

Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Committee

September 12, 2022 Meeting Minutes

Rev. Shirley Bowen described the mission of Seeds of Hope Neighborhood Center, which is located at 35 South Street, and the services that are offered to 'neighbors'. These services include:

- Providing meals
- Assistance with access to healthcare, including vaccinations, testing, and connecting people with a PCP
- Hep C and HIV testing
- Coordination with the City's People Recover program for those struggling with substance use
- Overnight warming center in winter months and daytime cooling center in summer months
- Health education/food tips
- Violence No More classes
- Will soon be offering a shower and providing shower supplies that can be stored at the center

Rev. Shirley shared some of the challenges that she sees neighbors struggle with, including:

- Challenges with accessing IDs – often need two forms and one with address
- Comments from the community/judgement
- Substance use disorder and availability of treatment
- Finding employment due to criminal history

There are an estimated 50-60 people in our community experiencing homelessness at this time. Rev. Shirley discussed some of the myths around homelessness – those experiencing homelessness do not feel entitled, they don't deserve it, and there is no scarcity of resources (there is funding available for people experiencing homelessness and people experiencing other challenges to all be assisted).

Some suggested ideas for areas that the DEI Committee could assist in were to create a registry of employers within the city who would hire folks with a criminal history, or organize a job fair with these employers. Additionally, in terms of inclusivity, acknowledging that we have homelessness in Biddeford and treating those experiencing homelessness with dignity (greeting them when passing by, etc) is key.

The Committee will be joined by Recreation Director Carl Walsh at the next meeting and determined that they would start discussions about Recreation programming once he is present. The next meeting has been set for Monday, October 3 at 5:30 p.m.