

Needham Human Rights Committee Meeting
February 17, 2022
7:30pm

Present: Rinaz Mala, Emme Ward, Finn McKeon, Cynthia Ganung, Amelia Klein, Kerry Hurwitch, Bud Schram, Julie Venables, Tina Burgos, Katie King, and Jennifer Howard Schroeder

Guest: Nichole Argo to talk about Needham Resilience Network

What it is:

“Whole society network”—collection of all major stakeholders in the community (formal and informal), traditionally marginalized groups at the center convened to create a welcoming community to help all feel supported and valued.

Goals:

- Build relationships and communication structures to develop trust and warmth.
- Share knowledge, who is doing what, when, etc., can we work together and support each other’s work. A “network of networks” a table of multipliers to relay network happenings back to those groups.
- To align around shared understanding racism, identify risks and reactions.

This is also a “process”—how to communicate to build respectful relationships.

How to prepare templates for appropriate responses based on best practices.

Network will promote social cohesion, and support efforts of member programs.

Network wants to develop something like a “threat assessment team”—who is being targeted, at risk of being targeted, how can we help intervene appropriately.

After 2 years, to socialize and be a model to scale it up around the country.

Year 3, will be bringing it out to other communities.

26 participants already confirmed. 30 members max.

Thursday, March 3 is first meeting. Monthly meetings thereafter.

The Network received a \$25,000/year grant for 3 years from BI Needham. This funding will pay for items such as the project manager salary and survey software.

Tina asked Nichole about the NHRC developing complaint process, what role could/would the Network take? Nichole has been researching and will come back with information. Targeted

violence in communities is up. We have learned that putting all resources into law enforcement is not effective for prevention. Community identification/awareness of who is at risk helps bring down the risk. Every individual/group has risk factors and protective factors. If communities can foresee who might be capable of inflicting harm, careful community intervention can prevent the harm from happening. Looking at those who might inflict the harm, not just those impacted by the harm. The Network would like to partner in the future with NHRC about this process.

Bud asked Nichole about an education component of the Network. One part of the meetings will be “mini sessions” teaching about substantive topics. The expectation is that Network members will take back what they learned to their respective groups. Social norms, rather than just education could make the difference. The Network wishes to establish social norms that model working across differences. One topic on the table is an “Upstander Training” if it can secure funding.

The NHRC is very thankful Nichole came to share the information.

Minutes of January 20, 2022 meeting: unanimously approved.

Community Education Event:

Recent meeting with NCE to hear about the 4-part class planned for the fall. Professor Josh Frank will be coming to Needham to teach a deep dive understanding of Critical Race Theory. NCE is looking for community support particularly in cross-promoting this opportunity. NDI and League of Women Voters have already signaled this support. NHRC will also help promote this event.

With regard to planning an NHRC education event about Critical Race Theory, Tina, Bud, and Jen have been meeting to brainstorm plans. The NHRC would like to put on some kind of event this spring to demystify CRT. First Parish is interested in collaborating on such a project.

Jen met with Terry Duggan, Assistant Superintendent of Schools to talk about the way Needham Public Schools are implementing equity principles into the learning environment. Ms. Duggan explained the principles of “Culturally Responsive Teaching” and how they are being implemented in Needham Public Schools. She stressed this is not CRT. This is a framework that the district is trying to weave into all aspects of teaching, it is not stand-alone curriculum.

Emme remarked last year there were more times where teachers were intentionally having those “difficult conversations” than this year. It could be more behind the scenes with staff and teachers, but it is more noticeable in certain classes or with specific teachers and principals.

Finn agreed it was felt more last year. He remembered the Courageous Conversations programming last year, but the One Day event this year was less impactful.

Emme added that with the older grades there is more opportunity to have the conversations, but as a sophomore there are fewer opportunities because classes are more required.

Bud wondered if these conversations would take place in “homeroom”?

Finn said yes, One Day activities were based in homeroom. But there could be more community building around these conversations. Hard to find a way to talk about this with peers with teacher supervision.

Bud wanted to know if we should invite someone from the school to come talk about their efforts.

Cynthia commented an important job of NHRC is to help bridge what is happening at the schools on equity.

Tina, Bud, Emme, Finn, and Jen will meet again to discuss next steps.

Community Conversations on Race

Another planning session was earlier this evening. The first event is March 1, 7-8:30, registration is open. Some of the comments the planning committee received had to do with not having a remote option. Sometimes having something fully remote can also be exclusive. Both options can leave people out. The reason we are doing it in person was to have the conversations face-to-face, to generate more thoughtful and honest dialog where people can't just turn off their cameras or feel detached from their comments.

Amelia was also getting a lot of emails and phone calls about the in person only. Have precautions been taken to maximize safety of the event at the Center at the Heights?

Katie King said there will be some spacing between chairs. We have 30 RSVPs right now, plenty of room right now. We did not discuss a cap yet. Masks are required at the Center at the moment but we do not know what may change by March 1. People will not be required to provide proof of vaccination.

Bud asked if there are other larger venues that could be considered?

Cynthia appreciates the dilemma, but the reality is that people will be putting themselves at risk and she assumed the mask mandate would still be in effect. Everyone wants face-to-face, but there are a lot of people who would not be able to come.

Tina said the event will be recorded and available on the Needham Channel. Hybrid programming is very difficult to navigate. The subsequent events may be offered virtually. The committee is continuing to discuss.

Bud suggests making sure the community knows it is going to be recorded and how they can participate.

Amelia suggested when the flyer goes out that there is something there that says it is going to be recorded and possibility to submit questions. Another question she was asked was who was sponsoring this event?

Tina explained all those who were part of the planning were listed on the promotional materials. NHRC, SelectBoard, NDI, Clergy Association, Metco/NPS members participated.

Discrimination Complaint Process discussion postponed until March meeting.

International Day

Rinaz: International Day planning, she reached out to a School Committee member to think about planning an event where families and students could create booths celebrating their cultures. Rinaz then learned of an activity at the high school that included a survey that asked about your country of origin, the results would dictate how students would be grouped for One Day activities. Many students were left feeling confused, angry, upset, feeling like this activity had many red flags that it would not go well. “Country of origin” is a loaded term that impacts students differently. Some students felt very separated, not unified. Important letter written by student affinity groups questioning the wisdom of this activity. This made Rinaz rethink whether the International Day should be a town event, not a forced event at the schools. If the Town ran it it could feel more voluntary.

Emme explained the survey went out in Homeroom and how she experienced the survey. The idea of segregating students felt very confusing. She thinks having people volunteer is a better idea. Finn commented many students didn’t respond.

Cynthia said Wellesley has put on International Day events in the past, that included booths and events. Groups who wanted to do things to reflect a particular culture could set up. There are groups in Needham existing already that celebrate different cultures it may prevent putting anyone on the spot.

Ameila suggested maybe using a different “identity” than national origin, such as “family”. Would need to be carefully planned by a diverse group.

Bud likes the idea of having an event. It is a major project that would take months to plan.

Rinaz wanted to promote education in a fun way to reduce hate and intolerance in the community. What happened at the high school made her think again. She is reaching out to others to get some feedback.

Bud thanked Rinaz for bringing this situation to the attention of NHRC. If anyone is interested in helping Rinaz on thinking this through, let Tina know.

Rest of the agenda is being bumped to March.

End of the Year report is currently due March 4. Katie will see if there can be a later date. Ameila will send Tina the template. Tina will create a list of the events and members will each commit to taking individual events to write a short paragraph about it.

Announcements:

March 26, 9am-11am. Rotary Club DEI Summit.(ZOOM)
from Bill Paulson, bill@billpaulson.com, president Needham Rotary.
Goal- Network and share ideas with other DEI stakeholders - share resources, actions and programs. Free Registration required.
Leaders include people from Needham and area towns.
Registration: <https://rotary7910.org/event/district-training-assembly--dei-summit-1/>

Postponed to March: Needham Community Farm event in collaboration with Needham Diversity Initiative. Movie & Panel Discussion on Soul Fire Farm's Documentary "Uprooting Racism: Seeding Sovereignty", Racial & Food Inequity.

Cynthia reminded the committee the Needham Housing Plan working group, next meeting is March 24.

Meeting adjourned at 9:09pm.

Respectfully submitted by,
Jennifer Howard Schroeder

Future Meetings and Note Recorders
March 17, 2022 - Amelia Klein
April 28, 2022 - Kerry Hurwitch
May 19, 2022 - Cynthia Ganung
June 16, 2022 - Bud Schram