



VOLUME 4



OEI 2024

# NEWSLETTER

# HOPE AND PEACE, THROUGH STORMS



The summer season brings a feeling of hope and peace for The Tamara D. Grigsby Office for Equity and Inclusion. The month of June 2024 proved to be one of the rainiest months on record for Dane County. We welcomed our summer intern, their creative ideas, and their inquisitive search for meaningful career development.

The Office for Equity and Inclusion weathered the storms and continued the valuable effort to make Dane County a better place. As we approach a new budget season, we progress with the knowledge that we've provided quality public service, support for our targeted businesses, and collaboration with Dane County Departments as they execute their equity and inclusion strategic plans. As we put the challenges and storms of the COVID Pandemic behind us, we're looking forward to a bright future of innovation and creativity in our equity goals for Dane County government.

The Tamara D. Grigsby Office for Equity and Inclusion is also pleased to announce and celebrate the arrival of our new Language Access and Reporting Specialist, Rhiannon Buehler. Rhiannon brings a very specialized skill-set and enthusiasm for learning County systems and we are glad to welcome her to the Office for Equity and Inclusion.

Finally, it is with great respect and appreciation that we honor the work and contribution to equity and inclusion demonstrated by, now retired, Dane County Executive, Joe Parisi. Executive Parisi advanced the goals of inclusion, encouraged access to opportunity, and established equitable programs, through our Department, that will make Dane County a better place, allowing everyone an opportunity to grow and thrive.

**Wesley Sparkman**

Director, The Tamara D. Grigsby Office for Equity and Inclusion



## ALTA LANGUAGE SERVICES PARTNERSHIP

After over 15 years of our previous bilingual testing process, this past June we partnered with ALTA Language Services to conduct all of our language testing going forward. ALTA is a reputable professional language service company that can provide language testing in over 100 different languages. We primarily will use their General Speaking and Listening exams, which can be catered to different fields such as nursing, law enforcement and behavioral health. The Speaking and Listening exam takes no more than 30 minutes to complete and includes questions on 23 different objectives of spoken communication. Each objective contains between 10 and 50 questions, and the ALTA system will randomly select one question per objective, making each test unique to each candidate. Each of the objectives is designed to elicit the full range of the target language and demonstrate how well the candidate can use and control the language (examples include giving a description, talking about a hypothetical event, or providing an opinion, etc.)

Some of the biggest pros to this change is that the new test will be available to the candidates 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, and can now be taken remotely, which wasn't an option before. Additionally, the level of language proficiency required to pass the test is advanced and will protect us against liability. Third, as mentioned, they have tests tailored to specific fields with additional exams such as for writing or medical terminology, just to name a few. Furthermore, each test is unique to each candidate, so it cannot be memorized or shared with other candidates, as everyone will get a different version of the test. Lastly, the testing system is easy to use and will certainly free up time for the HR Analysts/Diversity Recruitment Specialist during the recruitment process, as well as for the select hiring managers who would previously test candidates. For the recruitment process, candidates will no longer be given a week to arrange their schedules in order to come in to the City-County building, take the test, and then have their recordings sent to our grader for grading and returned within a week later. Now, the process is much more streamlined—candidates will have a week to complete the exam on their own and the grades are returned in about one to two business days.

On the contrary, there are also cons to the new language testing process. Primarily, I believe the new exam will be more difficult to pass. While it is still too early to tell, I worry that this may affect our ability to fill certain classifications, such as bilingual recruitments for Social Workers and Case Managers, whose eligibility lists the last few years has been a trickle. With a harder test, this may further reduce the number of qualified applicants being referred for interviews. I also fear that a harder test may weed out heritage speakers, those who grew up speaking the target language informally at home but who may have never been formally trained or educated in that language, especially if there are written bilingual exams as well. Those who may not have grown up in their country of origin may have a hard time passing the new exam, especially if there is a written translation exam.

In sum, from what I've heard, we have received a lot of positive feedback with the switch thus far. Some managers expressed confidence in using an external language service that specializes entirely in language testing, rather than creating and administering the exam ourselves. While we have only completed a few recruitments with the new ALTA Language Service thus far, I will continue to monitor the success rate of our candidates as we employ the service more and more.

There are times when processes continue in government long after they were created because of momentum or inertia. The time was right to make this transition, and I credit Sara Camacho and MK in Public Health for proposing the change, as well as Employee Relations Director Amy Utzig for her willingness to listen and act on the implementation of this new system. A buena hora!

**RODRIGO VALDIVIA,  
DIVERSITY RECRUITMENT SPECIALIST**

## PREPARATION, STABILITY & THE FUTURE



Upon my five-year anniversary with Dane County this past year, I couldn't help but reflect on the many ways this job has positively influenced my life through the stability it affords. Principally, in those five years, I have been able to purchase a home and go back to school for a Master's degree, thus increasing my possible lifetime earning potential. And, to think it all began because my boss was willing to take a chance on me. I still remember leaving my interview feeling proud—not because I felt like I had knocked every question out of the park, but because I had remained true to myself. I was positive and energetic, and I asked questions when I needed clarification (rather than pretending I knew something I didn't). I left feeling satisfied knowing that, regardless of the outcome, I could hold my head high because I had showed up authentically and not as who I thought they wanted me to be.

When it comes to interviews, we know all too well that, oftentimes, it may be a candidate's only chance to stand out and make a lasting impression. From a candidate's perspective, this do-or-die moment can come with a lot of pressure and our nerves can get the best of us, sabotaging our ability to focus and think clearly. As part of my duties as Diversity Recruitment Specialist, I provide mock interviews to workforce programs throughout the community, such as at Operation Fresh Start, Centro Hispano, Latino Academy of Workforce Development, and to community members and prospective candidates. Mock interviews provide an excellent opportunity to get repetitions under similar conditions. They can help a candidate articulate their responses under pressure and get some of the nerves out. I have seen individuals go from being extremely nervous in their first mock interview, to calm and collected by their third one. The difference can be huge!

I've learned that much of the current interview process, not just at Dane County but everywhere, tends to focus on behavior, with verbal communication and unwritten social cues weighted heavily. Interviewers will put a premium on how well they can build rapport with the interviewee. While this is important, it is not the most important indicator for how well an individual will be able to perform their job.

Take, for example, how this can be problematic when interviewing neurodivergent individuals. First, according to Luc (2024), "Research has shown that up to 30% of the population is considered to be neurodivergent." Further, according to a Deloitte report, "research suggests that teams with neurodivergent professionals in some roles can be 30% more productive than those without them." But if we're simply relying on our "gut feelings" or what we interpret as good soft skills, feelings that may better reflect our own values or that of the dominant culture, then we can create an unlevelled playing field that allows excellent, highly capable candidates to slip through the cracks. While this may seem unique to our own situation, on a grander scale, "Studies estimate that the unemployment rate for neurodiverse adults runs as high as 30-40%, which is three times higher than the rate for disabled people, and eight times higher than the rate for people without disabilities (Luc, 2024)."

# PREPARATION, STABILITY & THE FUTURE

## (CONTINUED)

In order to provide a more accurate skills-based approach to the interview process, we should employ a scoring rubric to assess candidates. Scoring rubrics bring more objectivity to the interview process by helping remove bias and inconsistencies, and can be used as retrospective data to assess the accuracy and quality of a hire. In his article, *A Scorecard for Making Better Hiring Decisions*, Dattner (2016) notes:

It is rare for organizations to measure the success of hiring managers in their ability to select the right candidates. It is also rare for individuals to hold themselves accountable for becoming better interviewers over time. By using a quantitative interview scorecard to evaluate the qualifications and suitability of job candidates, and by comparing interview-based predictions with subsequent performance on the job, it's possible to boost your interview hit rate and your organization's return on human capital investment over time.

Dattner adds that without a scoring rubric, "Selective memory makes it hard for us to accurately recall our impressions of candidates at the time we interviewed them, which in turn makes it hard for us to learn about our biases and to have an accurate assessment of how skilled we are as interviewers."

One of my goals for 2024 was to improve my ability to deliver mock interviews. You can be certain that I will be incorporating scoring rubrics from now on. I encourage you to use them as well.

-Rodrigo Valdivia, Diversity Recruitment Specialist

Dattner, B. "A Scorecard for Making Better Hiring Decisions." Harvard Business Review, February 2016, [A Scorecard for Making Better Hiring Decisions](https://hbr.org/2016/02/a-scorecard-for-making-better-hiring-decisions) (hbr.org).

Luc, Kelly. "Neurodiversity in the Workplace: Why It Matters." Culture Amp, 1 February 2024, [www.cultureamp.com/blog/neurodiversity-in-the-workplace](https://www.cultureamp.com/blog/neurodiversity-in-the-workplace).





# SUMMER INTERNSHIP



My name is Sebastian Bahena, and I am the newest summer intern for the Dane County Office for Equity and Inclusion (OEI). I graduated from LaFollette High School in 2022, and I am currently attending Madison College working towards a Business Management degree.

This summer, Dane County and the Boys & Girls Club (BGC) have given me the opportunity to intern in the OEI for eight weeks. This position has not been filled since 2021, and I am honored to have been chosen for this role. The Boys & Girls Club has a school program known as AVID/TOPS, which I have been a part of since 2016. AVID/TOPS is a college and career readiness program for high school and college students that offers a multitude of benefits and support systems. Through TOPS, I had the chance to go through the application process for a summer internship with the Boys and Girls Club. The BGC has dozens of business partners in the area that offer internships, and each applicant must choose their top three choices.

Interestingly enough, the Dane County OEI was actually my third choice when applying. Looking back, I am extremely grateful I ended up being chosen for this internship because the work that is done here is so important and I am lucky to be a part of it. This internship has offered a wonderful experience, shown me what a healthy workplace environment looks and feels like, and has opened so many doors to other opportunities. I am currently undecided as to what career I want to pursue, and working in this office has allowed me to meet and make connections with people from all over the community, giving me an insight on possible career paths to explore. One thing I do know is that I aspire to make a difference, big or small, and being able to see firsthand how policies and practices are put in place to accommodate for everyone is very inspiring to me.

When I am not in the office, I love spending time with my friends and family. I also enjoy being active and spend my off days doing something physical, whether it's being in the gym or taking a walk through nature. At school, I am a member of a program called Men of Excellence, whose main goal is to offer support, advising, and networking opportunities to male students of color on campus. It is important to me that everyone is offered the services they need to succeed, no matter who they are or what they have been through. I look forward to the rest of my time here in this amazing office and I'm forever grateful for this experience!

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# IRENE KATANA

## ON FINDING THE PATH

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**BY SEBASTIAN BAHENA**

This summer, I had the pleasure of interviewing a former Boys and Girls Club intern for Dane County. Irene Katana is a very skilled woman who has faced many challenges to be as successful as she is today. She attended Memorial High School, UW-Milwaukee, and was in the AVID/TOPS program. AVID/TOPS is a college and career readiness program run by the Boys and Girls Club (BGC.) The BGC also offers internship opportunities with some of their business partners in the community. During a period in which she took a short break from university, Irene obtained an internship with Planning and Development for Dane County through the connections she created and maintained with the BGC. She chose this internship because she was interested in engineering and felt this would be the closest to it out of all her options. Irene and her employers enjoyed her time there so much, that they offered her a position as a Geographic Information Systems (GIS) Limited Time Employee, which resulted in her working there for a total of five years.



During her leave from university, she learned more about herself and who she wanted to be and picked up new hobbies such as gardening. This new hobby of hers led to her finding an interest in agriculture and the environment. After some consideration, she decided to go back to school and attended Madison Area Technical College where she worked towards an Associate's degree in science. While there, Irene noticed a separation between students and the job world which inspired her to create the Engineering Club for students on campus. This club helps students get a good look at what they are working towards, helps them pick the right classes, plan their future, and be able to connect with professionals already in the field. This new path was much more interesting to her, so she continued her education at UW-Madison. Here she earned her Bachelor's in biological systems engineering and went on to get her Master's. Additionally, her connections with other government entities during her time in Planning and Development led her to hear about new job opportunities in Texas. At first, Irene was hesitant because moving from Wisconsin to Texas was a big decision, but after much consideration, she decided to take the job. One of the most compelling factors for her was that she wanted to work and live somewhere that had more culture and diversity than the environment she was in.

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# IRENE KATANA

## ON FINDING THE PATH

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**BY SEBASTIAN BAHENA (CONTINUED)**

Irene secured her new position as an environmental engineer in Texas. Environmental engineers abide by laws and acts enforced by the government relating to the environment, natural resources, the ways in which structures are built, and much more. Irene's main role is overseeing the process of cleaning and improving the water quality in the area. This includes water from waste, industrial use, public drinking water supply, recreational bodies of water, etc. This is a very intricate process that has many factors, but luckily Irene has a lot of experience for a job like this. Since she worked on the Geographic Information Systems for Dane County, she had an excellent understanding of how to find and predict potential problems but also had the knowledge to track them back to where they stem from.

Irene's success story is unique and a lot can be learned from it. When asked for advice for the younger generation trying to find their path, she mentioned school, networking/communication, and experience. Irene regrets trying to rush through finishing her degree and wishes she took more time to figure out what she was passionate about and wanted to make a career out of. Irene is also a firm believer in networking and advocating for yourself through sophisticated communication. Networking is one of the most powerful ways to get exposure to opportunities, find mentors, and see what is possible through established professionals in the community. Through people she has met, she was able to see what the job application process looks like, what day-to-day's look like in the workplace, and get a proper view of the career path she was working so hard to get into. Without networking, Irene may have never heard about the job opening in Texas. Last but not least, Irene wants people to know that in many circumstances, experience can outweigh education when it comes to being chosen for a job position. Employers are looking for someone who can benefit and grow with the company. Someone who has experience and transferable skills may be more qualified for a job than someone fresh out of college with little to no experience.

Irene's journey from an intern at Planning and Development to becoming an environmental engineer truly reflects her hard work and dedication. Her story is incredibly inspiring and I hope you all can benefit from it as much as I have!



## National Disability Employment Awareness Month



October is National Disability Employment Awareness Month (NDEAM), and the U.S. Department of Labor’s Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP) encourages businesses and organizations across the country to participate.

Held annually, NDEAM educates about disability employment topics and celebrates the many and varied contributions of America's workers with disabilities. Although national in scope, NDEAM’s true spirit lies in the many observances held at the grassroots level. Employers of all sizes and in all industries can take part.

The theme for National Disability Employment Awareness Month (#NDEAM) 2024 is “Access to Good Jobs for All.” Learn more in this announcement from Assistant Secretary of Labor for Disability Employment Policy Taryn M. Williams. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g1uTmUw-EYE>

For specific ideas about how you can support National Disability Employment Awareness Month, visit [dol.gov/NDEAM](https://dol.gov/NDEAM). Suggestions range from simple, such as putting up a poster ([English](#) | [Spanish](#)), to comprehensive, such as implementing a disability education program. Regardless, all play an important part in fostering a more accessible and equitable workforce, one where all people are recognized for their abilities—every day of every month. <sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> U.S.Department of Labor (n.d.). *NDEAM Key Messages*. Dol.gov. Retrieved August 5, 2024, from <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/odep/initiatives/ndeam/key-messages#:~:text=your%20own%20projects!-,NDEAM%20Resources,-Expand%20All>

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# TODAY'S STUDENTS

## TOMORROW'S LEADERS

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**BY THEOLA CARTER**

– La Follette Institute of Public Affairs Black Student and Alum Networking Event –

In February, La Follette graduate students were invited to a networking event with Black alumni and other public policy leaders. The event was orchestrated by La Follette School alum and Board of Visitors member Theola Carter (MA '91), who serves as Manager of Policy and Program Improvement in Dane County's Tamara D. Grigsby Office for Equity and Inclusion. At the memorable event, Carter and others shared wisdom and insights from their careers. "The students are the next generation. It is important to always give back by providing them with insight on our experience and thereby investing in our future policy makers and understand that policies directly impact the lives of people and that rules, policies, procedures and laws are not simply just words on paper." – Theola Carter.

Policy leaders and UW Alum invited to attend in person or virtually included Wesley Sparkman (MPA '00), director of the Office for Equity and Inclusion and 2023 La Follette School Alum of Distinction; Frances Huntley-Cooper (MPA '94), former Mayor of Fitchburg; Donna Brown-Martin (MPA '94), Milwaukee County Director of Transportation; Steven Little (MPA '91), Deputy Secretary of the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources; Signé Mbainai, UW Madison Law School graduate Dane County Circuit Court Commissioner; and Nia Trammell, UW Madison Law School graduate and Dane County Circuit Court Judge. Additionally, Carrie Braxton Manager of Equal Opportunity in the Office for Equity and Inclusion was in attendance.



The inspiring group included many firsts. Huntley-Cooper was the first African American mayor in Wisconsin's history, Mbainai is the first Black woman to be named Commissioner in Dane County, and Judge Trammell is the first Black woman to be appointed and elected judge in Dane County.

"I am profoundly grateful for the chance to learn and grow alongside such inspiring La Follette alumni," said MIPA student Awa Maïga about the event. "I also wanted to share how much I enjoyed experiencing this event with the other students. Sharing the insights and connections made with my peers added another layer of richness to the experience."

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# TODAY'S STUDENTS TOMORROW'S LEADERS

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**BY THEOLA CARTER (CONTINUED)**

– La Follette Institute of Public Affairs Black Student and Alum Networking Event –

“It was one of the most inspiring meetings and I am honored and proud to learn from such amazing alumni,” said MIPA student Gatiozzo Traore.

In addition to the networking event, several students attended The Meeting, a play that imagines a fictional meeting between Martin Luther King, Jr. and Malcom X, at Madison College. Students were also invited by Carter to a screening of the film Leaders of Madison’s Black Renaissance.

A couple of students attended the performance Delfeayo Marsalis Uptown Jazz Orchestra at the Overture Center where they had the opportunity to meet and network with other influential community leaders.

*“The students are the next generation. It is important to always give back by providing them with insight on our experience and thereby investing in our future policy makers and understand that policies directly impact the lives of people and that rules, policies, procedures and laws are not simply just words on paper.” – Theola Carter.*





# Waste & Renewables Internship



Hello! My name is Mikayla and I interned at the Dane County Department of Waste and Renewables (W&R) through the Boys and Girls Club for the last six weeks. My experience in this internship was beyond what I had expected. I learned a lot about landfills and how they operate by assisting with site tours, creating materials for their social media, and attending staff meetings. During my internship, I gained a lot of insight into what County work life looks like at W&R's, and how they pursue their mission to provide sustainable waste management and renewable energy solutions. My main role was to help with tours around the landfill and at events in the trash lab, I also created outreach materials for their upcoming open house.

## About the **Landfill**:

The landfill was built in 1985 at 7102 Maachic Way, Madison WI 53718 across from the Yahara Hills Golf Course. Though the landfill is a last resort for our trash, there are many County facilities that can reuse and recycle items instead: [Renewable Natural Gas \(RNG\) facility](#), [Clean Sweep](#), [Construction and Demolition \(C&D\)](#), and [more](#).

In 2020:

- 39 tons of chemicals were exchanged and used again through the Clean Sweep Product Exchange room
- 2,383 tons of shingles were recycled into asphalt
- 657 tons of tires were recycled into playground tile or incinerated for energy
- 870 tons of brush and logs were ground into wood chips to be used as mulch and animal bedding

In 2022:

- 71,500 tons of materials brought to the C&D facility were processed for recycling
- 2.6 million gallons of gasoline were processed in the RNG facility

All the facilities have significantly expanded the landfill life by using materials to their fullest potential. Right now, W&R's is working on creating a **Sustainability Campus** to educate the community, and is planning a new compost program to prevent organic waste from reaching the landfill. By 2029, the Rodefeld landfill will reach its maximum capacity and the County will have to start another landfill alongside . The Sustainability Campus will educate the community on the importance of reducing, reusing, recycling, redesigning, and using as many of our materials as possible before they reach the landfill. The Campus will also create new local jobs.

### **Trash Lab:**

The Madison Children's Museum built the Trash Lab in 2021. The Trash Lab has welcomed over 6,000 visits in less than two years and was recognized by the Associated Recyclers of Wisconsin and the American Alliance of Museums. The Trash Lab offers games for everyone to learn what can be made from recycled materials, design your own up-cycled invention, a brief overview of the RNG facility, and a close view of the landfill liner and the layers. It also offers a way for people to recognize that many of our things that may make their way into the landfill are reusable for another purpose. The Trash Lab weighs about 2 tons of materials diverted from the landfill, and about 90% of the Trash Lab has been up-cycled for a new purpose.





## MANAGER OF EQUAL EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITY

### CARRIE BRAXTON

Salutations! I am the Manager of Equal Employment Opportunity in the Office for Equity and Inclusion (OEI); I have been in this role for six years, I have been in the aforementioned department for eight years, and lastly and proudly, I have been with Dane County for 27 years. I am very fond of my job, because of the professional and personal growth that I have experienced while being in my role. Additionally, I am very fond of my public sector experience overall because of the splendid opportunities that I have had – this includes the various positions, the different work locations, the multitude of staff that I have been fortunate to work with, and the exemplary leadership that I have been fortunate to work for. Now on to my topics that I would like to share – Managerial Training, Language Access and Reporting Specialist Position, OEI Departmental Meetings, and Dane County Hiring Currently.

#### **Managerial Training**

The County is back to hosting Managerial Trainings for its leadership – directors, managers, and supervisors. Presently, the meetings are usually scheduled bi-monthly; held in person (usually at the Alliant Energy Center (AEC)), virtual, or hybrid. There are different topics covered such as Manager Comp Time, Performance Evaluations, and Discipline etc. These trainings are important and beneficial to County leadership in my opinion, because the variety in training topics may serve as refreshers or needed information for senior or newer leadership. During the training, Leadership has the opportunity to ask questions and engage in discussions. Moreover, these trainings may serve as mini-reunions, as one may be able to socialize with a previous colleague that they may not have seen for a while, and/or may have an opportunity to connect with a new colleague. Change is inevitable, and leadership needs to be abreast of such important information so that they may lead in the most effective manner. I am looking forward to other upcoming Managerial Trainings, as I think they will be a continued bonus in my leadership responsibilities.

#### **Language Access and Reporting Specialist Position**

Our department has recently hired a new Language Access and Reporting Specialist – Rhiannon Buehler, whose first day of employment began on June 17, 2024. This is an inaugural position in our office that will serve as a resource to other departments and agencies, while ensuring best practices overall. As the direct supervisor, I am excited about all of the progress that this position can bring with serving language access. The Language Access and Reporting Specialist role, adds to the other specialized positions in our department, which serve the County in various areas and capacities.



## MANAGER OF EQUAL EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITY

### CARRIE BRAXTON (CONTINUED)

#### OEI Departmental Meetings

We have very informative monthly departmental meetings. We follow an agenda that our Director, Wes Sparkman creates, which includes updates and acknowledgement of work anniversaries and other milestones and achievements of staff. Each staff must present a synergy report at least annually; here they provide an overview of their job duties, current activities, and other items they wish to share. At the end of the meeting, there is an opportunity to discuss current movies and/or books recommendations etc. The discussions are respectful and provide opportunities for light and fun-filled conversations. Staff may bring treats or even have “themed” potlucks at these meetings. This is a superb way to show camaraderie in one’s department while still handling the professional side in the work place.

#### Dane County Hiring Currently

This is an overview of the most current Dane County hiring. There has been an increase of staff hired over the most recent years.

#### Employees Total

2023 - Employees 2644, increase of 163 from 2022

2022 - Employees 2481, increase of 41 from 2021

#### Minority Staff Total for 2023

Male - 258

Female - 337

Other - 2

Not specified - 11

**Total - 609**

#### Minority Managers Total

2023 - Minority managers 46, increase of 7 from 2022

2022 - Minority managers 39, increase of 0 from 2021

#### Departments with the highest numbers of minority staff currently

Office for Equity and Inclusion - 75.0% minority staff

Juvenile Court Program - 52.7% minority staff

Badger Prairie (Human Services dept.) - 50.0% minority staf



## **CARRIE BRAXTON, MANAGER OF EQUAL EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITY**

Salutations! I am back to share more information with you. In my role as Manager of Equal Employment Opportunity, in the Office for Equity and Inclusion (OEI), my work duties and opportunities seem endless. I have been participating in so many events, such as outreach and trainings that I have had a hard time deciding what to share. That said I have decided to cover the following – Partnering with Dane Arts, Neurodiversity, Read Your Heart Out and Final Comment. These are different yet important topics that I want to share.

### **Partnering with Dane Arts**

Earlier this year, our department OEI collaborated with the Department of Cultural Affairs, also called Dane Arts, on a project that included supplying artwork to our department. The initial part of the project was as informative as it was interesting. My colleague, Reyna Vasquez and I, worked diligently with Dane Arts and Facilities staff to complete this project. During the latter part of the project, we chose a variety of art with the input of our Director - Wes Sparkman, to reflect diversity, and this worked out well. Additionally, we will be rotating artwork several times a year to display the work of various artists and to give OEI a bit of variety. Thus far, this has been a win-win experience.

### **Neurodiversity**

I participate in many trainings and workshops, as that is essential to the type of work that I do. One area in employment that is extremely important is disability. One particular topic in this area is Neurodiversity, which is according to Harvard Health Publishing, “the concept that there are a variety of ways that people's brains process information, function, and present behaviorally”. It has been helpful to review and discuss the barriers pertaining to Neurodiversity, not only in the work place, but also in education, and in one’s overall life. That said in pertaining to employment, a disability in the workforce should be met with a sincere effort to allow individuals to do the best they can while fulfilling their employment obligations. Although helpful, compliance with governmental regulations should not only be the incentive for employment but the employer should exercise fairness in the workplace. We must not forget that in being inclusive, we need to include those that have disabilities and be nonjudgmental in our actions and language. Whether we are choosing the staff, the setup of the workspace, and/or the training techniques, let us embrace and support all differences. This will create success in many areas of employment.

### **Read Your Heart Out**

I participated in the Read Your Heart Out event held at Lake View Elementary School earlier this year. Community members are invited to this annual event, held at participating elementary schools in the month of February, where they read to youth. This year I read to a Third grade, Bilingual Hmong class, who seemed very eager as I read to them. They had great questions and comments after my reading. Happily, I was able to share my reading journey with them and encourage them in their future reading endeavors. This experience was extra special for me because I honed many of my reading skills in the third grade, thanks to a dedicated teacher who was relentless in his efforts for educating his students. By learning to read well, it helped put me on the trajectory for my future. Reading is so important, and can open many doors for one’s life. Read Your Heart Out is a great way to instill this message in our youth. I cannot wait to participate again!

### **Final comment**

The world can have a lot going on; do not let negativity get you down. Do something for yourself, think positive, and try to be happy!

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# THE WHITNEY PLANTATION

## GENOCIDE IN THE UNITED STATES

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BY THEOLA CARTER



In October 2023, OEI staff had the unique opportunity to participate in the inaugural seminar hosted by the U.S. Raphael Lemkin Auschwitz Institute for the Prevention of Genocide and Mass Atrocities (AIPG) held in New Orleans, LA. AIPG is a global organization with a mission to build a world that prevents genocide and other mass atrocities.

The curriculum was sent prior to the meeting; so as participants we were keenly aware that discussions would center on hurtful events and topics of America's past and present. However, we did not really anticipated the emotional toll and unresolved open wounds that would confront us that we would have to truly analyze

through the lens of mass atrocities around the world. The first day of the program we visited the Whitney Plantation and so I will focus on the events of this day and describe what we experienced and learned. Being in this setting, transported and set the stage for the rest of the seminar. It was intense and a heavy lift.

When you think of the founding of the United States, you cannot deny that this country was built on mass murder, thievery, kidnappings, child labor, mass rapes, other heinous acts and blatantly discriminatory laws, policies and procedures sanctioned by the federal government or that the federal government stood idly by and did nothing when these crimes against humanity transpired.

The Whitney Plantation: In 1752, Ambroise Heidel (a German immigrant) purchased the land and then bought 20 enslaved Africans to hot, humid and unfamiliar Louisiana. These individuals are forced to work to grow and harvest indigo, a tropical plant of the pea family from sun up to sun down. In 1800s the plantation was inherited by Ambroise's son, Jean Haydel (the name was changed from the German spelling and pronunciation). The plantation converted from producing indigo to growing and manufacturing sugar cane and sugar. If one during that time would step into the sugar mill, the heat greeted one at the door. You would have seen boiling hot kettles, grinding rollers and open hot furnaces knowing that the slightest mistake could mean life or limb for persons working there. Children as young as 9 years of age were forced to work in this environment.



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# THE WHITNEY PLANTATION

## GENOCIDE IN THE UNITED STATES

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BY THEOLA CARTER (CONTINUED)



We could only imagine how the mothers felt potentially sending her children to their death on a daily basis. And how thankful she must have been at the end of the day, when she sees them return home. Over 2000 children lost their lives working in sugar mills of Louisiana. The harvesting of cane and the production of sugar was hard and intensive work. Working on a sugar plantation meant almost certain death for the enslaved. With the production of sugar, came an increase in wealth for the white plantation owners and an increase in the number of enslaved Africans.

Louisiana manufactured a quarter of the world's sugar supply. The Whitney Plantation operated for 250 years from 1752-1975. Today, the Whitney Plantation is a non-profit museum dedicated to educating the public about the lives of enslaved people.

The Memorial Walls have the names of all the enslaved that lived on the Whitney Plantation. Additionally, there is a wall dedicated to the children with their names noted, and a wall with the enslaved in Louisiana noting the places that the people were taken from. Inscribed throughout the walls were vivid quotes from many who were once enslaved but now were freed:

“My ma and her older child was bought from Virginia and sold at the French Market and taken to Lafourche Parish. Dat’s where I come into de world...I do know when I was small, my ma had a hard time working. Ed old missis was mean; would tie her and beat her ‘most to death. After us was set free, we ‘most starved to death. I would slip around and eat out of people’s slop cans, I would be so hungry” – Odel Jackson

“I got a scar big as he place my old mis’ hit me. She took a bull whip once the bull whip had a piece of iron in the handle of it and she got mad. She was so mad she took the whip and hit me over the head with the butt end of it, and the blood flew. It run all down my back and dripped off my heels.” Ella Wilson.

Their quotes, so poignantly stated, gives one a glimpse into how evil the institution of slavery was in the U.S. and the lack of humanity of white slave owners. All too often, the confederate south is romanticized in films such as “The Little Colonel” or “The Littlest Rebel”. Accounts of the torture and brutality are not told as a part of history or civics classes. Instead, students are told a sanitized or inaccurate descriptions of life in the antebellum south.



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# THE WHITNEY PLANTATION

## GENOCIDE IN THE UNITED STATES

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BY THEOLA CARTER (CONTINUED)

A memorial was also erected dedicated in memory of the Africans slaughtered in the 1811 Slave Revolt that took place along the east bank of the Mississippi River. Approximately 500 enslaved persons fought from St. Charles and St. John's Parish (also known as the German Coast) as they made their way towards New Orleans. In the process, several plantations were burned down, sugar houses and crops were destroyed, 2 white men were killed but in excess of 80 Black Freedom Fighters were killed and condemned to death. Without a trial, local white militia and federal troops hunted, interrogated, executed and decapitated them. Their heads were perched and displayed on spikes as an act to terrorize and warn.

As we walked and looked at the names, I could not help but think these figures represented living people. I began to think and wondered how my direct ancestors fared during the period. I don't know if any were beaten, raped, or murdered. I do not know my native tongue(s). I do not know where my family was stolen from. It sadden me when that the realization of what this memorial represented .... Individuals murdered because they had the courage to want their freedom. The museum preserves over a dozen historical structures including but not limited to a church, the big house, the overseers living quarters, and two slave cabins.

It is good to have such places as the Whitney Plantation around to remind us of the county's origins and we remember the lives of those who came before us. We as county should not run from our past but embrace and learn. The past cannot be nor is the past a Norman Rockwell painting. The past is harsh and ugly, but it is still U.S. history meaning that it includes everyone irrespective of your race, creed, color or culture. We are better than our past aggressions and pains and are moving towards a better tomorrow through diversity, equity and inclusion efforts. So, there is hope for a better day for future generations.





# HELLO THERE!

Greetings! I am the inaugural Language Access and Reporting Specialist in the Tamara D. Grigsby Office for Equity and Inclusion (OEI). I began midway through June this year and feel very blessed to be on this small, mighty, and tightknit team! I am hoping that everyone encounters parts of the day in which to give thanks and to be joyful! Gratitude is a key component for all areas of my life, including my professional life.

- **A Little Bit About Me** – I have a diverse professional background as an educator in public and private schools, working as a discipleship formation coordinator, and as the former LEP/ADA coordinator for the Wisconsin Department of Health Services in addition to being in many other roles. I am an experienced social justice, human rights, and civil rights professional; my favorite jobs have been in multilingual environments, which involve teaching and liaison responsibilities.
- **Meeting and Greeting** – As this is a new role, a focus for my supervisor, Carrie Braxton and I, is to get me out meeting different departments and work areas to learn about what they are currently doing and what language access needs are. We have currently met with and/or visited the Sheriff's Office, Human Services, Job Center, Corporation Counsel, Administration, Information Management, Board of Supervisors, Waste & Renewables, and Planning & Development, in addition to the City of Madison and the Wisconsin Department of Administration.
- **Language Access Points of Contact** – As a part of my work for Dane County, I will be seeking language access points of contact for each department and major functional work area. If you are interested in being a part of the internal Dane County Language Access Work Group, please contact me at [Buehler.Rhiannon@danecounty.gov](mailto:Buehler.Rhiannon@danecounty.gov) and/or (608) 283-1656 or stop by the third floor of the City-County building.
- **Collaborating Across the County** – I will be collaborating across Dane County and for the first year or so, I will be prioritizing my time and efforts working with the Sheriff's Office.
- **Out in the Community** – In my personal life, you may see me participating in faith-based ministry work and dancing! I recently participated in UNIDOS' event Bailando el Corazón: Clase de Bomba, a black Puerto Rican dance form. The class was amazing!

Looking forward to meeting you soon.

With sweet and summery July blessings,  
Rhiannon Buehler



## Q & A

# Tracking of Interactions with Individuals Who Are Limited in Their English Proficiency (LEP), A Brief Explanation of the Protected Group National Origin, and Providing Meaningful Language Access

Did you know that we are supposed to track every interaction we have with individuals who are limited in their English proficiency?

- Now you do! Yes, it is civil rights' compliance requirement and very useful for planning and budgeting for language assistance services.

Why do we need to do this?

- Federal laws prohibit discrimination based on national origin. The U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission explains:

National origin discrimination involves treating people (applicants or employees) unfavorably because they are from a particular country or part of the world, because of ethnicity or accent, or because they appear to be of a certain ethnic background (even if they are not). National origin discrimination also can involve treating people unfavorably because they are married to (or associated with) a person of a certain national origin. Discrimination can occur when the victim and the person who inflicted the discrimination are the same national origin.<sup>1</sup>

National origin includes not only an individual's place of origin, but also his or her ancestor's place of origin and includes physical, cultural, or linguistic characteristics; and being limited in English proficiency (LEP).<sup>2</sup>

What does being LEP mean?

- People with limited English proficiency are individuals who do not speak English as their primary language and who have a limited ability to read, speak, write, or understand English at a level that permits them to access programs, services, and activities in a meaningful way.<sup>3</sup>

Again, the characteristic of being of limited English proficiency falls under the protected group national origin. Someone who has LEP may be referred to as an individual who has LEP, a person who has LEP, an applicant who has LEP, and in other ways. You may also hear someone whose primary language is not English or whose preferred language is not English.

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<sup>1</sup> See U.S. EEOC, *Nat'l Origin Discrimination*, <https://www.eeoc.gov/laws/types/nationalorigin.cfm> and 29 C.F.R. § 1606.1 (2012), <https://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/CFR-2012-title29-vol4/pdf/CFR-2012-title29-vol4-sec1606-1.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> See Dep't of Health and Hum. Servs. Off. of the Sec'y, *Nondiscrimination in Health Programs and Activities*, 81 Fed. Reg. 31387 (May 18, 2016), <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2016/05/18/2016-11458/nondiscrimination-in-health-programs-and-activities>.

<sup>3</sup> U.S. Dep't of Just., *Dep't of Just. Language Access Plan 19* (Aug. 2023), <https://www.justice.gov/d9/2023-08/DOJ-Language-Access-Plan-August-2023.pdf>.

Nondiscrimination on the basis of national origin includes ensuring meaningful access to persons with limited English proficiency (LEP). There is no one answer to what meaningful language access will entail. It depends on the interaction, content, and importance of the contact with the individual who is LEP and other circumstances. The U.S. Department of Justice Language Access Plan, published August 15, 2023 states, “LEP designations are also context-specific; an individual may possess sufficient English language skills to function in one setting (e.g. conversing in English with coworkers), but these skills may be insufficient in other settings (e.g., addressing court proceedings).”

What is meaningful language access?

- The aforementioned plan defines meaningful access as, “Language assistance that results in accurate, timely, and effective communication at no cost to the individual with LEP needing assistance. Meaningful access denotes access that is not significantly restricted, delayed, or inferior as compared to programs or activities provided to English-proficient individuals.”

How do you provide meaningful language access?

- Meaningful language access can be provided in three main ways: 1. direct in-language communication, 2. interpretation, and 3. translation language assistance services.

More to come on providing meaningful language access in a future newsletter article. In the meantime, if you'd like to learn more, check-out this [webpage for Title VI LEP Guidance \(https://www.lep.gov/title-vi-guidance-for-recipients\)](https://www.lep.gov/title-vi-guidance-for-recipients). I recommend reading the guidance of the Department(s) from where your work area primarily receives federal financial assistance.

Also, look out soon for a template Record of Interaction with Individuals Who Are LEP to begin tracking, planning, and budgeting on how best to provide meaningful language access.

# CULTURAL EVENTS

Did you know that OEI has an online cultural events page? According to the National Center for Cultural Competence, they define cultural awareness as “being cognizant, observant, and conscious of similarities and differences among and between cultural groups.” The Cultural Events page is designated to celebrate different cultures, holidays, heritage months, and acknowledge various marginalized groups. Recognizing diverse cultures increases communication and interaction with many communities. It allows us to learn about the history and current experiences of those who fought/fight against oppression. Each month, we commemorate and list different events taking place virtually and/or around Dane County. We encourage the public to attend events to get a better understanding of other cultures and identities as well as one’s own. Connect with others by celebrating and embracing their differences.

Feel free to check out <https://equity.danecounty.gov/Cultural-Events> monthly and if you know of events please submit to [OEI@danecounty.gov](mailto:OEI@danecounty.gov).

## Dane County Cultural Updates and Events

OEI observes [Disability Pride Month](#) and [BIPOC Mental Health Awareness Month](#)



Ann Magill

- [Americans with Disabilities Act 34th Anniversary](#)
- [July 18 - Crip Camp](#)
- [July 18 - The Caravan for Disability Freedom and Justice](#)
- [July 21 - Cottage Grove's Disability Pride Month](#)
- [July 26 - Virtual Disability Pride Parade](#)
- [July 27 - Disability Pride Festival 2024](#)
- [BIPOC Mental Health Coalition](#)





# DANE COUNTY

## EMERGENCY TELEPHONE NOTIFICATION SIGN-UP

Dane County Emergency Management provides several services to citizens, businesses, and local governments. These services include coordinating emergency responses; assisting citizens, cities, towns, schools, and businesses to create emergency plans; developing community hazard mitigation plans; operating the countywide tornado siren and other emergency alerts, and organizing Emergency Medical Services. It is important that you are prepared as much as possible and know what to do in the event of an emergency. A key factor in knowing what, where and when is Dane County Emergency Notification.

The Dane County Emergency Telephone Notification is the official emergency notification system used by Dane County first response agencies to communicate with community members during emergencies. Sign up now to receive free alerts via text message, email, and/or voice message.

Add your addresses (home, work, school) to receive geo-targeted alerts  
Indicate what types of alerts you want to receive, including weather, evacuation orders, armed person/active shooter, hazardous materials incidents, gas leaks, missing persons, and more.

Indicate how you want to be notified: text, email, and/or voice message.

To sign up and receive emergency notifications go to

[https://www.smart911.com/smart911/registration/registrationLanding.action?cdnExternalPath=.](https://www.smart911.com/smart911/registration/registrationLanding.action?cdnExternalPath=)



**Sign up to  
receive alerts**

**Emergency alerts and notifications via**

Phone call, text message, email and social media



