



INCLUSION THROUGH DIVERSITY

TOMPKINS COUNTY Office of Human Rights

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Memorandum

DATE: November 13, 2017
TO: Health and Human Services Subcommittee
FROM: Xavier Rusk, OHR Paralegal Aide
RE: OHR November 2017 Monthly Community Engagement Report

Introduction:

OHR is funded for four (4) full-time employees: a Director, Receptionist, Education & Outreach Coordinator, and a Paralegal Aide. In a sentence, OHR’s mission is the promotion and protection of human rights in Tompkins County. Specifically, the Director provides a vision, managerial oversight, and legal expertise to the OHR and the community; the Receptionist provides administrative support to staff and is a point of contact for community referrals; the Education & Outreach Coordinator is tasked with promoting human rights through education and outreach; and the Paralegal Aided is tasked with human rights promotion through enforcement and compliance.

Receptionist:

OHR is fortunate to have a Receptionist who is bilingual in English and Spanish as its primary point of contact for OHR. The Receptionist schedules appointments with current clients and does the initial intake for new clients to assist in Enforcement & Compliance; forwards calls and assists in organizing events to assist in Education & Outreach; and refers individual without a discrimination complaint to an appropriate agency as well as manages the daily operations of the OHR (e.g. paying bills, mail, and etc.) to provide Administrative Support. Below is a chart of the Receptionist’s Community Interactions.

Community Interactions (total):	82
Enforcement & Compliance:	60
Education & Outreach:	2
Administrative Support:	20

Education & Outreach Coordinator:

OHR's Education & Outreach Coordinator promotes human rights by engaging community stakeholders, forming partnerships and collaborations, developing and managing community programs, developing human rights educational material, and managing OHR's intern and volunteer program. In addition, OHR is receptive to requests from community members to provide programming within OHR's purview.

Notable updates:

OHR is celebrating its 30th Annual Human Rights Arts Competition (HRAC). The Education & Outreach Coordinator is continuing OHR's partnership with the Dorothy Cotton Institute (DCI) to mutually promote HRAC and the DCI's Annual Gala. As a part of that partnership, one poetry winner will be awarded the Dorothy Cotton Award for Poetry. Community members from a broad cross-section of the public with an interest in art, poetry, and video are being contacted to judge entries. The deadline has been extended to November 27, 2017 at noon.

An Ithaca High School teacher reached out to OHR to develop a Spanish class lesson regarding a local community and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). OHR's Education & Outreach Coordinator collaborated with the Human Rights Commission's (HRC) Ana Ortiz to develop the lesson and present it entirely in Spanish on November 7, 2017. The lesson is slated to be converted from PowerPoint into a video in both English and Spanish for future UDHR lesson plans for teachers.

The City of Ithaca has reached out to the OHR for Limited English Proficiency/Language Acquisition Plan (LEP/LAP) training in order for its departments to be in compliance with federal anti-discrimination laws. OHR's Education & Outreach Coordinator shall be providing a series of trainings to City Departments. This training is slated to be converted from PowerPoint into a video for future consumption.

The Education & Outreach Coordinator has begun attending the Diversity Consortium of Tompkins County (DCTC) meetings on behalf of OHR to maintain OHR's human rights perspective with DCTC.

Ongoing projects include: converting existing presentations into training videos; the development of unpaid internship projects; revitalizing the "What Would MLK Say Today?" Poster Contest; updating the [County website](#) and OHR's [Facebook page](#); and developing human rights educational materials to meet the needs of the community. The Education & Outreach Coordinator is a member of various non-profit boards and is engaging in training to further develop leadership skills.

Paralegal Aide

The Paralegal Aide provides protects human rights by assisting individuals to file a formal complaint with a state or federal agency; and under the direct supervision of the Director, providing legal information to the County and stakeholders regarding compliance with local, state, and federal anti-discrimination laws – this may lead to development of technical assistance: legal briefs, policy toolkits, or etc.

Notable update(s):

Under the direction of OHR Director Karen Baer, the Paralegal Aide was directed to streamline the complaint process to be in compliance with state and federal administrative procedures as well as be efficient and accurate in the processing of complaints of unlawful discrimination. Through mentorship and formal education from the federal Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (June 2017) for the Paralegal Aide, the first part of the process is in its penultimate phase. Specifically, extraneous bureaucracy and processes for which OHR lacks jurisdiction has been removed from the complaint process. A new intake sheet to focus interviews and by extension reduce the number of interviews leading up to a formal filing has been developed and is being implemented. Focused interviews are being refined into structured interviews through the development of questionnaires – route questions that must be answered in the analysis of unlawful discrimination as determined by the alleged adverse action, subject matter jurisdiction, and basis. The eventual goal is to reduce interview preparation time and number of interviews, while maintaining the human aspect of our services and high quality.

In the last month, OHR has received eleven (11) reports of unlawful discrimination – two (2) complaints have been formally filed, four (4) complaints are awaiting client review, one (1) was offered a pre-filing settlement, one (1) was referred to an appropriate state or federal agency, and three (3) have been provided or are undergoing a consultation.

Ongoing projects: OHR was approved by the County Administrator, HHS, and the County Legislature to use Rollover funding in 2017 to purchase case management software. OHR is consulting with different vendors and County departments to determine what software would be best in order to provide better, meaningful data to the Legislature and the community. The Paralegal Aide is a member of various nonprofit/local government boards and is engaging in training to further develop legal professional skills.