

Human Relations Council | Nutley Yesterday · Today - 1961

HUMAN RELATIONS COUNCIL

BY NELLE A. ANDERSEN

ON November 21, 1950, was founded the Human Relations Council of Nutley, New Jersey. There were twenty-two members of varied races and religions with differing economic and cultural backgrounds.

The goals were as follows: to foster an interest in and understanding of the importance of good inter-group relations to provide accurate information on community matters concerned with these relationships ...to examine and analyze community problems in intergroup relations ...to propose and carry out programs of action to meet such problems ...to stimulate individual and organization interest in the solution of these problems ...to serve as a clearing house of information to those working in the field.

The first essential was an informed membership, capable of sound thinking and constructive positive action. This was acquired through the help of Seymour Samet and Arnold Harris of the Essex County Intergroup Council; the East Orange Civil Rights Commission; Daniel Anthony, then Regional Director of the National Conference of Christians and Jews; and Miss Katherine Sonne of the Nutley Public School Guidance Department. Also, there were conferences, speakers and films.

As a beginning point, all things seemed to focus on the ParentChild-School Relationship. A decision was made to raise community funds to provide scholarships to the Rutgers University Workshop in Human Relations. This would provide training for both parent and teacher. Doctor Floyd Harshman, Nutley School Superintendent, co-sponsored this project and awarded the scholarships at the first annual dinner in May. A sum of over eight hundred dollars was raised and four teachers, one school nurse, one minister and one parent attended the Workshop. At this dinner, the guest speaker was Miss Grace M. Freeman, who, as State Representative, proposed and saw enacted New Jersey's present Civil Rights Laws.

Among projects of the second year was the Audio-Visual Aids Workshop, held at Spring Garden School. There were seventyfive registrants. Various techniques for conducting informative meetings were demonstrated. Emphasis was placed on audience participation, using human relations as demonstration topics. The second project was concerned with Brotherhood Week. Mayor Jernick appointed the Council to enlist various town organizations to participate in the celebration. Programs were provided for the Ladies' Auxiliary of the Elks, Mothers' Club of Washington School, Woman's Club, Optimist and the P.T.A. and Assembly of Lincoln School. As a result of these last two programs, a committee to study needs and values of brotherhood was

formed within the school.

In 1952-1953 the "Audit" became the all consuming interest of the year. It was plain that before a community could take action to insure the preservation of the rights of all of its citizens, it must know all the facts. The purpose of the Nutley Human Rights Audit was to accumulate the necessary information in order to present to the people of the community an objective and fair picture of the status of human rights in the town.

Five other organizations participated in the "Audit": The Nutley Ministerial Association, the Knights of Columbus, The Catholic Daughters of America, the Sisterhood of Temple B'nai Israel and the League of Women Voters. These organizations provided the fifty auditors who conducted the survey. Individual sponsors were Mayor Chenoweth, Rabbi Danzig, Reverend Joseph Napier, Mrs. Frederick Sanford, Dr. Walter Ryan and Dr. Rush Bauman.

The areas chosen for fact-finding included Housing, Health, Employment, Education, Recreation, Public Accommodations, General Welfare. This was an arduous task well done under the guidance of Miss Margaret I. Kramer. The Council assumed all financial responsibility for the Audit, had many copies printed and widely distributed. No conclusions were drawn and no recommendations made. Many of the facts gave cause for pride in the community; some gave cause for concern. Any untoward facts would have to be met sooner or later. The aim of the Council was to spur the conscience of the community. The New York Times published a summary of the Audit and praised the Council's mental alertness and keen insight.

In 1955-1956 the most significant event was a Seminar in Human Relations which was instituted by School Superintendent Robert Flood, Assistant Superintendent Dr. Hirsch Silverman and the Nutley Board of Education. There were noted speakers from universities and organizations. Monthly meetings were attended by the entire school faculty and interested citizens.

In 1956-1957 the annual town-wide celebration of Brotherhood Week was a real community highlight. Thirty-four organizations sent representatives to man the many committees. Churches, unions, civic clubs, cultural groups and the schools participated. "Our Town - The History of Nutley In Song and Dance," a pageant designed to show the contributions to the cultural, civic and economic life of a community, was composed of various ethnic groups. With the Nutley Community Chorus, the Nutley Folk Dance Group and many skilled people used for staging, research, publicity, and hospitality, more than one hundred citizens were involved in the production.

Another historic event was the establishment of the Nelle A. Andersen Scholarship Fund. This scholarship would know no geographical limitations and would be administered by an autonomous Board of Directors appointed by and responsible to the Council. The first award was to a representative of the Department of Labor of Puerto Rico.

In 1957-1958 a Brotherhood Celebration under the leadership of New-Soong-Li, Director of the Workshop for Cultural Democracy, and Vereda Pearson, a recreation director in the New York School system, created a warm, brotherly atmosphere. The Negro History Seminar was brilliantly conducted by Professors Lawrence and Smythe of Brooklyn College. A seminar on "Religion in Education" was presented by Judge Hubert Delaney, nationally known jurist. His great clarity on a subject so highly controversial and little understood helped in many areas of work.

A positive stand on the housing problem was in the offing. The way was being blazed but had not yet effected any change in the basic situation. With continued efforts the Council members looked forward to the successful solution of challenging problems and a steady advance ever closer to the realization of their goals.

In 1958-1959 a permanent Mayor's Brotherhood Committee was formed indicating a new level of development in the promotion of intergroup understanding in the community life of Nutley.

Its first activity was to call a Youth Conference. Community consultants participated in panels on Work Opportunities, Educational and Cultural Activities and Recreation. The thirtytwo organizations involved represented a cross-section of the Town of Nutley.

The United Nations Week event was the International Covered Dish Supper which created a feeling of kinship. Reports were given by college students who had just returned from a close-up study of Europe and Asia under the sponsorship of the American Association of the United Nations. Here was a heartening example of the informed youth so needed to meet tomorrow's world.

Brotherhood Week brought its round of varied activities. Programs were more widespread. Churches and organizations planned individual celebrations.

One of the dreams had been to see the development of Nutley's young people into an organization to improve intergroup relations. Through participation in the Youth March to Washington, the Community Youth Conference and the Brotherhood Youth Camp, sponsored by the National Conference of Christians and Jews, the dream was realized. "Youth For Brotherhood" was organized in the fall of 1959.

In attempting to deal with housing problems in Nutley, "More and Better Housing for All" was discussed by William Brach and Julius Wildstein. Acute situations were pointed up, which resulted in the initiation of a Citizens Committee on Housing. An eviction was prevented, and meetings held with the Mayor, Planning Board, Commissioners and realty organizations stressed the need for corrective action.

"An Evening With Nelle Andersen" was a moving and poignant account of her

visit to Puerto Rico and the problems solved by a courageous people. A musicale and garden party for the Nelle A. Andersen Scholarship Fund was a delightful affair. This year the award was made to a foreign student from the Near East. The Tenth Anniversary Dinner was a memorable event, with the presentation of a narrative in words and music, "The Opening Door," interpreting various moods of the Council's Ten Years.

Officers and Executive Board - 1959-1960 are: Mrs. Theodore Arnold, Chairman; Mrs. William Darden, Vice-Chairman; Mrs. Robert Eldridge, Vice-Chairman; Mr. Lonnie Tomlin, Treasurer; Mr. Frederick Bartel, Financial Secretary; Mr. William Cundiff, Recording Secretary; Mrs. G. J. McFarland, Corresponding Secretary; Mrs. Martinus Andersen, Mrs. George Boissy, Mr. William Darden, Mr. Philip Cots, Mrs. James Hewitt, Mrs. A. H. Levenson, Mrs. Edwin Lotz, Mrs. Lester Newman, Mrs. Phyllis Novack, Mrs. Chester Peterson, Mrs. Anthony Serviente, Mrs. Peter Snyder, Mr. Peter Snyder, Miss Elvira Tava, Mrs. Sanford Weber, Miss Blanche Weisel, Mrs. Charles White.