Models of Affirmative Community Based Responses to Hate Crimes I

Panelists:

Eileen Hogan Heineman  
*Racial Justice Program Director, YWCA Evanston/North Shore*

Jennifer Scott  
*Human Relations Specialist, Chicago Commission on Human Relations*

Sherialyn Byrdsong,  
*Teacher, spouse of hate crime victim Ricky Byrdsong*

Moderator: Ken Gunn, First Deputy, Chicago Commission on Human Relations

QUESTION: What guidance can you provide based on your experience with community based responses to hate?

ANSWER:  
Scott – Scott works for the Inter-Group Relations Division (IGR) of the Chicago Commission on Human Relations (CCHR). IGR reacts to incidents of violence and proactively works to reduce incidents of discrimination and hate while promoting inter-group understanding. Scott explains that she advocates for victims of bias motivated crime. She conducts mediations and peace circles, and educational workshops on a variety of topics including restorative justice, bullying, cyberbullying, anger management. Scott explains that these are free services provided by the City. Success is measured when they are able to interrupt the violence or the cycle of the tension.

When mediating a community tension, Scott hears people’s stories and helps them to see their commonalities and understand each other’s perceptions. Scott describes a mediation she conducted between a business owner and a customer. The business was a salon with strong ties to its community. The customer was a long term customer of a salon. An incident occurred in which the store alarm went off when the customer exited the store. The salon employees detained and searched the customer, and called the police. The customer felt they took those actions against her because of her race, African-American. Through Scott’s mediation efforts, each side had the opportunity to tell their story and the relationship was mended. The customer continues to use the services of the salon.
Heineman – Heineman works for the YWCA Evanston/North Shore, which works to eliminate racism and empower women. Every Father’s Day, the YWCA facilitates The Ricky Byrdsong Memorial Race Against Hate. The race honors the legacy of Ricky Byrdsong, former Northwestern University Men’s Basketball Coach, who was murdered in a hate crime because of his race. The killer also shot at a synagogue and at a Korean graduate school student. Heineman describes that he was indiscriminate in his hate – he hated anyone who didn’t look like him. The race is a community response to the hatred and violence.

Heineman states that it is important to teach communities how to talk about racism because it gets in the way. We have to think about how to educate a block, a group, a community. Good mediums for communication are social media, letters to Aldermen, and letters to the newspaper, and she emphasizes that it is best done with facts. She says, “Tell the stories, in their truths.” Heineman discourages engaging in online debates because you risk providing a platform for hate. Similarly, Heineman suggests that instead of giving more publicity to a hate event, focus on a positive event instead. Heineman describes how when the KKK gathered in Skokie, a coalition held a positive cultural event at the same time.

Heineman says it is important for a community to develop skills to deal with conflict. The first of those skills is focused listening. No one listens anymore; we just want to be heard. Listening is important because it lends itself to the next important skill – understanding multiple perspectives. Heineman says that the goal cannot be to convince each other that we are right, rather it must be to understand why we hear differently based on our different experiences. Heineman further recommends that there must be opportunity for dialogue about whatever issue at hand. There must be a competent facilitator who understands the issues.

Heineman stresses the importance of community partnerships, even between those who might not seem like your natural ally. She says that we must break down the natural barriers to collaboration. She gives the example that even if two organizations are competing for the same federal funding, they can still collaborate for an event. Rather than have two sub-par events, they can collaborate to have one great event. She describes the benefits of collaboration, including advertising each other messages and that collaboration makes individual groups less vulnerable to attack. Heineman also stresses the importance of police partnerships.
Sherialyn Byrdsong – Byrdsong explains that she is a teacher. She taught high school science for many years and then retired when her husband, Ricky Byrdsong, was murdered in a hate crime. After 20 years, she returned to teaching, but this time she taught math, her first love, to middle school students. She describes that she was determined to make a difference. Going in, her philosophy was “Teach. Teach. Teach.” But, she was dismayed that the students were not coming to learn. After four years, she felt frustrated and “too old and too stressed,” so she decided to retire. Byrdsong describes that not too much later, God opened a door for her to return to the classroom again. This time, she had a paradigm shift from God. Her philosophy was no longer “Teach. Teach. Teach.” Instead her philosophy became, “I am here to love you, pray for you, and I might be able to teach you.” Now, her students want to learn. Byrdsong says, “We are here to be instruments of love, whatever your job or position. This will help reduce hate crimes.” Everyone who commits a hate crime is a student in a classroom at some point or another.

Byrdsong explains that the town where she lived at the time of her husband’s murder, Evanston, was often described as Mayberry. She says there could not have been a better place for such a horrible thing to happen. The community was outraged and channeled its energy in community walks, meetings, forums, conversations, and activities that happened in schools, homes, and churches of all denominations. She says that the first year of the Ricky Byrdsong Memorial Race Against Hate, over 750 people gathered to run and walk in unity and that the race continues every year. Byrdsong also says, “If we remain touchable, sensitive, and loving in our hearts, we will help to prevent hate crimes.”

AUDIENCE QUESTIONS

**QUESTION:** Was the Chicago Commission on Human Relations started in response to something?

**ANSWER:** Gunn – Yes, the Chicago Commission on Human Relations began in 1947 to deal with race relations in Chicago, similar to many other areas of the country.

**QUESTION:** Do you offer Restorative Justice Training?

**ANSWER:** Scott – Yes, the Chicago Commission on Human Relations offers Restorative Justice Training.

**QUESTION:** Do you want or have money or resources dedicated toward front-end proactive prevention of Hate Crimes? Are there any current programs?

**ANSWER:** Scott – Yes, the Commission dedicates resources to proactive prevention of Hate Crimes. The Commission conducts educational workshops to schools and community groups. The Commission also works with the Chicago Housing Authority to do education for the communities where residents will be relocated.

**Noriega** – This Summit is about prevention. Every curriculum is preventative.
**QUESTION:** How can someone obtain the services of the Intergroup Relations Division of the Chicago Commission on Human Relations?

**ANSWER:** Scott  – Call the Chicago Commission on Human Relations at 312-744-4111 or call me directly at 312-744-1093.

**QUESTION:** How do you respond to a child’s question about racism?

**ANSWER:** Heineman  – We need to normalize the conversations around race and violence as often as we can. Stop tip-toeing around it. Respond to the child saying, “Yes, there are Whites who don’t like Blacks and Blacks who don’t like Whites, but we don’t do that in our family.” We should be having conversations with our children asking questions like “How could you stand up for someone?” and, “How will you respond if it happens to you?” We can’t be afraid of offending each other.

**QUESTION:** What should you do when allies don’t respond the way you hope?

**ANSWER:** Scott  - You can create forums, have informal dinners, get to know coworkers. Continue to learn about who else is around. Focus on one small group at a time.

**AUDIENCE COMMENTS**

**COMMENT:** Organizers from “Not in Our Town,” Bloomington, Normal - We were able to mobilize quickly when hate motivated events came to our town, because we already had a network in place. When Matt Hale came to our library to recruit, instead of giving him attention, we held a cultural celebration a few blocks away. Pick up a “Not in our Town” starter kit at our table.

**COMMENT:** This comment was made by an unidentified audience member - Love is a long story, it is hard work for the heart. White people must talk about their privilege and how to give it away.

**COMMENT:** Pablo Medina, Director of Inter-Group Relations (IGR), Chicago Commission on Human Relations - IGR is all about advocacy. It is all about prevention. This work should be part of curriculum in schools.
Breakout Description
Models of Affirmative Community Based Responses to Hate Crimes I
Breakout Session I
Illinois Room C
10:45 am to 12 noon

Description: Panelists will share their experience of a community based response to hate that offers hope and healing. Most often hate crimes committed against an individual are meant to send a destructive and hateful message to an entire community. Panelists share successful models that interrupt the cycle of violence and create affirmative avenues for community building.

Learning Objectives: There is hope and models of community building in the face of hate violence.

Panelists:

Eileen Hogan Heineman, Racial Justice Program Director, from the YWCA Evanston/North Shore will discuss The Race Against Hate. On Father's Day each June, the Ricky Byrdsong Memorial Race Against Hate brings together thousands of people from all over Chicagoland to run and walk in unity against racial hatred and violence. The Race Against Hate honors the legacy of Ricky Byrdsong, former Northwestern University Men's Basketball Coach who, while walking with his two young children in 1999 was murdered by a white supremacist. Because of Ricky's lifelong love of sports and compelling work with young people in the community, the Ricky Byrdsong Memorial Race Against Hate was launched by his widow, family and friends to bring attention to the need to combat hatred in all of its forms. Proceeds from the Race Against Hate are used to further the mission of the YWCA Evanston/North Shore, in particular our efforts in the areas of racial justice and violence prevention.
Michael Kimpan from The Marin Foundation will discuss the “I'm Sorry Campaign.” In 2010, Kevin Harris was searching for a way to show attendees of the Chicago Pride Parade that he and his other Christian friends were sorry for the ways in which the Christian Church had failed to love the LGBTQ community. His idea of Christians going as a group to the Pride Parade to apologize to the LGBTQ community became the annual “I’m Sorry” Campaign. Today’s “I’m Sorry” Campaign consists of The Marin Foundation staff and friends wearing T-shirts saying “I’m Sorry” and holding signs explaining the wrongs that have been committed against the LGBTQ community. A simple apology targeting LGBTQ Pride Parade participants turned into a national campaign. Mr. Kimpan is the Associate Director of The Marin Foundation and travels the country speaking and presenting to institutions of education, church/religious groups, and doing civic advocacy for political organizations.

Jennifer Scott, Human Relations Specialist, Chicago Commission on Human Relations (CCHR) will discuss community based responses to hate crimes and community tensions. In her work at the CCHR, Ms. Scott utilizes mediation, conflict resolution and peace circle models to interrupt violence and to create affirmative avenues for community building. These anti-violence measures are used to: defuse community tensions, address neighbor to neighbor disputes, advocate for victims of bias motivated crimes, address bullying in the public and private schools, strengthen business and resident relationships, build relationships between, cultural, racial, and ethnic communities, to bring community leaders together and to cultivate opportunities for Chicagoans to gain skills to effectively interact in our diverse city.

Moderator:

Ken Gunn, First Deputy, Chicago Commission on Human Relations (CCHR) will serve as moderator. Through his work with the Chicago Commission on Human Relations, Ken has helped develop strategies and protocols for engaging the community in responding to some of the most vicious hate crimes and volatile intergroup tensions in the city for nearly 25 years including the firebombing of Korean stores in the Englewood Mall in 1992, the nearly fatal hate crime attack of Lenard Clark in 1999, and the rampant backlash of hate crimes against Arabs and Muslims following the September 11, 2001 terrorists' attacks.