



ONE CITY FOR ALL PEOPLE



ANNUAL ACTIVITY REPORT OF 2019

METRO HUMAN RELATIONS COMMISSION (MHRC)

MARCH 2020

MISSION



The mission of the Metro Human Relations Commission (MHRC) is to protect and promote the personal dignity, peace, safety, security, health, and general welfare of all people in Nashville and Davidson County. The Commission’s work is organized around a theme of “One City for All People.” This motto guides all MHRC education, training, advocacy, and compliance services.

The MHRC identifies innovative solutions for improving access to fundamental goods, information, and services. We implement initiatives and projects that are strategic, intentional, and purposeful in addressing various forms of inequity.



The Commission develops data-driven and equity-oriented policy papers and research reports regarding issues of inclusion in Davidson County. These projects identify points of intervention, craft short and long-term recommendations, and serve as mediums of public education for constituents, community leaders, and policy makers.

The MHRC implements its mandate through resolving complaints and implementing educational programs related to discrimination in employment, housing, financial services and commercial transactions, provision of public accommodations, provision of city activities and services, educational programs and opportunities.



Human Relations Commissioners are appointed by the Mayor and confirmed by the Metro Council to represent the conscience of the Nashville and Davidson County community. Commissioners are responsible for the oversight, resolution, and addressing of community concerns and complaints of discrimination (real and perceived). The Executive Director manages the day-to-day operations. The Director is responsible for all fiscal, administrative, and program areas of the Commission.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

For the purpose of implementing its mandate, throughout 2019, the MHRC organized or contributed to a number of educational and community building events and activities - **trainings, conferences, public events, festivals, TV and radio programs:**

- In order to ensure **compliance with Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964**, the MHRC provided **technical support** for various governmental bodies to build their capacity in ensuring that - **no person is excluded** from participation in, or denied the benefits of, or subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving federal financial assistance on the grounds of race, color, or national origin;
- **Informational brochures** and other publications were prepared, published and disseminated to various beneficiaries;
- The office enforced **compliance** through reviewing and responding to complaints and performing conciliation and mediation efforts;
- The staff of MHRC served as **members of boards and coalitions**;
- The MHRC implemented several **projects** aimed at addressing the challenges of various vulnerable groups in achieving full integration in community and effectively addressing inequity;
- Provided policy recommendations to various policymakers on improving the inclusion and equity efforts in Nashville and Davidson County.



EDUCATIONAL, AWARENESS RAISING AND COMMUNITY BUILDING ACTIVITIES

In 2019 the MHRC organized or contributed financially and through its human resources to **49 educational, awareness raising activities, and city-wide multicultural festivals, and media programs** for constituents, community leaders and policymakers on the issues of non-discrimination and inclusion of diverse groups in various government programs and activities. Through these activities, MHRC served or engaged over **115,600 constituents**. This figure does not capture the number of constituents reached through media outreach (television, radio, podcasts and social media).

Education and Awareness

Raising Activities:

Mobile Diversity Seminar (x2)
 Equity Trainings (x2)
 Systemic Inequality Training
 Diversity Training (x3)
 Juvenile Court Training
 Open Table Nashville Training
 Vanderbilt Affordable Housing Seminar
 LGBTQ Training for MNP
 Neighbour 2 Neighbour Conference
 Fair Housing Matters Conference
 Housing presentation at Youth Global Forum
 Immigration Forum
 Nashville Rising Symposium
 Vanderbilt Community Development class
 Learning Lab Presentation for PolicyL link
 "What's the 411" on WFSK
 Strong Communities Summit
 Guest Lectures at Lipscomb and Vanderbilt



Community Building Efforts:

MLK Day Convocation and related events
 Community Oversight Board Meeting
 LGBTQ Conversation regarding Community Centre
 Nashville Rising Workgroup Meetings
 Regional Equity Planning meeting
 Caravan Faith Tour
 Pipeline! (play and panel discussion)
 Stand Against Racism (3 events)
 Stand Against Racism Lunch and Learn
 You Shall LHV w/o Stigma
 LGBTQ & the Greater Nashville Community: What Next?
 Project Unite: A Cultural Festival
 Vanderbilt Medical Centre Diversity Fair
 Music City Iftar
 Nashville PRIDE
 WFSK Food & Music Fest
 African Street Festival
 Good Neighbour Day Festival
 Press Conference before Council Meeting
 Celebrate Nashville
 Black PRIDE Honours Banquet
 Cultural Connections Reception and Event
 World AIDS Day Commemoration
 Human Rights Day
 Kwanzaa Celebration - Celebrates African heritage, unity, and culture

PUBLICATIONS

A series of pamphlets on “**Understanding Nashville’s Housing Crisis**” (Part 1 – “Affordable for Who?”, Part 2 – “How Do People Lose Their Homes?” and Part 3 – “Residential Segregation: How Did It Happen and Why Does It Persist?”) was published and disseminated. The series analyzes statistical data and underlying reasons of the housing crisis and details the history of housing discrimination in Davidson County.

Overall, **4,795 hard copies** were published and disseminated;

- Number of visits on the website: <https://www.housing101.us> since the initial publication of the pamphlet until January 2020 was **2535**;
- More than **20 educational workshops** were organized on affordable housing reaching out about **300 people** through in person trainings.



**4,795
publications**



**2535 visits
on web-site**



**20
workshops**



**300 people
trained**

The publications were researched and drafted in cooperation with partners from Vanderbilt University, Tennessee State University, and community partners from various sectors. The publication was included in the mandatory reading materials of the MA programs in Community Development and Action at Vanderbilt University, and the College of Leadership & Public Service at Lipscomb University.



PARTNERSHIPS

In planning and implementing activities, the MHRC partners with state and federal agencies, as well as with educational institutions, employers, housing providers, faith-based, cultural, civic and charity organizations. Last year we partnered with more than 50 organizations.

Partners: American Baptist College; American Muslim Advisory Council; Brothers United Network, Inc.; Casa Azafrán; Conexión Américas; Fisk University; Faith and Cultural Center; Hispanic Family Foundation; General Sessions Court; Islamic Center of Tennessee; Islamic Center of Nashville; Metro Nashville Juvenile Court; Jean Crowe Advocacy Center; Justice For Our Neighbors (JFON); Metro Nashville Police Department; Metro Nashville Police Training Academy; Metro Nashville Public Schools; Middle Tennessee Transgender Support Group; Muslim American Cultural Center; Neighborhood Resource Center; New Covenant Christian Church; Oasis Center; Operation Stand Down; Tennessee Immigrant & Refugee Rights Coalition (TIRRC); Tennessee Transgender Political Coalition; The Mayor's Office; YWCA; Valor Collegiate Academics; NeedLink Nashville; Homes for All Nashville; Legal Aid Society of Middle Tennessee and the Cumberland; Open Table Nashville; Tennessee Fair Housing Council; Celebrate Nashville; Nashville Pride; TN United for Human Rights; TN Human Rights Commission; Interdenominational Ministers Fellowship; Play Nashville; Metro Parks; Community Nashville; Metro Human Resources; The First Amendment Center; African American Cultural Alliance; Nashville International Center for Empowerment; Southern Word; Nashville Food Project; A Voice for the Reduction of Poverty; Nashville Organizing for Action and Hope; Food Access Network; and many others.

**Partnerships with
more than 50
organizations**



Boards and Coalitions on which Staff Served

Celebrate Nashville Board

- Tennessee Diversity Consortium
- Cultural Connections Committee
- Borderless Arts Tennessee: The State Organization on Arts and Disability
- Nashville Black Pride
- AWAKE
- Nashville Complete Count Census Committee

- A VOICE for the Reduction of Poverty
- Welcome Home!
- Nashville Coalition Against Domestic & Sexual Violence
- Nashville PRIDE
- U.S. Peace Corps – Nashville Chapter
- Brothers and Sisters United – Nashville
- Tennessee Fair Housing Council
- Nashville for All of Us



COMPLIANCE SERVICES (COMPLAINTS AND CONCILIATIONS)



MHRC staff regularly responds to constituent complaints and concerns about civil and human rights violations, providing conciliation services, legal information, and referrals. During 2019, MHRC responded to over **30 complaints**.

TITLE VI COMPLIANCE

Metro departments, from service agencies to schools, are recipients of federal funds and, as such, are required to comply with the provisions of Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Title VI holds that “No person in the United States shall, on the grounds of race, color, or national origin, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving federal financial assistance.”

It is the intent of the MHRC to ensure that all residents have access to all city-funded programs and services through educating citizens so that they better understand Title VI and how they can enforce their rights. The MHRC website (www.1City4AllPeople.com) provides information about Title VI and what it means for residents, examples of Title VI non-compliance, procedures for filing a complaint, related rules, executive orders and laws, and common myths about Title VI.

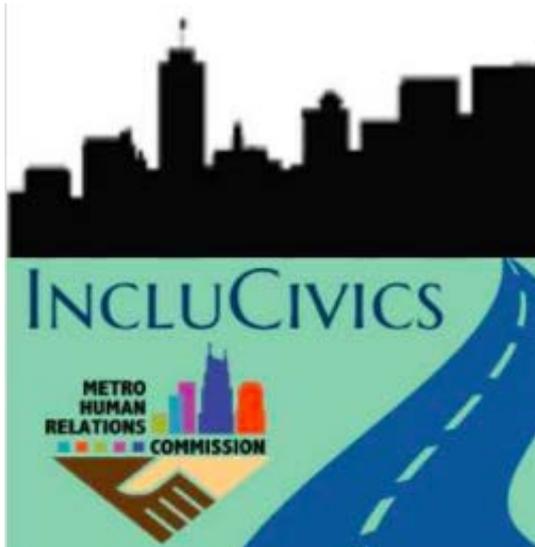
In the reporting period, MHRC provided **Title VI trainings and technical support to Metro departments** on best practices for implementing Title VI and how to respond appropriately to complaints.



ONGOING PROJECTS

IncluCivics Reports and Platform

In 2015, MHRC published the first IncluCivics Report examining the diversity and equity of 50 Metro Nashville departments. MHRC made policy recommendations on the concerns identified in the analysis to address the underrepresentation of certain groups within Metro's workforce.



Since 2015, the MHRC has regularly released the updated information in its IncluCivics Report through an online IncluCivics Platform (www.IncluCivics.org) to encourage transparency, accountability and constituent engagement. This effort received local and national attention, affirming the need to continually examine our workforce and ensure that it is truly representative of Davidson County residents.

ESL Map

Given the rapid changes to Davidson County's demographic landscape and linguistic needs of increasingly diverse constituents, MHRC aims to provide information on the English as a Second Language Classes (ESL) offered throughout Nashville. The **ESL Map** is an online platform for easily finding ESL classes in Nashville - <http://www.eslmap.com>.



ONGOING PROJECTS

PolicyLink Anti-Displacement Initiative

The PolicyLink’s All-In Cities Anti-Displacement Policy Network is a new multi-city effort to combat displacement with the aim to improve housing affordability and reduce the burden of evictions by creating new policies around renter protections, community land trusts, commercial neighborhood stabilization, inclusionary zoning and other equitable development strategies. Over the past two years, this laboratory of city leaders brought together teams from 10 U.S. cities, comprised of local mayors and city council members, senior city staff, and community leaders, to discuss and share policy ideas and solutions and develop new strategies.

Nashville was selected as an inaugural member of the Network (along with Austin, Boston, Buffalo, New York, Denver, Philadelphia, Portland, Oregon, San José, California, Santa Fe, New Mexico and the twin cities of Minnesota – Minneapolis and Saint Paul). The team was led by MHRC Executive Director, Mel Fowler-Green. Through this engagement, the team assembled data, policy ideas and best practices that MHRC hopes will lead to the strategic development and tracking of solutions to displacement to ensure that Nashville’s neighborhoods continue to thrive. As a result of this work, the MHRC is now advocating for the adoption of an “Equity Lens” in policy-decision making throughout Metro.



POLICY RESEARCH AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The MHRC follows a wide range of policy issues, offers recommendations, oversight, and ensures constituent engagement in policy making.

Throughout 2019, the MHRC worked on several **policy issues and recommendations**:

- Inclusive health insurance for Metro employees
- Equity goals, as articulated in the “Community Covenant,” adopted unanimously by Metro Council (Resolution RS2019-31)
- The use of an “Equity Lens” in policy and financial allocations (in Metro and in nonprofits)
- Money bail reform
- Adoption of all recommendations made by both the Policing Project and MHRC following the Driving While Black Report
- Training recommendations to MNPd and MNFD
- Language Access plan improvements (under Title VI and ADA)



OUR TEAM

As the **Director of Policy and Research**, what I love most about this role is that the work is community-led. I lead research projects using **Community Based Participatory Research** which is a partnership approach to research that equitably involves community members, organizational representatives and academic researchers in the research process. Then, based on the findings from research projects, we are able to advocate for policy change by presenting recommendations to the Council and the Mayor's office. I appreciate that through this role, I am able to establish deep and meaningful relationships with community members and work alongside to make Nashville a more equitable city for all.



Melody Fowler-Green
Executive Director

I am among the very lucky who can say "I love my job." The work of the MHRC allows me to use my legal education, my organizing skills, and my love of community. It has been a sincere pleasure working on behalf of ALL Nashvillians in the past five years.



Sarah Imran



As the **Director of Community Engagement**, I operationalize international community engagement by embedding an equity lens – an approach that informs our policy recommendations and outreach. While listening with an open heart and leaning into what communities identify as their most urgent concerns, I connect with a board array of constituents, including communities of color disaffected by inequitable policing, religious leaders from the interfaith spectrum, and those maligned by the affordable housing crisis. In addition to appropriating funds to local organizations and initiatives, I serve as the ambassador of MHRC's Board of 17 Commissioners

Mark Eatherly
Director of
Operations &
Special Projects

Looking back at my seven years with the MHRC, the work I'm most proud of revolves around the abiding partnerships and relationships we have fostered throughout the community. The mission of our office is difficult enough as it is, but without trust it would be utterly impossible. Flashy it isn't, but this endeavor is foundational to the Commission and vital when pushing the envelope on issues of equity, inclusion, and justice. Our many longtime partners will tell you that we consistently show up and carry our weight on projects and events year after year. Moreover, many communities understand we have their best interests at heart, and we aren't attempting to score political points, get our pictures in the news, or otherwise leverage them for our personal gain. Our mission is only viable when residents deem us worthy of their trust. And, one only has to glance at our annual events and projects to see that's exactly what has been happening.



Barbara Gunn Lartey



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This report was prepared by Medea Gugeshashvili, a Humphrey Fellow at Vanderbilt University. We were very happy to host Medea to share ideas and knowledge about Human Rights Education.