



Kalamazoo's Summit on Racism

Kalamazoo's Summit on Racism: 2004 – 2008

A Brief History

Background Information

Kalamazoo's Summit on Racism is a unique community led initiative design to create action driven results in our community. The focus of Kalamazoo's Summit on Racism is to identify and eliminate institutional racism in the Kalamazoo community.

The Racial Justice Institute of Grand Rapids Area Center Ecumenism (GRACE) established the first Summit on Racism on April 16, 1999 in Grand Rapids.

After attending the GRACE conference, the City of Kalamazoo, along with the Kalamazoo Community Foundation, approached the YWCA of Kalamazoo to team together to address institutional racism in our community.

Kalamazoo's Summit on Racism started with a series of leadership conferences to bring together one hundred key individuals to assess the community's needs and develop projects and initiatives to eliminate racism.

The first leadership conference was held January 30, 2004 and followed up with another leadership conference on June 7, 2004. At this time, a Steering Committee was also established, consisting of close to fifty community leaders, to provide further guidance and support.

On September 30th, 2004, the first annual Kalamazoo's Summit on Racism conference was held at the Fetzer Center at Western Michigan University, with participation from over 200 key community leaders and residents.

Eight sectors, representing various community presences, met and established goals and outcomes for the first Summit year.

On June 30, 2005, the Summit held it's third leadership conference under the guidance of a smaller Steering Committee with members including: Robert Jones, Mayor, City of Kalamazoo; Jennifer Shoub, YWCA CEO; Deborah Barnes, Director of the Lewis Walker Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnic Relations; Gloria Royal, Kalamazoo Community Foundation, representing Jack Hopkins; and Rev. Louis Felton, President of the Northside Ministerial Alliance.

Kalamazoo's Summit on Racism operates with the understanding that racism is a national problem that occurs in every city across the United States. Kalamazoo, therefore, is not free of racism and reflects national trends regarding racism. This acknowledgment of racism and its' effects allows the city to have open dialogue regarding race and create solutions to eradicating it in the Kalamazoo community. This willingness to challenge racism on behalf of the city and its citizens contributes to the successes of the Kalamazoo's Summit on Racism.

Kalamazoo's Summit on Racism: 2004 - 2005 Outcomes

At Kalamazoo's first Summit on Racism, 8 sectors (faith-based, healthcare, for-profit, etc.) were created and set their own objectives in three areas: housing, employment and education. At the conclusion of the first year of the Summit, the sectors had accomplished the following tasks:

- A centralized calendar of anti-racism activities, initiatives, programs, and trainings was created. This effort was established in order to support the efforts of all organizations whose missions' address racism. We recognize that we are stronger when we come together to share resources and our efforts.
- In an effort to link like-minded organizations together, the Lewis Walker Institute, ERAC/CE and the YWCA have linked web-sites in order to support each other's work. Again, though we may have different approaches, we are working toward the same goal: eliminating racism in our community.
- A Racial Justice Continuing Education Units plan for employers to implement in their business or organization was created. This commitment - on the part of the employer – enables businesses and organizations to provide opportunities for their staff to educate themselves about the many ways racism impacts our lives.
- A Racial Justice Resource Library open to the community was established. It has taken our entire lives to internalize racist images and stereotypes into our personal world. Eradicating our thought processes will be a journey that will take a lifetime to complete. The Lewis Walker Institute, ERAC/CE and the YWCA have accumulated a compilation of books, videos and magazines in support of individuals' continuing education.

Kalamazoo's Summit on Racism: 2005 - 2006 Outcomes

In reviewing the first year of the Summit, the Steering Committee requested that the Leadership Conference consider modifying the structure of the Summit by reorganizing into three initiatives as opposed to eight sectors. By focusing on three initiatives as a group in contrast to the 24 objectives set last year, this new structure has allowed us to take advantage of the unique viewpoints each sector has regarding three major concerns: housing, employment and education. This change to a more focused set of objectives serves to allow the Summit to maximize the gift of time and talent from all individual participants.

In October 2005, the 2nd Annual Summit on Racism Conference was held and again received a great turn out from the community. Outcomes and methods of pursuit include:

Education: The Education Initiative formed three sub-committees to address issues in areas of education. The three groups worked focused on teacher education, the MEAP test, and an analysis of the Kalamazoo Public Schools district.

Group one focused on the teaching practices of students in the College of Education at Western Michigan University who will be future teachers in local schools. The goal was to decrease the potential for future discriminatory practices by future teachers, by increasing the cultural competency of student teachers. By educating the future teachers, while they are still working to obtain their teaching certification, our goal will be to establish a cultural competency component as requirement in the education curriculum. This allows us to change the impact and practices of the teachers graduating from Western Michigan University (WMU).

Group two focused on assessing the MEAP (Michigan Education Assessment Program) test for racial and cultural biases. After review, it was determined that bias within the test did exist. The Education Initiative was successful in acquiring representation on the State of Michigan MEAP test review committee and is working to ensure that future versions of the MEAP test are created without such biases that impact the abilities of those students of color taking the exam.

Group three focused on creating a racial justice report card for the Kalamazoo Public Schools district. Through a reporting mechanism created by the Applied Research Center in Oakland, California, this group examined the Kalamazoo Public School district in terms of racial justice. This work was

primarily performed by members of the district and assisted the district administration in making the decision to begin Crossroads Ministry training for all district employees.

Employment: The Employment Initiative focused on reviewing organizations and the cultural environment for all employees, normally established or enforced by supervisors, human resource directors and chief executive officers. The goal was to identify, implement and/or increase the use of the best anti-racism strategies by employers.

The use of these anti-racism strategies will have a direct positive impact on the cultural environment of all staff. By establishing the anti-racism strategies, this will allow organizations/companies the opportunity to measure themselves against a standard and continuously striving to improve the cultural climate of their organization.

This Initiative conducted Roundtables to complete a Rubric to assist business and organizations in determining whether or not they are providing a successful anti-racist work environment. After completion of the Rubric, the Employment Initiative will begin making a toolkit of materials to assist employers in becoming anti-racist.

Housing: The Housing Initiative focused on landlords that discriminate in allowing access to housing based on race. Our goal will be to decrease discriminatory practices by landlords, by increasing their awareness of the laws that prohibit racial discrimination.

By educating the landlords in a timely manner, our goal will be to decrease the amount of reported discrimination practices. This allows us to change the practices of the landlords instead of duplicating efforts of assisting the victims in remedying racial discrimination (such as what is available via the complaint process to the fair housing and/or civil rights agencies).

Kalamazoo's Summit on Racism: 2006 – 2007 Outcomes

At Kalamazoo's 3rd Annual Summit on Racism Conference, the three Initiative groups discussed changes in leadership, as well as new and continuing goals, during the conference. The work of the Summit continues in monthly and bi-weekly Initiative meetings. Outcomes for the year include:

Education: Focusing on the education and training provided to future teachers by the College of Education at Western Michigan University, the Education Initiative addressed the need for a cultural competency component in teacher education. By partnering with instructors from the College of Education, we determined that adding an additional course to the teacher education curriculum is not a realistic option. Due to factors including the union contracting, State of Michigan teacher education requirements, and the extended process required for adding additional courses, an alternative route was undertaken. We have focused instead on infusing the existing courses with cultural competency through the commitment of the College of Education faculty to attend workshops on issues of race and oppression.

Additionally, the Education Initiative has representation on the newly formed Kalamazoo Public Schools (KPS) anti-racism team. Through the KPS anti-racism team's work, current teachers and other employees of the district will be working to unlearn racism and remove the prejudices and biases that currently exist within the curriculum.

Employment: The Employment Initiative continued work on their Rubric of anti-racist business practices. The newly completed Rubric, created with the assistance of human resource professionals, will become the basis for a Toolkit for achieving an anti-racist work environment.

Additionally, the Initiative worked to create standards for its own function by creating a set of Guiding Principles to assist volunteer members in understanding what is required for those working with the

Initiative. These new Guiding Principles have assisted those currently working with the Initiative to remain on task as they work to create their Toolkit.

Housing: In the previous cycle, the Housing Initiative attempted to address discriminatory practices by landlords. It was determined that the laws and guidelines in place for landlords in the City of Kalamazoo and surrounding areas do not allow for the type of educational system to be made mandatory.

The Initiative refocused its energies through viewing part three of the film Race: The Power of an Illusion. Part three, *The House We Live In*, focuses specifically on racism in housing. Through a historical analysis of housing law and policy in the United States, the film discusses how racism in housing was sanctioned by the federal government through the Veteran's Housing Administration following World War II, examines the process of "red lining," and looks at how home ownership impacts the generational wealth of families of color.

After viewing the film, the Housing Initiative approached the Kalamazoo Association of Realtors to determine whether an educational would be possible for realtors. With the assistance of members of the Board of Realtors, an educational program on racism in housing practices was created and added to the new realtor orientation. Utilizing a short section of *The House We Live In*, this presentation provides new realtors with important information about racism in housing and the segregated housing patterns of Kalamazoo County. Members of the Housing Initiative are working with the Kalamazoo Association of Realtors to arrange for this presentation to be provided to current realtors as well.

Kalamazoo's Summit on Racism: 2007 – 2008 Outcomes

Kalamazoo's 5th Annual Summit on Racism Conference was held on September 26, 2009. At the Summit Conference, Initiative groups met to select new leadership, recruit members, and establish new goals for the 2007 – 2008 Summit cycle, including:

Education: The Education Initiative continued its work with the College of Education at WMU and the KPS anti-racism team. Additionally, through the coordination of the Education Initiative Leadership Committee, the Initiative successfully created a Directory of Anti-Racism Education and Youth Initiatives. The Directory will serve as a living document, to be updated annually as additional anti-racism opportunities are added to the cadre of those available in the community. The Directory will be available online beginning in October 2008.

Employment: The Employment Initiative continued its work to create the Toolkit for achieving anti-racist work environments. Turnover in Initiative participation and leadership stalled the work during the 2007 – 2008 cycle. Initiative members look forward to renewed participation in the 2008 – 2009 cycle.

Housing: The Housing Initiative utilized the presentation created for the Greater Kalamazoo Association of Realtors as a basis to create a forum for landlords, as well as a general public education presentation. Geared toward the general public, the Initiative plans to provide public education presentation to local groups. The first Landlord Fair Housing Forum will be held in Kalamazoo on October 15, 2008, with additional forums in other areas of Kalamazoo County in 2009.

For more information about Kalamazoo's Summit on Racism or to get involved with an Initiative, please contact the YWCA Racial Justice program at (269) 345-5595 or rj@ywcakalamazoo.org.