

Human Rights Commission
Meeting Minutes
February 13, 2008
7:30 PM in the Newton City Hall cafeteria

Attendance:

Commissioners present: Jane Brown, Peter Brown - Acting Chair, Muriel Esdale, Brenda Krasnow, Sheila Mondschein, Sona Petrossian, Susan Thomas

Commissioner absent/regrets: Marianne Ferguson, Judy Fischbach

Advisory Council Members present: Lt. Bruce Apotheker, Ann Capoccia, Dianne Chilingirian, Marcia Cruz Redding, Nazik Kazimi, Norman Lazarus, Viviane Planine, Armando Rossi, Frank Wolpe

Advisory Council Members absent/regrets: Sam Glass, Carol Y. Kelley, Matt McBride, Carleton Merrill, Myrna Offen, David Rosen, Joan Rubin, Sharon O. Stout

Students present: Julijana Englander, David Fisher

Students regrets: Ali Zaidi, Isaac Zarsky

Staff present: Beverly Droz

Guests: Homer Franck, Emma Reinhardt of HERvoices Inc.

The meeting opened at 7:35 pm, chaired by Peter Brown.
Everyone was welcomed and introductions were made around the room.

The minutes of the January 9, 2008 meeting were approved and accepted.

School Updates:

Newton South High School:

David Fisher reported:

- Social Awareness Club is going to screen "Winter Soldier" on Wednesday, March 5. The film focuses on human rights abuses in Vietnam, and will be used as an analogy for similar problems in Iraq and Afghanistan.
- STAND is putting together a 3-part initiative this spring, centering around the "Days of Remembrance" in April. We will add to the art exhibit for the week, host an end-of-week event, and involve the middle schools as well.
- WAI, Water Aid International, hosted an event on February 13th, a fundraiser and awareness event about water as a human right.

Viviana Planine also reported:

- Black History Programs 1//30/08 "Anti-Racism Problem we all live with."
- At Anti-Racism Meeting Katie Saunders presented. 2/15/08: One hour session devoted to discussing issues of racism in USA. Goal of the session is to inspire and educate fellow classmates to become active against racism. Speakers included the Director of American Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee of MA and the Director of the MA Black Legislative Caucus.

Newton North High School:

Julijana Englander reported:

- The ACC (Asian Culture Club) at NNHS hosted Asian Culture Day, which included seminars, movie presentations, and a student-faculty panel.
- MVP (Mentors in Violence Prevention) Day was Feb. 12th which consisted of skits starring NNHS students to bring light to issues of peer pressure and relationship abuse.
- The BLAC is planning a fashion show and an awareness day for the spring.
- The NNHS Leadership Class is planning a trip to New Orleans for Katrina Relief in April.

Hate Crimes/Incidents

Lt. Bruce Apotheker reported:

- Learning Prep School had swastikas in the bathroom stall in January – the Police is investigating.
- Officers are being trained on hate incidents, i.e. how to speak to victims etc.

- Last year, many nasty emails were sent to Principal Price, this year none were sent during “To be GLAD day” so that is positive progress.
- They expect a grant to work on Anti-Bullying issues.

SPECIAL GUEST

Emma Reinhardt, founder & director of HERvoices, Inc.

The mission of Hervoices is to facilitate cross-cultural knowledge, openness, empathy and understanding by empowering and amplifying the voices of underrepresented woman and girls. In connection with communities around the world, and around the corner, HERvoices collects personal testimonies from underrepresented women and girls to develop participatory, multimedia presentations that are shared with diverse audiences.

It is a non-profit group with a Board of Directors, an Advisory Board, and volunteers. They get their funding from individuals, presentations at locations, grants. They would like to partner with the HRC to present some programs to the public. Children can easily connect to the programs because peers read statements and they can identify with it. Their website is: www.hervoices.org

HRC thanked Ms. Reinhardt for presenting and expressed interest of future collaborations.

New BUSINESS:

MLK Service Projects:

Julijana reported that at NNHS they’re exploring bringing Martin Luther King’s “Letters from Birmingham Jail” to the elementary school classes. It would need to be an abridged version but it would reveal what King went through beyond the “I Had A Dream” story. If they go to one school then they’ll go to all. The Commissioners suggested going to Middle Schools first since that may be more age appropriate.

Brenda reported that on MLK day, the Rashi School was open and members came and did service projects there to benefit a number of causes. This was a wonderful learning opportunity and could be duplicated at other schools.

Members reported on experiences and programs they went to on MLK Day, such as the well attended event at the 2nd Church with the Mayor and the Newton Clergy Association.

Ann Capoccia brought the brochure on Hunger Statistics from Our Lady’s.

Committee sign-up:

Bev handed out committee sign up sheets that were passed around for members to confirm what committees they are working on or interested in. There was agreement that there should be an ad-hoc MLK Day Committee so that the HRC can be more involved with it.

Display case:

Sona spoke to Jeremy Solomon in the Mayor’s office about having a HRC wall display case in City Hall. He’s checking with the powers that be and will be back in touch with her.

Co-sponsorship of Guantanamo program:

Jane Brown reported on another program with Newton Dialogues for Peace and War which will be held on 6/24/08. We had co-sponsored an event on this subject matter with them in April 2007 when Newton lawyers Doris Tennant and Ellen Lubell described how they were representing a Guantanamo detainee who had been held 5 years without charges. It may cost \$50 and we’d help with PR. A motion to co-sponsor was approved unanimously.

Commissioners’ Meeting:

The Commissioners will postpone their regular meeting on 2/26/08 in order to attend Scott Ritter’s talk on “The Threat of War against Iran”. Mr. Ritter is an outspoken UNSCOM Senior Weapons Inspector in Iraq and is now on a nationwide tour, speaking out again the Administrations’ threats against Iran. Flyers were handed out and people were encouraged to attend.

The Women's Commission:

Jane, Brenda and Bev have been attending their meetings this year, along with the Community Social Worker in Bev's office. The Women's Commission is conducting needs assessment in our community of women with pressing economic needs. Our Community Social Worker sees these women and knows their issues. The assessment discussion meetings will take place at these 3 locations during March and April: Senior Center, Newton Community Service Center, Weeks House. The HRC is co-sponsoring these meetings.

Encounter Point film:

Susan reminded members that HRC owns a copy of this film and it is available for personal viewing by taking it out on loan from Bev's office.

Situation in Haiti:

Armando brought up the situation in Haiti and wondered what the HRC can do. Peter suggested that members who are interested in a certain issue form an ad-hoc committee to discuss it and then bring it to the HRC at-large.

COMMITTEE REPORTS:

Membership: No report.

Fair Housing Task Force (FHTF):

Sheila reported that the Mayor had a press conference and that the fair housing website, discrimination complaint process and general information were publicized. The Task force hopes to have the action plan by June. There has been a recent training for staff stake holders and they'll be a 2nd training coming up soon. HRC will put Fair Housing information on our web-pages and in our brochure when it's reprinted.

Program:

Brenda reported that the committee had a meeting at city hall and is exploring possible programs. She talked with Father Cuenin. Another idea is to have an "Open House" but we'd need to explore subject matter and speakers. Susan's been trying to get in touch with organizations so we can continue the Israelis/Palestinians series.

Education:

Sona reported that they've started organizing "Day's of Remembrance". It will be held at NNHS April 8 (1 day) and this is problematic because it is a lot of work for such a short time. She will continue to look into it. It will be at NSHS the week of April 15. The Speakers list has been researched and revised.

Communications:

Susan asked Bev to have the press releases put on the HRC website. Brochures need to be re-stocked continually at the Library and at the City Hall information table.

MAHRC:

Peter reported on an upcoming program: "Global Human Rights Torch Relay" This events speaks out against the Human rights abuses that continue in China. While China has been granted the honor of hosting the 2008 Summer Olympics, they need to improve their record of Human Rights. On March 30th there will be a torch receiving ceremony and rally to help support this issue.

Multi-Cultural:

Marcia has been in touch with Emma who came in tonight and will follow up with her.

Newton Clergy Association:

Bev reported that Sam has arranged for her to present to the March 4 NCA meeting. Ann reported that the "no sweat" entrepreneur, who Sam mentioned at last month's meeting, came and presented at her church, Our Lady's, and it was very informative.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:00 pm.

Next meeting: Wednesday March 12, 2008 at 7:30pm in the City Hall cafeteria.

Respectfully submitted, Beverly Droz, HRC staff director