

Union
County
Human
Relations
Commission

We can learn a lot from Crayons.
Some are sharp, some are pretty,
some are dull, some have weird names,
and all are different colors...but they all
have to learn to live in the same box."
Author Unknown

OUR MISSION: The Union County Human Relations Commission (UCHRC) serves to promote and encourage a more peaceful and ecumenical society in Union County, by providing support to bias crime victims who are targets of a crime because of their race, creed, color, religion, ethnicity, age, gender, sexual orientation, sexual identity, socio-economic status, or physical or mental challenges, and by intervening to eradicate the conditions that ultimately cause them.

The UCHRC addresses the issues of prejudice, bias and racism and their impact on our local schools, workplaces and neighborhoods.

Our mission, and the focus of our efforts and activities, is to actively encourage, develop, promote and strengthen respect for human rights and cultural diversity among the people of Union County.

Simply stated, the UCHRC celebrates the richness of life that cultural diversity brings to our communities and ourselves.

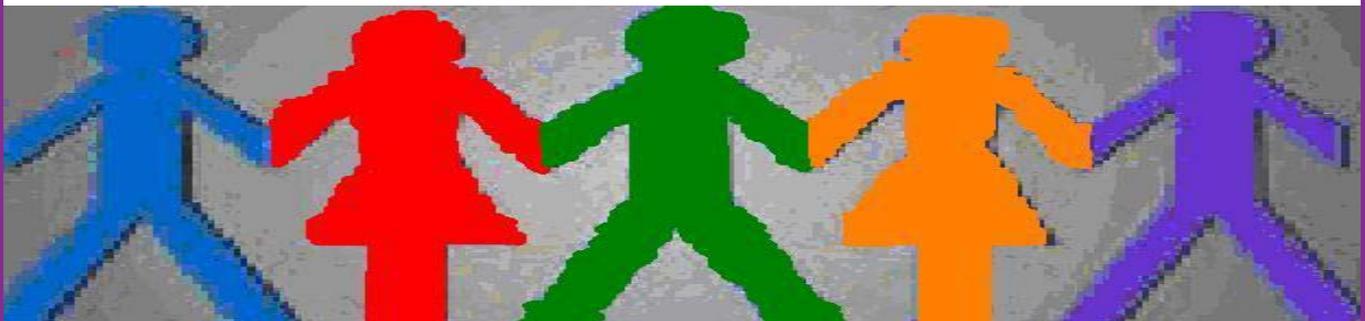
Biannual Report

May 2010 to May 2012

c/o The Office of the Union County Prosecutor
Andrew K. Ruotolo Justice Center

32 Rahway Avenue, Elizabeth, New Jersey 07202

◆ www.ucnj.org/uchrc ◆ 908.889.9028 ◆ FAX: 908.889.9653



Union County Human Relations Commission

MEMORANDUM

TO: The Honorable Theodore J. Romankow, Union County Prosecutor
FROM: Peter McTiernan and James F. Keefe, UCHRC Co-Chairs
DATE: May 1, 2012



Dear Prosecutor Romankow:

This annual report offers an update on the focus and efforts of the Union County Human Relations Commission (UCHRC) over the past two years. The UCHRC has continued to take an active role in fostering harmony and good will among the diverse citizenry of Union County. We also have worked diligently to maintain past programs which have been successful.

The *Police & Teens Together* (PATT) program has accomplished its goal to engage every school district in the county. This interactive program continues to be presented as part of the regular curriculum at New Providence High School, while returning to other schools throughout the county on a rotating basis.

The *Pass The Message On* bias-prejudice reduction program which has been piloted at Linden High School for the past three years has received local accolades, and was honored by the New Jersey Bias Officers Association in 2011 and 2012. This program broadens the awareness and understanding of high school students about the Pyramid of Hate, and then has them mentor the younger students to encourage them to change their behaviors and be careful of their word choices.

The InterFaith Community Network has launched two well-received public forums: "*Foreclosure: Moving from Fear to Positive Action*", and *Gang Awareness: Continuing The Dialogue*." The Foreclosure forum has provided participants with free options that are immediately actionable and provide hope; while the progress and momentum of the ongoing Gang Awareness dialogue go up a notch with each session. We continue to work to energize and expand the InterFaith Community Network, an association of houses of worship that provides a safe haven for dialogue in times of crisis, and, continually, as a venue for ongoing education.

We are also proud to still be perceived as an expert resource in the county and state in the realm of bullying, cyberbullying, harassment and intimidation, particularly those that are bias-based. We have continued to partner with your office and the Office of the Union County Superintendent of Schools to provide ongoing education for the educational and law enforcement communities.

We have a highly motivated commission. A number of the group have used personal time and resources to receive ongoing training in conflict mediation, to attend the New Jersey Human Relations Commission's and New Jersey State Bias Officers' Annual Conferences, and Kean University's International Conferences focusing on global relations issues.

The Commissioners individually and collectively continue to look into the complex issues that are reported in the news on a daily basis -- the immigration controversy, bias incidents and hate crimes, genocide, and even devastating natural disasters, and specifically how they impact our community. We have benefited from presentations on various cultures within our diverse county and are reviewing ways to improve multicultural understanding among Union County residents. We will continue to expand our knowledge of the many human relations issues that exist in our shrinking world, and to educate and encourage the community at large concerning these issues and to find creative and constructive solutions.

The world can be a better place and we can all help it to become that better place.

We sincerely appreciate your unequivocal support for the Commission and its many endeavors. You are to be commended for recognizing the diversity of citizenship we enjoy in Union County, and for providing a means to address the sometimes difficult issues that arise as a consequence.

The Commissioners are grateful to you, your office and the Bias Crimes Unit, the local police departments and their bias officers, and the Union County Superintendent of Schools and his staff, for encouraging us, networking with us, and for co-sponsoring important initiatives and activities.

Our annual Unity Achievement Award event stands as a beacon of inspiration and hope, honoring individuals and organizations who dedicate themselves to improving the human condition in all regards. We offer our sincerest thanks for supporting and funding us in this endeavor.

We appreciate your continuing support, without which none of these programs and outreach efforts -- or the real and perceived differences we are making with those we connect with -- would be possible.

Celebrate the Richness of Life

UCHRC Unity Awards

The Commissioners who volunteer their time and energies to serve on the Union County Human Relations Commission unequivocally agree that the best way to strive to accomplish our mission -- to actively encourage, develop, promote and strengthen respect for human rights and cultural diversity among the people of Union County -- is to publicly honor those who already do it well.

The UCHRC's annual Unity Achievement Awards honor individuals and organizations that have contributed in an extraordinary manner to promote respect for human rights, human dignity, and cultural diversity throughout Union County.

Spring 2012 marks our eleventh annual Unity Award Presentation. Year after year, the inspirational and heartfelt event embraces the best we, individually and collectively, give of ourselves on behalf of others, and touches the spirit of our Award recipients, their guests, and ourselves.

We gratefully acknowledge the support of AGL Resources/ Elizabethtown Gas Company for graciously permitting the use of their atrium for our reception and ceremonies, and to the Union County Prosecutor's Office for its continued support and funding.

2011 Unity Award Recipients

The photo at the right captures our 2011 Unity Award Recipients, who were honored for their achievements, as follows (front row, from left.)

by a Non-Profit Organization.....

Lin's Linens -- Gail Leiberman, Liz Belogh and Lin Salerno

Recognition for harnessing and illuminating the value and power of brightness, serenity, peace and healing in our physical world through our simple and spiritual human connections

by a Student.....

Johnna Booth, Hillside High School

Recognition for demonstrating an outstanding character and unselfish, caring nature that serves as a role model for her peers and community

Special Recognition.....

Clara Kramer

Recognition for providing a written and living testament to the dual nature of people: for as bad as things may be, they can always be balanced by goodness

Special Recognition.....

Mary Beth Kelley, Trinitas School of Nursing

Recognition for providing visionary and progressive leadership which has resulted in a top-notch nursing school, while simultaneously creating opportunities for students of diverse backgrounds and need to participate and achieve a nursing degree

by an Individual.....

Lillie Brown

Recognition for dedicating her entire life to selfless giving, fellowship and service to improve the quality -- and spirit -- of life for others

(back row, from left)

Special Recognition.....

Commissioner Brian Levine, a Senior at Westfield High School

Recognition for his enthusiastic participation and meaningful contribution representing youth in his two years of service as a UCHRC Commissioner

by an Educator.....

Henry Varriano

Recognition for emphasizing the importance of a learning environment that embraces the arts, culture and citizenship and promotes and encompasses the entire community for the benefit of all students

by a Community Organization.....

Dawson Yeomans / Furniture Assist

Recognition for carving a unique niche to provide hope and a home to those they serve, while also generating ripples of hope, satisfaction and service to those who help them make it happen



by a Corporation/Business.....

Tim Williams, AGL Resources/Elizabethtown Gas Company

Recognition for developing a program for students and at-risk youth to learn valuable lessons today that can earn them a better future

Special Recognition.....

John Miller, accepting the Award honoring his late wife,

Assistant Prosecutor Jo Ann Miller, Union County Prosecutor's Office

Recognition for a legacy of a woman which is deemed to be great, and for professionally and personally "always doing the right thing"

by the Clergy.....

Rev. Dr. Gerald Lamont Thomas, Shiloh Baptist Church

Recognition for his visionary leadership of his congregation and community to embrace each other as they work to build a brighter future for themselves and each other

in Law Enforcement.....

Lt. Keith Aslin, Linden Police Department

Recognition for his ongoing efforts to sensitize students and the community to the injustices of bullying, bias, prejudice and hate while empowering them to stand up and speak out for themselves and others who are being victimized

in Public Service.....

Union County Firefighters Edwin Donnelly (Union), Al Srnka (Union), Andy Stratton (Cranford), and William Lavin (Elizabeth)

Recognition for paving the way for burned youth to find their own way past their physical and emotional scars to find friendship, joy and peace for a day, a week, and a lifetime

2012 Unity Award Recipients

Achievement by a Corporation/Business.....

Clyne & Murphy, Westfield -- Jen and Steve Quaranta, Owners
Recognition for continued years of hard work, compassion, kindness and community service which demonstrates how wonderful our world can be when we each do what we can do to help our fellow man

Achievement by a Community Organization.....

The Relief Bus -- Juan Galloway, President
Recognition for providing substance and personal assistance to those in need transforming their homelessness into opportunity and hopefulness

Achievement by a Non-Profit Organization.....

Raphael's Life House (Covenant House) -- Edith Coogan
Recognition for recognizing the horrific circumstances faced by homeless moms and their newborns, and providing them with a safe "today" and a chance for a brighter "tomorrow"

Achievement by an Individual.....

Richard A. Davis
Recognition for immeasurable years of selfless, tireless, dependable and dedicated volunteer service to improve the quality of life for others in the local, county and state community

Achievement in Public Service.....

David Klurman, Director, Hillside Recreation Department
Recognition for a lifetime of dedicated and devoted service, accomplishment and achievement on behalf of Hillside's youth of all ages

Achievement a Student.....

Melissa Heron, Kean University
Recognition for demonstrating outstanding character and leadership abilities that serve as a role model for her peers and community guiding and inspiring them to make the world a better place

Achievement by an Educator.....

Esther Paden, Linden High School
Recognition for simultaneously teaching and nurturing her students and the community, with today's good works, spreading ripples over many tomorrows

Achievement by the Clergy.....

Reverend Manuel Donelson, Masterpiece Program, City of Linden
Recognition for his visionary leadership to provide a safe haven for Linden's youth while enriching their bodies, minds and hearts and encouraging them and guiding them to reach for the stars

Special Recognition.....

**St. Teresa of Avila Church, Summit/
ESL & Citizenship Program**
Recognition for providing a beacon of hope, faith and unity for a better future for the many new immigrants in the community

Dr. Dennis Vodarsik
Recognition for a lifetime of immeasurable compassion, concern, wisdom, love and untiring dedication to his fellow man and community

Hernan Agudelo
Recognition for selfless bravery and quick heroic action that risked his own life while saving the lives of his two neighbors

Helene Scheuer
Recognition for a lifetime of personal dedication and professional excellence in providing guidance, assistance, expertise and excellent communications to achieve equality, opportunity, and justice for all

Peter McTiernan, UCHRC Co-Chair
Recognition for his leadership, dedication and service to the Union County Human Relations Commission as Co-Chair from 2010 to 2012

Intervene to Eradicate the Conditions that Cause Bias & Hate

"PASS THE MESSAGE ON" – A Bias & Prejudice Reduction Pilot Program for Youth



Monica Goncalves (far left) addresses her class while Dr. Paula Rodriguez Rust and Lt. Keith Aslin look on.

One initiative the Union County Human Relations Commissioners have actively pursued is the creation of a program targeting impressionable middle- and elementary school students focused on **Bias and Prejudice Reduction**. Linden High School history teacher Monica Goncalves (*top photo, left front*) has graciously allowed the Union County Human Relations Commission to explore ways to engage her juniors and seniors in dialogue and education about the important issues of our time, including sensitizing them to the ways words and actions can foster bias, prejudice, hate and violence; empowering them to take a stand to watch their own behaviors; and to stand up and speak out on behalf of others who are being targeted and victimized. The goal of this program and all of the programs we undertake, is to create awareness and, ultimately, foster understanding and respect.

The name of this program captures another key ingredient of this program:

PASS THE MESSAGE ON.

The key partners who are developing, presenting and ultimately packaging this program to roll out to other Union County schools are Lt. Keith Aslin, Linden Police Department's Juvenile and Bias Officer, Dr. Paula Rodriguez Rust (Spectrum Diversity LLC), a sociologist and diversity educator specializing in social psychology, survey research, statistical analysis, racial and ethnic relations, and gender & sexuality, Linden High School teacher Monica Goncalves, and UCHRC Commissioner Karen Positan.

The program has evolved over the three years it has been presented. The first session provides students with a historical overview of acts of bias, prejudice and hate. The second presentation, which addresses the social aspects, brings it home, with a discussion of how bias and prejudice affect our lives individually, and what we can do about it.

As a homework assignment, students are asked to write about their personal experiences and any insights this new awareness has given them. Although bullying is not mentioned, bullying and bias-based bullying is often brought up by the students. During the entire presentation, students are taught some known and effective methods for addressing bias, prejudice, stereotyping and bullying, and how to put them into practice.

Because the Commissioners understand that youth are better influenced by other youth rather than adults, the goal of the program has been to co-develop an insightful and sensitive



At their March 2012 annual conference, the New Jersey Bias Officers Association presented awards for the "Pass The Message On" program to Lt. Keith Aslin (Law Enforcement-2011) (*far left*), Commissioner Karen Positan (Community) (*center*), and Dr. Paula Rodriguez Rust (Educator) (*second from right*).

educational program that can be presented to high school students, that the high school students can then repackage and present to middle school and elementary school students.

The seniors **Pass The Message On** to middle and elementary students through mentoring. To prepare for their field trips, the high school students work together in smaller groups to develop a brief program they can present to the younger students in a classroom setting to engage them in a conversation about bias, prejudice and bullying. Many choose to use role plays to demonstrate what can happen, and how the younger students can better respond. The program kicks off with an assembly presentation, with the high school volunteers reading some of the writings that have been collected through the three-year process to the younger students before returning to the individual classrooms, with each high school group presenting the program they developed to the younger students.

Last year, 25 high school students visited a local elementary school and a middle school to present the program. This year, the high school seniors will be mentoring high school freshman.

In the first two days of the program presentation, the initial attitude of most of the high school students was, "We can't stop that here. This is HIGH SCHOOL! Are you kidding!" but at the debriefing following the elementary and middle school presentations, they had so absorbed and internalized the messages that they had tried to pass on to the young students that they said things like, "The middle schoolers wouldn't listen to us!"

The high school students forgot that they had almost the same attitudes at the start of the program. Having to take the message and "Pass It On" to younger students caused them to internalize it themselves. They became representatives of the message, and as a result took the message to heart.

Afterwards, the elementary students also wrote letters to the high school students thanking them for coming for a visit, which are priceless to read and which reinforce that the Message had been Passed Along, delivered and understood.

Lt. Aslin (2011), Dr. Rodriguez Rust (2012) and Commissioner Positan (2012) were each honored by the New Jersey State Bias Officers Association, which recognized the significance of this program and their achievements in the field combatting bias intimidation.

Cultivate Dialogue, Communication, and Mutual Respect Police & Teens Together (PATT) Program:

The idea for a program to improve understanding and communication between youth and law enforcement was born out of a discussion at a regular meeting of the Union County Human Relations Commission almost thirteen years ago. While discussing events in the news at that time about altercations between citizens and police officers, the discussion evolved to our own discomfort for ourselves and our licensed teenage children when a seemingly simple event such as a motor vehicle stop occurred.

The pilot program for the **Police & Teens Together (PATT)** program was launched at Elizabeth High School in Spring 2000, and has been presented countywide at all high schools in Union

County's 21 municipalities. Many departments have continued the program on their own, or invite us back from time-to-time.

In the first two sessions, the students speak out about their own perspectives of, and encounters with, law enforcement officers, and officers speak about themselves as people and as professionals. The third "Trading Places Role Play" session is the highlight, with the students as officers for motor vehicle stops and crowd dispersement role plays, stopping the officer "students." (See photos below.)

By the fourth and final session, the students and officers have built understanding, rapport and mutual respect, while also having fun.

The photos below, from a high school program in Fall 2011, will give you some idea of the excitement, and learning, that takes place.



Junior Human Relations Commission

The Commissioners have continued to explore the concept of creating a **Junior Human Relations Commission**. Two recent youth Commissioners have added value and helped to guide the processes to ensure the best outreach to young people, and the creation of programs that are meaningful and engaging. With their assistance, this initiative is finally coming to fruition.

UCHRC Youth Commissioner Joseph Bonaccorso was a high school freshman when he received the UCHRC's Unity Award for Achievement by a Student in 2010, and, immediately following, was asked to serve, representing youth.

One of his greatest contributions to the Commission thus far has been to oversee the creation of a Junior Human Relations Commission at the Arthur L. Johnson High School in Clark, where he is currently a junior.

He secured support from the administration, enlisted a faculty advisor, and received approval in August 2011 to move forward.

Its first meeting, held in September 2011, was held after school for one-half hour. In its brief existence, the Junior Human Relations Commission has selected the following activities as their primary focus: Advocating and taking action to prevent bullying from occurring; using peer mediation to address normal conflict resolution; promoting racial tolerance; raising funds for environmental causes; raising funds for American soldiers; addressing and helping to solve any global, national, state or local injustices that may occur; and to hold a clothing/food drive five times during the school year.

We applaud the efforts and accomplishments of Commissioner Joseph Bonaccorso in his brief time serving on the Commission, as well as the administrators, student advisors, students and parents of the Arthur L. Johnson High School community.

Bullying and CyberBullying Awareness and Prevention

Bias-based bullying is bullying, harassment or intimidation based upon a person's gender, race, ethnicity, perceived sexual orientation, sexual identity, religion, age, familial status, or mental, physical or sensory handicap.

The Union County Human Relations Commission is extremely proud of our long-standing, proactive and aggressive stance on promoting awareness and prevention of bullying, cyberbullying, intimidation and harassment -- particularly with regard to bias-based bullying.

Soon after the Columbine High School tragedy in April 1999, the Commissioners began to more carefully explore the arena of bias and hate as it relates to bullying. A heated discussion over whether or not bullying should be considered "a rite of passage" at one meeting (it's not!) led to the eventual creation of a Sub-Committee to further the education of the Commissioners, and ultimately, the community, on bullying, harassment and intimidation.

The exploding use of modern technology and gadgetry by children and youth has also resulted in that audience using that same technology and gadgetry to continue to abuse and torment each other (aka Cyber-Bullying/Bullycide), and, with the preponderance of a text-messaging culture in this generation, sexting.

The Commission is proud of its significant accomplishments in this realm, having partnered with the Union County Prosecutor's Office and the Union County Superintendent of Schools in this initiative, and to continue to take a leadership role in the county community, and in the state, to increase awareness and efforts to intervene and prevent the negative short-term and long-term consequences it causes. This has included Train the Trainers workshops held for law enforcement and educators, involvement on the New Jersey Task Force for Bullying and CyberBullying Awareness and Prevention, the creation of printed brochures for students and adults in both English and Spanish, and ongoing educational presentations for students, parents and school staff.

Within the past year, several workshops have been held for school administrators, educators, school bullying coordinators, and law enforcement officers on these areas, as well as the requirements of the recent legislation.

With New Jersey's passage of New Jersey's Anti-Bullying Student's Bill of Rights -- the nation's strongest anti-bullying legislation signed into law on January 5, 2011, the national attention relating to the death of Rutgers University freshman Tyler Clementi, and the recent verdict handed down in the case against his roommate, Dharun Ravi, who was convicted of bias intimidation, there continues to be a quest for information and understanding by schools, students, parents, and the law enforcement community. As reported in a New York Times article on March 16, 2012, the Ravi verdict, in particular, is poised to broaden the definition of hate crimes in an era when laws have not kept up with evolving technology.

Ultimately, it is the responsibility of the school to create a school environment and culture that will serve as the best intervention and prevention mechanism for bullying, harassment, intimidation and other forms of school violence and disrespectful activities. For this reason, and as part of our ongoing commitment to continue our leadership role in bullying and cyber-bullying awareness and prevention, we will continue our partnership with the Union County Superintendents of Schools and Union County Prosecutor's Office to provide turnkey education and training on bullying, cyberbullying, generational texting/sexting, and bias-based bullying.

InterFaith Community Network

In the aftermath of the Columbine High School tragedy, the Union County Human Relations Commission actively set about to create a structure and system to be used to quickly put together crisis-response public forums when necessary.

The result was Union County's Interfaith Community Network, comprising multi-denominational houses of worship geographically spread throughout Union County that have volunteered to act as "safe haven" host-sites.

The purpose of establishing this network of facilities is to ensure that we can quickly arrange meetings as necessary wherein the community can dialogue and express concerns about issues and events affecting their communities.

It also provides the opportunity to present programs that ultimately focus on Prejudice Reduction and Multi-Cultural Diversity, as well as simple "human relations" concepts.

In the past two years, with its partners, the InterFaith Community Network have hosted several offerings of two meaningful and well-received Public Forums:

- The first, for worried and distressed homeowners, on Foreclosure.
- the second, an ongoing Public Dialogue on Gang Awareness.

FORECLOSURE
Moving from FEAR to POSITIVE ACTION!
Thursday, September 22, 2011
6:30 to 8:30 PM
Shiloh Baptist Church
515-521 West 4th Street, Plainfield
presented by the Union County Human Relations Commission and the Union County Foreclosure Task Force in cooperation with the New Jersey Public Defender's Office of Dispute Settlement and the Union County Superior Court

FREE Program! If you or someone you know is worried about, facing or has lost their residence to FORECLOSURE, this FREE educational program will identify

- positive actions that can be taken
- options that are available, and
- FREE resources that are offered on a state and county level.

Wheelchair Accessible

Join us to hear firsthand from key players who will give you hands-on program information that you can put directly to use including funding, legal assistance, housing assistance, and mediation. They will be available to answer any questions you have.

For more information, please call the UCHRC at 908.689.9028

Public Forums: Foreclosure

In partnership with the New Jersey Office of Dispute Settlement, the Union County Superior Court, and the Union County Foreclosure Task Force, a free public forum entitled, **"FORECLOSURE: Moving From Fear To Positive Action,"** has been and continues to be presented in a variety of venues in Union County.

The program is comprised of a variety of expert panelists who present options that are available to someone who is worried about, facing, or who has recently lost their residence to foreclosure, positive actions that can be taken, and, most importantly, FREE resources that are offered on a state and county level.

Panelists included representatives from the following organizations: ♦ **the Office of Dispute Settlement, New Jersey Office of the Public Defender**, who provides an overview of the free statewide Mortgage Foreclosure Mediation initiative, with details of how to sign up; ♦ **The New Jersey Housing and Mortgage Finance Agency**, who speaks about the role of the NJHMFA in program development and providing resource and referral information for persons facing foreclosure, including funding; ♦ **Local Housing Counselors** -- the most important and extremely vital resource for the homeowner, who works with the homeowner every step of the way on budgeting, financing, identifying viable loan modifications, and pursuing potential

mortgage/rental assistance programs; **Superior Court** who provides a general overview of the court's perspective, and the role of the court beginning with a bank filing a foreclosure complaint, through to a potential Sheriff's sale; and ♦ **the New Jersey Division of Consumer Affairs**, who warns never to pay anyone for assistance, including the plethora of scam artists who try to convince distressed homeowners they can help them avoid foreclosure "for a fee," and speaks to the free and professional assistance available on the state and county level;

The program was offered first at in October 2010 at St. Helen's Roman Catholic Church in Westfield; followed by a program in the Spanish language at the Blessed Sacrament Church in Elizabeth in January 2011, and Shiloh Baptist Church in Plainfield in September 2011. The next program is planned for the Rahway area in Fall 2012. The turnkey program was introduced to the New Jersey Human Relations Council in March 2011, and has been spun off by the Ocean County Human Relations Commission at the Toms River Library in June 2011. The Union County Human Relations Commission perceives that by reaching this initial public, ultimately the information will reach those individuals and families who need it most, and will assist in guiding them to the resources that are available to assist them through the arduous and difficulty journey.

Public Forums: Gang Awareness

It will take each of us and all of us to do the best we can to stem the tide of hatred and violence in our world.

The UCHRC's InterFaith Community Network has called upon all sectors of the community -- the clergy, parents, students, citizens, educators, social agency staff members, community organization staff members, law enforcement professionals, and all youth advocates -- to come together for a community education and dialogue on gang awareness.

Acknowledging the presence and impact the gang culture has in our communities, this ongoing series of Gang Awareness Public Forums has been

developed so that all sectors of the community can come together to discuss and share ways that we, individually and collectively, can address these issues and work with youth to encourage healthy choices, relationships and affiliations.

Formal and informal presenters and the audience have engaged in a healthy dialogue to explore the best practices to develop and fund gang-prevention measures and outreach.

We are grateful to the many citizens within Union County and the surrounding counties and towns who have taken the time to participate and to proactively take a stand to influence our youth's direction toward a brighter future while making our homes, schools and community a better and safer place to live and work.

The Union County Human Relations Commission
invites you to join us for a special presentation

Gang Awareness The Community Dialogue Continues

Thursday, March 29 -- 6:30 p.m.
at the
John H. Stamler Police Academy,
1776 Raritan Road, Scotch Plains
(on the Union County Vo-Tech Campus)

Who should attend?
•Parents
•Citizens
•Clergy
•Educators
•Social Agency Staff Members
•Community Organization Staff Members
•Law Enforcement Professionals
•All Youth Advocates

Acknowledging the presence and impact the gang culture has in our communities, this Gang Awareness Public Forum has been developed so that all sectors of the community can come together to discuss and share ways that our community can address these issues. Our goal is to guide and assist youth by encouraging healthy choices, relationships and affiliations.

In this continuing Public Forum, join us as we explore the best practices for developing and funding gang-prevention measures and outreach.

FREE EVENT -- FREE PARKING -- WHEELCHAIR ACCESSIBLE
RSVP by email to kpostan@ucnj.org
Please include your name, organization and phone number.
Or call 908-889-9028.

Conflict Mediation

The Union County Human Relations Commission is primarily focused on local concerns and is committed to the improvement of life in the county.

To this end, a great number of the Commissioners were trained in conflict intervention and mediation by Caroline Petrilla, Esq., a former staff member of the New Jersey Secretary of State's Office of Dispute Settlement (which now resides in the Office of the Public Advocate).

In addition to the initial 18-hour state-mandated training, the Commissioners have continued to work with Ms. Petrilla and on their own to conduct ongoing training sessions, including role play sessions, to hone their skills and gain a broader exposure to

potential solutions devised by those in conflict.

Some Commissioners have also chosen to work as conflict mediators with the federal court system.

As Commissioners, we are becoming increasingly aware of individual needs for mediation, as well as opportunities to provide mediation to citizens to resolve disputes and keep these matters out of the court system.

An integral part of our "tool box," the Commissioners are reaching out to make various community groups aware of our capability in this regard, and encouraging them to call upon the Union County Human Relations Commission to be of service.

**"The truth is that there is nothing noble in being superior to somebody else.
The only real nobility is in being superior to your former self."**

Whitney Young (1921-1971)

Promote Human Rights & Cultural Diversity

Understanding Other Cultures and Ourselves

The Union County Human Relations Commission continues to seek opportunities at meetings and in public forums to become acquainted with other cultures, with an eye to better understand the visible and invisible behaviors, motivators and values that comprise our diverse global community. A recent presentation featured local Marathi-speaking people from India, who are seeking to preserve their cultural heritage, language, and music. The organization is a pioneer in the movements to eradicate untouchability and women's illiteracy. We have also been inspired by recent visits exploring the Chinese American and Muslim/Arabic communities and cultures, as well as other guest presenters. The Commissioners continue to explore ways to become acquainted with and better understand other cultures, themselves and each other, always with an eye toward helping to spread that awareness to the general public.

The Union County Human Relations Commission also continues to strive for self-education and discovery. At the end of every meeting, Commissioners share "Popcorn and Soda" -- that is, recommendations about books, movies, television programs, theatrical productions, school plays, music, websites, and educational and cultural events. Through this exchange, we are encouraged to explore various aspects of cultural diversity and human rights that help us to look at ourselves, and at the complexities of cultural exchange and discourse in our society, both today and yesterday. The ensuing discussions reflect a wide spectrum of opinions, viewpoints, perspectives, biases and prejudices, which reinforced both the need to continue these dialogues, and the need for our Commission to actively engage in providing ourselves and the general public with these types of educational experiences and opportunities.

Global Issues including Immigration, Genocide, Human Trafficking, and other Suffering

While the UCHRC is primarily focused on local concerns and the improvement of life in our county, we have also engaged in a myriad of discussions on many sensitive social and legal issues and sought responsible ways to address these subjects. Our inquiries have reminded us that, despite our commitment to the Union County community, we are inextricably tied to the global community, which has led us into discussion of a broader field of issues. We recognize that some of these issues, such as the Darfur genocide, human trafficking, immigration, and the NARCO drug wars are incredibly broad and complex in scope. We continue to search for new insights and learn so that we can share ourselves, our education and our wisdom in a manner that will improve our life skills and help our county reap the full benefits of our diversity.

Support for Bias Crime Victims

We continue our close relationship with the municipal, county and state bias crime offices, including the New Jersey Division of Criminal Justice's Office of Bias Crime and Community Relations, the New Jersey State Bias Officers Association, and the Union County Prosecutor's Office Bias Unit, which serves on our Commission. They regularly update us on the types of bias incidents and hate crimes that have been investigated in Union County.

We are committed to uphold the law and sponsor efforts encouraging the abandonment of negative words or actions motivated by prejudice, bias, or hate, or protected characteristics including race, color, religion, national origin, ethnicity, sex, gender, gender identity, expression, disability or sexual orientation. We are also committed to find and/or develop support mechanisms for those who are victimized.

UCHRC Commissioners

Our Commissioners continue to seek active and interested members to ensure the Union County Human Relations Commission reflects the diverse population of Union County. A Background Information Nomination form that has been developed aids in this process. The following is our Membership Roster effective April 2012, reflecting 35 members:

Co-Chairs.....

★ **Peter McTiernan** (2010-2012)

★ **James F. Keefe** (1997 to present)

Recording Secretary...★ **Karen E. Positan** Members At Large.....

★ Lorraine Aklonis

★ Barbara Babcock

★ Joseph Bonaccorso

★ Barbara Boyer

★ Reverend Alfred E. Brown (2008-2010)

★ Dr. Carmen Centuolo

★ Dr. Martin Dickerson

★ Faheemah El-Amin (2000-2002)

★ Maria Egoavil

★ Flor Gonzales

★ Sgt. Lenny Guarino

★ Jo Ann Hamilton

★ Alice A. Holzapfel

★ Nora Mislán

★ Charles Newman

★ Virginia San Pedro

★ Helene Scheuer (2004-2006)

★ Esmeralda Vargas

★ Emma Villegas

★ Linda Weissbrod

★ Chief Brian Mahoney, Scotch Plains Police Department

Union County Prosecutor's Office:

★ First Assistant Prosecutor Albert Cernadas, Jr.

★ Deputy First Assistant Prosecutor Anne K. Frawley

★ Captain Ana Zsak (Bias Unit)

★ Lieutenant Jim Russo (Bias Unit)

★ Detective Johnny Ho (Bias Unit)

Commissioners on Leave.....

★ Aristo Carranza ★ Janice Jackson

★ Ana Martinez ★ Deborah Smith

Commissioners Emeritus.....

★ Raul Pinto

★ Jack Weinshanker (2002-2004)

Continuously Improve The Commission

The Union County Human Relations Commission, which consists of a group of Union County residents from diverse personal and professional backgrounds, was created by the Union County Prosecutor's Office in 1991. Following the death of then-Prosecutor Andrew K. Ruotolo, the UCHRC ceased activities for a couple of years. It was reorganized and reenergized in 1997.

Since that time, the Union County Human Relations Commission has continued to earn our statewide reputation of being a Commission that is progressive, interested and involved.

The UCHRC meets every other month on Monday nights at the John H. Stampler Police Academy in Scotch Plains. UCHRC Sub-Committees meet as needed to address and implement specific projects. Being a group of like-minded volunteers, we are constrained by the resources and time available among us. Despite our sparse resources, we continue to use our leverage to gain the broadest exposure and impact.

We will continue to work to identify opportunities for current and future Commissioners, and continue to work to meet and exceed the standards asked of all New Jersey Human Relations Commissions.