

CITY OF MESA
HUMAN RELATIONS ADVISORY BOARD (HRAB)
Youth Diversity Education Team (YDET)
November 17, 2015 Minutes

The Youth Diversity Education Team of the City of Mesa met on November 17, 2015
at 5:00pm at the Mesa City Plaza, 20 E. Main St. Ste. 170.

MEMBERS PRESENT
Nadia Khalighi, Chair
Cliff Moon, Vice-Chair
Denise Heap
Robert Martinez
Talmage Pearce
Martin Rios

MEMBERS ABSENT
Frank Johnson

STAFF PRESENT
Bethany Freeland
Ruth Giese

GUESTS
Erica Reyes
Bryce Cook

1. Call to Order.

Ms. Khalighi called the meeting to order at 5:00pm.

2. Items from citizens present.*

There were no citizens who requested to speak to YDET.

3. Approval of minutes from the October 20, 2015 YDET meeting.

Ms. Heap suggested that the members of the committee give introductions since it was Mr. Rios first meeting. Mr. Cook introduced himself as a member of the LDS church who has started a support group for members of the Church who are part of the LGBT community. The rest of the committee went on to give their introductions.

Mr. Moon made a motion to approve the minutes from the October 20, 2015 YDET meeting. Mr. Pearce seconded and the motion carried unanimously.

4. Hear, discuss, and take action on organizing youth community service projects including the topic of Diversity through organizations such as: the Baha'i Community, Anti-Defamation League, Girl Scouts, Boy Scouts, and Gay and Lesbian Education Network.

Ms. Khalighi asked Ms. Reyes to recap with the committee what some of the youth service project suggestions were. Ms. Reyes stated that she spoke with another member of the Baha'i community about brainstorming some ideas. One of the possibilities that they discussed was reading to children. This would involve gathering the interested youth volunteers and choosing books that have a diversity related theme. Ms. Reyes also stated that her mother taught children's literature at MCC and is willing to assist with the project. The school that was suggested was Care Partnership with Bev Tittlebaker. Ms. Reyes also suggested that the target group of children belong to an after school care group. This way it is easier for the youth volunteers to attend.

Another idea that was discussed was a mural project. Ms. Reyes stated that she already had an artist who showed interested in being involved. Areas of possibility were Guerrero Park and Downtown Mesa. Ms. Anderson liked the idea of having it somewhere very visible to the public so that it can make a statement that the youth of Mesa came together to express their support of Diversity. Ms. Reyes informed that committee that the artist that she is contact with would sketch a design of the concept, then sketch the agreed upon design on the chosen location, and then have the youth volunteers paint in the areas. The committee would be responsible for procuring any required permits or materials needed to complete the project. Ms. Anderson suggested arranging a meeting between the artist and the youth volunteers to brainstorm and choose the

design together. Ms. Khalghi stated that Lindsey Balinkie, a Neighborhood Outreach Coordinator, is already working with Academy with Community Partners Charter School on another mural project and they are looking for another one. The committee agreed that this would be an ideal place to start a mural project. Ms. Anderson reiterated that she liked that idea, but that she preferred a more public place to display the mural. Ms. Khalighi felt that it was a good idea to get the mural done at the school, so as to gather some experience with what to expect with a project like that, and then move on to bigger locations from there. Ms. Heap also suggested working with RAIL Mesa to find another possible location. Mr. Moon also reminded the committee that a letter would need to go out to the parents outlining the objective of the project, as well as the time and commitment required.

Ms. Khalighi suggested that the committee move forward with the first project, reading to children, because that project requires much less planning. Ms. Heap stated that she would contact Ms. Tittlebaker as soon as possible to set up a good time for the students and to secure the space for the project. Ms. Reyes also suggested that some of the children from the Baha'i community would be available to attend the reading as well. Mr. Martinez added that it would be good to add a bilingual component to the reading. The committee agreed. The committee decided to meet the evening of November 30, 2015 at 5pm in the same location in order to sort out the details of the reading project.

Mr. Pearce also informed the committee that he spoke to a few non-profit organizations who had questions as to what time of day the service learning projects might occur, as well as few other questions. He stated that he would email them to Mr. Moon to pass on to the Service Learning Director of Westwood.

5. Discuss and take action on recent updates to the LDS church organization involving children of same-sex couples. The policy updates have led to an increase in suicidal thoughts and harassment among school-aged children.

Ms. Heap informed the committee that this policy is having a significant impact on the residents of the City of Mesa. She stated that it was important to find a way to inform the schools of the current situation and develop some sort of support for those involved. She also told the committee that it is their charge to protect the vulnerable. She informed the committee that one of the active members of the group Mama Dragons had recently attempted suicide in the wake of the church policy update.

Mr. Cook updated the committee on the details of the new policy. The LDS church is opposed to same sex marriage. Although, recently the LDS church helped pass one of the first antidiscrimination laws in the country in the state of Utah. Also, one of the church leaders spoke against individuals who refuse to perform their duties as presented to them by the state, such as issuing marriage licenses. Mr. Cook clarified that the new policy declared anyone person who entered into a same sex marriage or relationship as an apostate. This has great negative connotations to individuals in the church, so much so that it extends that individuals children. He went on to stress that this has caused significant pain to individuals in the church who are affected by this policy. Ms. Heap stated that in comparison, a few years ago, the schools were not offering any support for children with deployed parents. This issue was brought to the attention of the schools and some programs were put in place to address this. This is something Ms. Heap would like to see happen with this particular issue. Mr. Moon asked Mr. Cook if he was aware of any schools in Mesa who were taking it upon themselves to identify students who may be affect by this. He stated that he was unaware of anything like that currently. Mr. Cook also said that he didn't believe this would bleed into the school atmosphere in most areas, but that areas with a high ratio of LDS members may begin to see an issue. He also thought that it was worth having teachers in these areas keep an eye out for any exclusionary type response from the children toward kids who have members of their families in same sex relationships.

Ms. Heap also mentioned that the group, Mama Dragons, would be a good resource. Mr. Cook explained that all moms with children who are LGBT have adopted the name of "Mama Dragon," including his own wife. Ms. Anderson stated that she believed the schools need to be on high alert and that kids will inevitably "be kids," and that bullying is a strong possibility. Mr. Cook questioned what the process might be to notify schools to aware of this issue. Mr. Moon informed the committee that he would email Shane McCord, who is one of the Superintendents of Mesa Public Schools asking how counselors should handle the subject, should it arise. Ms. Anderson also added that beyond bullying, the children impacted by this will be greatly affected emotionally whether bullying is a factor or not.

Mr. Cook further explained that policy states that any child who lives with a parent in a same sex relationship will not be allowed to participate in the church itself. There was an amendment made that said if the child lives full time with a parent who is in a heterosexual relationship, then they may still be active in the church. The caveat to this revision is that "full time" refers to zero contact with the LGBT parent. This can cause extreme emotional distress to the child who is forced to choose either the parent or the church. Ms. Giese added that if there is an instance where a young adult starts to feel that they may be LGBT, then they know that the church will not support them as they grow older. Mr. Cook stated that this is where suicide may start to play a huge role. It fosters feelings of self-loathing in these young people. Mr. Pearce offered that he felt bullying would not be an issue among children in the schools. He agreed that suicide is a possibility and that everyone should be aware of the sign of individuals who are considering suicide. Mr. Cook added though that may be true, there is a great chance of bullying within families. He stated that there are very devout members who may gang up on the members who are involved in same sex relationships. This is a common occurrence. Mr. Moon stressed that while he hopes it is true that bullying will be a non-issue, he sees bullying happening on a high level very often. Mr. Cook concurred that it may be a scenario of exclusion rather than explicit bullying. Mr. Moon also reminded the committee that cyber bullying is a very real problem with kids today.

Mr. Moon stated that he would reach out to his resources and see what can be done. Mr. Cook let the committee and Mr. Moon know that he would be happy to be added as a contact should the committee need advice in the future on this issue.

6. Discuss future agenda items, meeting dates, announcements, and other general information.

- Next YDET meeting will be held on Tuesday, January 19, 2016 at 5:00pm.

7. Adjournment.

Meeting adjourned at 6:00pm.

Submitted By:



Ruth Giese,
Diversity Program Administrator