn transgender and gender non-conforming people whose lives had been lost to anti transgender violence the past year in the US. The International Transgender Day of Remembrance began as a candlelight vigil in San Francisco in 1968 to commemorate the life of Rita Hester, an African-American trans woman who was murdered in nearby Allston. NHRC member Cynthia Ganung, who is also a member of the Needham Clergy Association, participated in the vigil as a reader of names of people whose lives were lost as a result of anti-trans violence.

Human Trafficking Awareness
January 9, 2020
Powers Hall

NHRC co-sponsored with Needham PATH (People against Human Trafficking) an anti-human trafficking event in Powers Hall. Billed as a community conversation, there were two short films about sex trafficking and a keynote speaker. There was a brief film from the Blue Awareness Campaign of the Department of Homeland Security that addressed the vulnerability of young high school girls. This was followed by a short-animated film entitled "I am Little Red" that addressed the bold tactics which sex traffickers typically use to lure vulnerable teenagers. The event closed with a very active question and answer period that followed a very emotional and impassioned speech by Cheri Crider, a survivor who escaped commercial exploitation close to 40 years ago. There was a very engaged audience that included several girls from the Needham High School who were driven to form an anti-human trafficking club at the high school as a result of the event.

Annual Martin Luther King, Jr. Day Celebration
January 20, 2020
Pollard Middle School

"There is little hope for us until we become tough-minded enough to break loose from the shackles of prejudice, half-truths, and downright ignorance."

Join us for
Needham's Celebration and Observance of

Martin Luther King, Jr. Day

Monday, January 20, 2020
Pollard Middle School Auditorium
200 Harris Ave, Needham
10:00 AM - 12:00 PM
Doors open at 9:30 AM
Refreshments will be served

Snow Date: Sunday, January 26, 2020
1:00 - 3:00 PM

Sponsored by the following Needham organizations:

- Diversity Initiative
- Interfaith Clergy Association
- Human Rights Committee
- Public Schools and its METCO Program



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.

www.needhamdiversity.org

NHRC was a co-sponsor along with the Needham Diversity Initiative, the Needham Interfaith Clergy Association, and the Needham Public Schools and their METCO program for the event. This year's MLK Day program was an inspiring celebration of the life and legacy of Martin Luther King Jr. Over 300 people came together for a spirited program with music, dance, poetry and reflections. There was a diverse group of performers and attendees, including many families, children and youth. NHRC members organized and provided refreshments and attended the program.

Conversations at My Neighbor's Table Potluck Series

Feb. 9, 2020

Temple Beth Shalom



The seventh of a series of potluck conversation dinners focused on the theme: ***Restorative Justice: What it is and how it can work*** - including ways it is being used in Needham. Special Guests were Dr. Rachel King, Title IX Coordinator, Institutional Planning, Curry College; Dr. Jennifer Balboni, Professor of Criminal Justice, Curry College; and Officer Adrienne Anderson, Needham Public Schools Resource Officer. The event provided attendees with opportunities for discussion and dialogue within small groups, who then shared their ideas

with the entire audience and made suggestions for a follow-up potluck event. Sponsored by: Temple Beth Shalom, First Parish in Needham Unitarian Universalist, Bahá'í Community of Needham, Christ Episcopal Church, Congregational Church of Needham, Presbyterian Church in Needham, Needham Diversity Initiative, Needham Human Rights Committee and Cooperative Metropolitan Ministries.

Conversations at My Neighbor's Table Potluck Series

June 24, 2020

Via Zoom



Unpacking Structural Racism: Exploring and Deconstructing White Privilege and Power was the topic for the June 24, 2020 event co-sponsored by the Needham Human Rights Committee and other groups in town. It was the 8th program presented by the group and the first one on Zoom. The program explored the racist structure of our society so we could better understand how racism affects each of us. Through conversation, we generated steps to take to create anti-racist structural changes.

COMMUNITY OUTREACH

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 FREE PUBLIC LIBRARY Started in May 2018, the NHRC continued to co-sponsor and plan regular book discussion meetings in collaboration with the Trustees of the Needham Free Public Library and Diversity Initiative. The goal of this effort is to create a shared reading experience for community members to explore stories representing a wide variety of perspectives. Books are selected intentionally to make readers think about putting themselves in another's shoes and to link our shared humanity through engaging discussion.

Diversity and Discussion Book Club
Co-sponsored by the Trustees of the Needham Free Public Library, Needham Diversity Initiative, and the Needham Human Rights Committee
2019-2020 program

Diversity and Discussion Book Club

Cosponsored by the Trustees of the Needham Free Public Library, Needham Diversity Initiative, and the Needham Human Rights Committee

- September 12, 2019
Things that Make White People Uncomfortable
by Michael Bennett 
- October 16, 2019
 The 57 Bus: A True Story of Two Teenagers and the Crime That Changed Their Lives
by Dashka Slater
- November 14, 2019*
It wasn't Me
by Dana Alison Levy 
- January 9, 2020
 We Are Here to Stay
by Susan Kuklin
- March 12, 2020
The Body Papers
by Grace Talusan 
- May 14, 2020
 Hotel on the Corner of Bitter and Sweet
by Jamie Ford
- June 10, 2020
Educated: A Memoir
by Tara Westover 

All discussions start at 7:30 PM in the Community Room

*Will be held at the Pollard Middle School

Due to the COVID -19 pandemic, March 12 discussion was postponed to May 16 (held via Zoom with the author in attendance) and the May 14 discussion was cancelled. On June 10, 2020, the NHRC lead the book discussion via Zoom.

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.

WestMetro Focus Group on Impediments to Fair Housing The HOME Investment Partnerships Program, the largest Federal block grant to State and local governments, is designed exclusively to create affordable housing for low-income households. Needham is part of a local consortium of towns that collectively receives funding to provide affordable housing in the Town. In order to be eligible for funding, the Town prepares a Regional Analysis of Impediments Plan related to fair housing issues. A representative of the NHRC participated in a virtual focus group to discuss Needham's efforts/impediments to "Fair Housing" on April 7, 2020. The NHRC offered

to play a role in assessing residents' needs by examining how NHA residents are educated about their rights regarding fair housing, in collaboration with the NHA director. This is an example of efforts the NHRC makes to collaborate with other Town Committees.

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 continued to meet with the Superintendent and Needham Public School officials and staff 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. Gutkanst has attended many NHRC meetings and has kept the Committee informed about major initiatives and activities in the NPS, particularly 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.

REAL Coalition A co-chair of the NHRC has served as a member of a School District-wide team: Race, Equity, Access & Leadership (REAL), whose purpose is to lead the work and conversations around equity in the Needham Public Schools and classrooms. The NHRC is a partner of the Coalition.

NPS Metrowest Grant Mr. Tom Denton, Guidance Counselor, Needham High School, had contacted Ashok back in 2018. He was seeking support for his application from the NHRC for a grant from Metrowest Health Foundation. His proposal was for addressing racial climate in Needham High School. Specifically, the grant money was for training student leaders in Courageous Conversations and to help students develop the skills and empathy to create an environment that would be more respectful and welcoming to the diversity of students in Needham. After careful consideration, the NHRC offered to collaborate with Mr. Denton and sent a letter of recommendation for his proposal to Metrowest Health Foundation. The Metrowest Foundation funded Mr. Denton's Racial Equity grant for 2019. After another supporting letter of recommendation from the NHRC, the grant was renewed for 2020.

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.

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 One member of the NHRC is an active member 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, the NHRC was a co-sponsor of two community potluck conversations held at Temple Beth Shalom. (See Community Education section.)

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, the 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 Needham Human Rights Committee, along with the Needham Diversity Initiative, has been an on-going cosponsor of the Library Book Forum series since 2018 featuring special guest discussion leaders and Pollard Middle School students. NHRC members led several of the discussion groups.

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.

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.

Needham Community Response Network

As part of its mission to protect the human rights of all Needham residents, the Needham Human Rights committee has provided advice and assistance to the town and has participated in community initiatives in response to acts of hate and bias. The NHRC has been interested in developing a Community Response Network to respond to acts of bias and hate in Needham.

June 2019 – February 2020 The NHRC partnered with the Needham Diversity Initiative to further explore ways to bridge communication between groups, and amongst members of the broader community. NHRC members met with a representative from Over Zero, an organization that works within communities to build “relational infrastructure.” NHRC shared their findings with Town leadership and proposed a “community response network” for communication, including key Needham stakeholders. A series of intensive meetings were held with Kate Fitzpatrick, the Town Manager and Select Board members to create a plan for moving forward with a model that would best suit Needham in formalizing our community’s response to hate speech and other acts of discrimination. . In February 2020, the Town of Needham sent invitations to a vast number of leaders in Needham, representing many different points of view and positions within town.

The workshop was planned for Friday, March 27, 8:30-4:30 pm at the Needham Free Library, co-hosted by the Select Board, the Needham Diversity Initiative, and the Needham Human Rights Committee. The workshop would be facilitated by Over Zero. “Attendees of the workshop will receive an overview of the dynamics of hate; briefly examine recent events in the community; participate in contextually informed simulations that will illumine how and when to respond to hate incidents; and prepare and plan for future events. The workshop is intended to be

the start of a conversation with additional work occurring post-event. Unfortunately (due to the COVID-19 pandemic) the March 27 workshop was postponed to a later date.



*Statement of the Needham Human Rights Committee
June 2, 2020*

To our Needham Community –

We are brokenhearted after witnessing the cruel police killing of George Floyd in Minneapolis, Minnesota in this ongoing plague of police violence that has devalued black lives. George Floyd’s cries for breath, for help, for his mama have forced all of us to think more about what we are called to do – to hasten the coming of the day where no one else has to endure the crushing pain of racism and hatred.

To our black brothers and sisters, we stand with you and we grieve with you. You have endured the trauma and terror of this kind of violence for far too long. For those of us who are not black, we cannot fully understand your pain, but know that we are here with you. We will continue to try our best to be an ally.

So many of us are feeling angry and helpless about these issues that feel so much bigger than us. Our hope lies in each of us who are willing to act for meaningful change, and to see our role in impacting systemic racism. At the same time, we recognize that anti-racism work starts with honest self-reflection to identify those areas in our own belief systems and actions that result in inequity and indifference. This internal work includes an obligation to educate ourselves about how and when racism began in our country, including how its manifestations have morphed and adapted through the centuries.

As your Human Rights Committee, our work aims to build bridges of understanding as we advocate for the human rights of all in our town. We hope that this groundswell of awareness will lead to meaningful action. Our community needs your presence and your voice.

In the days to come, we will share resources for learning and action on our website and Facebook page.

In solidarity,

The Needham Human Rights Committee

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