

Berkshire County NAACP Social Justice Action Committee Report

March 2020

Businesses Against Bigotry Campaign

On March 2, 2020, we met with Cheryl Mirer of Downtown Pittsfield, Inc. (DPI) and others to discuss issues of collaboration and communication. We had requested the meeting just with Cheryl, but she invited others associated with DPI's training event, *Navigating Bias in Business and Culture*. Present, in addition to Cheryl and SJAC members Drew Herzig and Rebecca Thompson, were Gary Levante, board chair of DPI, Gwendolyn VanSant and Stephanie Wright of Multicultural Bridge, Laurie Mick of Pittsfield Economic Revitalization Corporation, and John Lewis of Sp3ak Easy Studio and an NAACP Berkshires Executive Committee member. We had asked NAACP Berkshires President, Dennis Powell to attend. He was unable to do so, but approved and supported our agenda.

In order to have everyone in the room equally informed, we began by describing in some detail the work we had done on NAACP Berkshires' Open To All? Initiative - beginning in Fall 2018 - and we distributed a copy of our *Open to All? Progress Report* to everyone present. We then shared, quite directly and explicitly, our concerns about why no one from NAACP Berkshires was invited to assist in planning - or even informed about DPI's all day training event, *Navigating Bias in Business and Culture* scheduled for March 20, 2020.

It became clear from the ensuing discussion that planning for the training session was a direct result of the Open To All? Community Conversation held by NAACP Berkshires on January 8, 2020. We noted how the lack of coordination and communication had created confusion among those who had worked with us and continued to support this issue and reiterated that we very much supported the training event, but felt that NAACP Berkshires should have been included in the planning of that event from "day 1." As a result of this meeting, publicity for the March 20, 2020 event was revised to include the NAACP Berkshires as a partner. We made clear and believe we received confirmation of understanding from those present that NAACP Berkshires expected to take a leadership role – with others - in moving this issue forward in the future.

Following the meeting, we sent an e-mail to all those persons we had invited to attend a "going forward" brainstorming session scheduled for March 18, 2020 (canceled due to timing conflict with DPI training event) informing them in a general way of the outcome of the meeting.

The following week, we hand-delivered posters to managers or owners at ten downtown businesses to encourage them to have at least one member of their business present for all or part of the training. It was a pleasant surprise to get quite positive responses from most of the people with whom we spoke.

On March 11, 2020, Cheryl Mirer contacted us and asked our opinion about postponing the training because of the coronavirus situation. We concurred that postponing was a wise decision.

Police Profiling in Adams

Nothing new to report. A scheduled meeting had to be postponed and now is on hold.

All SJAC activities have been suspended since mid-March due to COVID-19.

Social Justice Action Committee

Drew Herzig, co-chair
Rebecca Thompson, co-chair
Arlene Kirsch
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