

Equity Lens in the Community

BY LEILA GORDON ■ PHOTOGRAPHY BY LINDA RUTLEDGE

How do you look at the world through an equity lens? A key to this perspective is in this quote from Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.:

Through our scientific and technological genius, we have made of this world a neighborhood and yet we have not had the ethical commitment to make of it a brotherhood. But somehow, and in some way, we have got to do this. We must all learn to live together as brothers or we will all perish together as fools. We are tied together in the single garment of destiny, caught in an inescapable network of mutuality. And whatever affects one directly affects all indirectly. For some strange reason I can never be what I ought to be until you are what you ought to be. And you can never be what you ought to be until I am what I ought to be. (from “Remaining Awake through a Great Revolution”)

It is this idea of mutuality and seeing ourselves in the lives of others — empathy — that is at the heart of living in a community that practices seeing the world through an equity lens. Equity is not the same as equality. Equality provides the same identical set of tools for everyone to succeed; equity is assuring that everyone has the actual tools they need to succeed. We want to explore the potential in our community for using an “equity lens” to assure that everyone here reaches their potential.

When Anna Deavere Smith shared her work with the Reston community last year for the 2015 Reston Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Celebration, it prompted such deep conversation among her audiences



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that it became imperative to have her return to continue and check in on our dialogs. Reston Community Center made a commitment to using a variety of events and experiences to look at issues reflected in national dialogs about disproportionality, the justice system, and other aspects of 21st century realities.

In planning these, we have been working with many community partners. This past fall, with the Initiative for Public Art — Reston (IPAR), we launched that effort with *We Make Reston* — an action that is part of *INSIDE OUT* — a global art project that celebrates the intrinsic value of all individuals. In addition to the project exhibit sites in Reston, a community conversation about the diversity the portraits reflected occurred the weekend of the Reston Multicultural Festival. In January, Anna Deavere Smith returns to Reston for the Reston Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Birthday Celebration with a performance work, *From Rodney King to Michael Brown*. She will also engage with the audience in dialog as well as further the conversation the following day in her keynote address.

Also in 2016, we will collaborate with Supervisor Cathy Hudgins, our colleagues in the Human Services System, and Cornerstones, among

others, to host a community engagement event featuring a nationally recognized speaker to discuss how communities can develop an intentional path toward equity. Our goal is to advance the vision of Reston as an inclusive, healthy, and productive community. We hope you will stay tuned for more details about these activities of course, but most importantly, we hope if you are interested or want to become more involved in them, you will reach out to us — RCCContact@fairfaxcounty.gov — and let us know. Faith communities, neighborhoods, organizations, and individuals — everyone is welcome and needed. Dr. King’s dream of the beloved community is part of Reston’s DNA; let’s stay together on this journey and make that dream a reality.



Leila Gordon has been the RCC Executive Director since 2008.