



Human Rights Commission

2023-2024 Annual Report

Commissioners

Ethan Cords **Chair**, Jim Gunderson **Vice Chair**, Jamie Vanoosbree **Secretary**, Brandy Leon, Dave Emanuelson, Edgar Esquivel, and Mustafe Ismael.

Mission Statement

Promoting cultural diversity by educating the community on issues of discrimination and advising the city council on human rights issues.

Community Engagement

Commissioners engaged with many community organizations throughout the year including SHRM, the Owatonna Community Leadership Academy, Project Community Connect, Rainbowatonna, Promoting Peace, OPEN Owatonna and Alliance for Greater Equity.

DOJ Mediation

The United States Department of Justice reached out to the HRC to discuss some concerning events that have happened in Owatonna. The DOJ identified the Commission as a key stakeholder in these matters and worked with the Commission, City staff and community members to reach a peaceful resolution.

Welcome Week

We held our second annual Welcome Week in September. Commissioners hosted a soccer game, pickleball games, attended Downtown Thursday and held a human library. The highlight of Welcome Week was the human library, an event where community members of different backgrounds could be checked out as human books to share their experiences, challenges and successes they've experienced in life. The books represented disabled, LGBTQ, immigrant, first generation Americans, senior citizens, students and more.

Martin Luther King Day Celebration

For over a decade, the HRC hosted a breakfast on Martin Luther King Day at Plaza Morena. Though the breakfast was always a successful event, we knew it could be better. This year, we hosted our first ever lunch celebration. Seema Pothini from Humanize My Hoodie provided an engaging presentation on tools for recognizing and responding to injustices by humanizing each other. Turnout for this lunch was more than double the turnout of our previous breakfast and the response from attendees was overwhelmingly positive. We will continue hosting an MLK Day lunch in the future.