

Northfield Human Rights Commission

2017 Annual Report

The Northfield HRC has had a busy year in 2017, as we were involved in numerous events, liaised with other HRCs, had several visitors at our meetings, formalized various aspects of our operations, and last but not least, played a key role in the development of Northfield's Municipal ID program. What follows are brief summaries of the HRC's activities in these and other areas.

HRC Organization and Management

- The HRC welcomed new members Najwa Bukhari, Angelique Dietz, Justin London, Shafqat Igbal (mid-year appointment), and Rigoberto Lazaro (mid-year appointment), and new youth representatives Siri Hoff, Irvin Corona, and Keara Cooney. Youth representatives Jack Cuddy and Kajsa Johnson rotated off of the HRC after two years of service. Continuing members are Richard DeBeau (chair), Mar Valdecantos (vice-chair), Corinne Smith (secretary), Eve Webster, Lucy Gonzalez Miron, and youth representative Isaac Riggins.
- In terms of operations, the HRC established an annual calendar for its regularly planned activities, worked on protocols for contacts/community interactions, and formalized our relationship with city staff re assistance with agendas, minutes, and correspondence.
- The HRC, which historically has had no budget, requested and received an annual budget of \$3,050.00 from the city of Northfield, to cover expenses related to our annual MLK day event, clerical costs, participation in state HRC events, support for Northfield Reads, and other program expenses.
- A review of the HRC's bylaws is currently underway, to be adopted in early 2018, to bring them up to date with current organizational and administrative practice.

Community Interactions

- The HRC was involved with and sponsored an ongoing Latino oral history project, carried out by members of the Northfield Historical Society and Carleton College faculty and students.
- Early in the year the HRC was involved with a number of low-income housing issues, and worked with appropriate city staff and offices to move complaints forward.
- The HRC supported the Northfield Reads program, which in 2017 focused on mental health issues.
- HRC Youth Representatives developed a skit addressing topics such as racism and implicit bias for teachers, students, and other community groups.
- HRC members have regularly met with Latino community members following St. Dominic's Misa en Español.

Events

- This year's MLK Celebration took place on January 26 (postponed from Jan. 16th due to inclement weather). Its theme was "Building Bridges of Understanding", and Father Dennis Dempsey of the Church of St. Dominic was presented with the annual Northfield Human Rights Award for his work with Northfield's Latino community.
- HRC members also participated in the Day Without Immigrants event (2.16.17) and the International Day of Peace events (9.21.17)

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Professional Collaborations

- The HRC communicated with other Northfield Boards and Commissions regarding broadening civic engagement, as per the goals of Northfield's strategic plan regarding "Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion."
- HRC representatives met with the Northfield EDA about local Latino businesses and their interactions with the city and inclusion in local business community planning.
- Several HRC members met with community members in Faribault, to assist with their interest in setting up their own HRC. Future meetings are planned with the Bloomington HRC.
- Several HRC members attended the MN HRC summit in October and a number of GARE (Government Alliance on Racial Equity) activities over the course of the year.

Special Visits to the HRC

- Kevin Lindsey, Minnesota's Commissioner of Human Rights, attended the HRC's March meeting. After giving background on the State HRC and its current initiatives, Lindsey and HRC members discussed the role of local HRCs in relation to local governments, as well as the state office. Legal issues regarding record keeping and the role of HRCs in investigations were also discussed.
- Monte Nelson, Northfield's Chief of Police, attended the HRC's September meeting. The biggest concerns Chief Nelson shared with the HRC were underserved (especially Latino) residents of Northfield, and the impact of mental health on community service and policing. He noted the benefits of a municipal ID for law enforcement. He also provided statistics on bias crimes in Northfield (in 2016, none; in 2017 two) and staff fluency in Spanish.
- Dr. Matt Hillmann, Superintendent of the Northfield Public School District, attended the HRC's October meeting. After reviewing HRC relevant curricular initiatives on social/emotional learning, Dr. Hillman discussed ongoing challenges faced by the school district, including retention of diverse staff, discussion of sensitive/difficult issues in the classroom, and enrollment equity in AP classes, athletics, and extra-curricular programs; the school district subsequently provided data on these issues and discussed them with a representative of the HRC. Dr. Hillmann noted that the two largest barriers to minority participation in these activities are often transportation and child care (as older minority students often have to care for younger siblings), and that broader community progress in human rights issues (e.g., the Municipal ID) helps the schools, as they are a microcosm of the Northfield community.

Municipal ID

- Initiated by a group of Northfield Citizens, the HRC, led by Mar Valdecantos, investigated the possibility of city-issued photo ID, for Northfield residents who would like to have one. Working with community service providers (banks, pharmacies), city staff and the city attorney, the HRC discussed the issue at several meetings over the summer, with input from interested community members. The HRC presented a proposal to the Northfield City Council on November 21st, and the city of Northfield, after further deliberation and public comment, unanimously adopted a proposal for a Municipal ID at their meeting on Dec. 12th.

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While Northfield continues to progress and improve on human rights issues, discrimination is still present in our community. In many different areas (education, law enforcement, city services), we are still hampered by a lack of bilingual staff. This not only makes it difficult to provide needed services, but also limits mutual understanding and community building. Housing issues for low-income residents continue. A theme which keeps recurring in encounters with both community members and agencies is the impact of mental health issues on human rights problems, in both their causes and effects. The HRC plans to pay particular attention to the intersection of mental health and human rights issues in the coming year.

Finally, it is with great sadness that we note the deaths of two HRC members. Franklin Lee, who served on the HRC from 2012 to 2017, passed away in June, and Najwa Bukhari, who joined the HRC in 2017, passed away in July.

Respectfully Submitted,
Justin London, on behalf of the 2017 NRC.