

Rochester Leaders Advance Their Understanding of Diverse Perspectives

Leadership Rochester identifies emerging and existing leaders each year and brings them together for monthly sessions with key leaders to discuss the significant issues affecting Rochester and Monroe County. The unique format makes Rochester and Monroe County the classroom. Programs are strategically designed to move to unique locations to give participants a comprehensive look at our community along with influential organizations and individuals that shape our region.

[CCSI Chief Diversity Officer, Keshia Carter](#) opened the “Finding Common Ground” January program day with an exercise aimed at helping participants understand their own cultural identity. The exercise set the tone for participants to be open to thinking critically about the perspective, identity and lens of someone else before making judgement or making statements driven solely by their own personal views. The cohort was immersed in a day-long experience focused on intercultural understanding, understanding diverse perspectives and challenges specific racial groups face historically and currently in the Greater Rochester Area.

[CCSI Sr. Consultant, Cultural Competence and Health Equity, Nancy Sung Shelton](#) contributed to the full day of robust conversations. She invited Shabaka Mu Asar to moderate a panel of elder leaders, Assemblyman David Gantt and Howard Eagle, paired with young men, Garrison Shelton and Michael Goings-Benjamin, who are Nancy’s sons. The perspectives offered in this dialogue allowed a view into the strife of the black community from the Rochester riots in July 1964 to contemporary issues that are detailed in the Mr. Mu Asar’s documentary, “Young Black Male”.

Nancy closed out this provocative day serving as the moderator for a panel of regional thought leaders: Kit Miler, from the Gandhi Institute, Michael Kelly from the Rochester Refugee Resettlement Services, Rodney Young from the United Way, Angelica Perez-Delgado, incoming CEO of IBERO, and Shira May from the Restorative Initiatives. Nancy posed questions to each panelist asking them to report the current state of their organization, their work and the community they serve; she asked them to respond to the notion of disparities, inequity and poor outcomes from the angle that the “system is not broken, that it is functioning as it was designed”; and the final question was for each panelist to describe what “liberation” looks like, Nancy offered the definition of liberation as, “the act of setting something free; freedom”. In summary, all panelists agreed that things need to change, each are working on affecting positive gains within their purview, and they all remain hopeful as they continue the hard work of making the world a better place.

Anecdotal feedback from Leadership Rochester participants was that it truly was a powerful and thought-provoking day!