

TEAM Westport Meeting Minutes
September 9, 2014, 8 AM
Room 309
Westport Town Hall, Westport, CT

Attendees: Brett Aronow, Catherine Onyemelukwe, Harold Bailey (Presiding), Bernicestine McLeod, Maggie Mudd, Judy Hamer, and Dolores Paoli

Guests: Zoe Tarrant, Chad Kinsman (Westport Country Playhouse)

The meeting was called to order at 8:10 AM.

Minutes: The minutes from the July 1st meeting were approved. Catherine moved approval and Maggie Mudd seconded.

New Business

What's Up?:

1. Ferguson, MO happened last month. We mentioned “the talk” that is necessary to be given to children – especially boys of color – about relationships with police. What happened in Ferguson is really not a black issue, but a societal issue. Black men are perceived to be more dangerous than others. Ferguson, with heavy equipment added to everything else, was a state of siege in order to defend the police against the people.
2. The “New Jim Crow” is the way things are. This explains how heavy artillery came to be used commonly by local police forces. Who are we? The experiment in mass incarceration – over incarceration of men of color in the US – needs to be discussed and out in the open.
3. Was there a discussion about this at Staples since this is tied into history? It is certainly worth asking the question. Should we ask James D’Amico what’s happening? Current conversations about trusting or not trusting police need to keep going. Others need to be talking about this too because it IS happening.
4. How should we continue the conversation? Incidences keep arising: for example, the Atlanta Hawks owner with the email; the image of Ray Rice and domestic violence. The impacts are racial.

Old Business

Programming

1. Westport Country Playhouse – “Intimate Apparel”

Chad is the Executive Assistant to Mark Lamos and Michael Ross. David Kennedy is currently teaching in Edmonton. Chad gave us an update on the programming surrounding the production of “Intimate Apparel” and handed out the printed folded brochure with all of the scheduled events. The production runs from October 7th through November 1st. Featured activities include:

- a. At Norwalk Community College (NCC) the play is a common read for each incoming student – 600 in number.
- b. The Playhouse has scheduled a 4-hour long session at the Carver Center. Lynn Nottage, the playwright, had a box of family photographs and found a picture of her great grandmother who was a seamstress which inspired her to write the play. We are working with the kids to tell their stories by bringing in a picture and writing a monologue. Also the Carver Center will bring a group of students on Community Day (October 26th) and display the kids’ work.
- c. A study-guide will be distributed to the public school systems.

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- d. There are 3 student matinees, thus far, now ½ full. The cost of the student ticket for NCC students is less than 50%. Stephane Kirven is still talking with SHU.
- e. The Playhouse will have a new Education and Community Relations Coordinator – Courtney Loria – starting on the 15th. The Playhouse will be focusing on getting groups and organizations engaged.

2. Books featuring ‘Kids of Color’

Several of us attended a ‘Kids of Color’ meeting in July (22nd) at the Library with the Childrens’ Librarian (Mary Parmelee) and with Kelle Ruden.

Discussion and agreed action:

- ALL children need to read, to be exposed to, and to have books with diversity. This is not JUST important for kids of color.
- The Library should bring in as many books with kids of color as possible on a well-thought out schedule and integrate those books within the collection without it being a big deal.
- Books that show diversity need to show kids having fun just like everyone else and not always address serious topics like slavery or civil rights. (Those are the books that aren’t as available as they should be.)

Some good things are happening. However, we agreed to put together a small committee to crystalize the vision and determine our mission and goals. Brett, Catherine, Dolores, Zoe, Harold, and Susan Ellis will be the core group. Others are welcome.

3. Other:

With the way things are going in the world, we should think of ways to educate the community about what Islam really is – a distinction between what the faith is philosophically versus the political conflicts and social connotations that are evidenced. We can work with the Library and with religious groups. Any programming needs to be held in a neutral space. We can work with Rev. Alison Patton to brainstorm. Maggie and Dolores will work together on this.

Close: The meeting adjourned at 9:42AM.

The next meeting will take place at 8am on Tuesday, October 7, 2014, in Room 201 of Town Hall.

Respectfully submitted,

Bernicestine E. McLeod
Secretary