

## **CCCSJ History**

The Community Coalition for Social Justice, CCSJ, was organized in December 1999 after a call from Emily Spieler, a former law professor at WVU, to respond proactively to threats to our community, specifically in reaction to Ku Klux Klan activity in nearby cities.

## ***Mission***

CCSJ's mission is to bring together people from throughout the Morgantown and nearby areas, religious organizations, faculty and staff of area schools and the University, labor unions, community advocacy organizations and individuals dedicated to promoting the principles of social, environmental, and economic justice and respect for all persons. We oppose discrimination and hate-motivated violence in Morgantown and surrounding communities.

## ***Human Rights and Civil Rights***

When CCSJ first started, we lobbied on behalf of the Civil Rights Team Project, a program of the Civil Rights Division of the West Virginia Attorney General's office to address bullying and discrimination in schools. The program was active in Morgantown High, South Junior High, and St. Francis schools. We have long lobbied the state legislature to expand the state's human rights legislation to provide protection against discrimination in housing and employment based on sexual orientation or gender identity.

CCSJ members wrote the City of Morgantown's first ordinance to establish a Human Rights Commission in 2001 and, in 2012, we worked to revitalize that commission by soliciting support from many neighborhood associations. Since then, we have supported the commission's work to make Morgantown a more inclusive city by endorsing their resolutions on marriage equality, the Rights of Immigrants, Refugees and Asylees, LGBTQ, and the importance of welcoming everyone to the Morgantown area.

In 2003, Tim Hairston, interim president of CCSJ, represented us at the public hearing that the West Virginia Advisory Committee to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights held at the WVU College of Law. The committee's report, entitled "Civil Rights Issues in West Virginia," discussed police-community relations, treatment of racial minorities and people with disabilities in the public schools, civil rights issues related to employment, hate crimes, and a community climate of intolerance.

Our 9th MLK Day event's theme in 2015 was "The Road to the Vote" to honor the fiftieth anniversary of the Voting Rights Act of 1965 and led to good contacts with the League of Women Voters, who became an organizational member.

At our annual meeting in September 2017 we were pleased to welcome members of city council to share their ideas and help us strategize on how to make Morgantown a better community. We also sponsored a showing of "Not in Our Town," part of a movement to address bullying and hate in communities.

More recently we have publicly supported the Morgantown City Council's proposed resolutions on land acknowledgement, Indigenous People's Day, and CROWN non-discrimination efforts, as well as their proposed Civilian Police and Advisory Board. We have also spoken to the Morgantown City

Council to endorse efforts such as the Morgantown Green Team's request that the city council support the goals of the Paris Climate Change Agreement.

### ***Martin Luther King Jr. Celebration events***

We have conducted family-friendly annual Martin Luther King, Jr. Day events since 2007, mostly at the Metropolitan Theatre, Morgantown. Each year we have theme for the event; for example, in 2018 the theme was "Growing Up Martin," focusing on Dr. King as a boy and his experiences that made him the man he became. We also try to involve the community in the event, with contributions from choirs and other groups at local schools. Often, we have invited an actor to come and portray an important historical figure in human rights, e.g., Ilene Evans portraying Harriet Tubman in 2020. We started co-sponsoring this event with Main Street Morgantown in 2011, including a banner on High Street and posters in businesses downtown. We also very much appreciate the continued financial support of the City of Morgantown, which allows us to make this a free event.

### ***Books***

We have organized the acquisition of collections of books with funds from the Morgantown city council for the public library, focusing on disabilities, economic justice, the environment, women's studies, African American studies, diversity, tolerance, and justice. We procured a grant from the Appalachian Community Fund to purchase some of these books for the Clay-Battelle and Clinton District Libraries.

### ***Events***

In 2004, as part of our annual meeting, the Community Coalition for Social Justice sponsored an economic and social justice organizations' fair at First Presbyterian Church, Morgantown. The aim was to to gather organizations working to promote social and economic justice in the areas in and around Morgantown so that they could meet, network, and gain publicity. In 2009 we organized a forum on the Regional Jail which was well attended. CCSJ has sponsored social justice fairs, discussion sessions, and diversity picnics to get groups together to talk about their concerns and priorities. As a result of these discussions, in 2010, we helped sponsor a fair housing program specifically related to the lack of accessible housing in this area for people with disabilities. We held a program in 2011 at Greater St. Paul African Methodist Episcopal church featuring two outstanding women who relayed their experiences during the Civil Rights Movement: Charlene Marshall, the first African American woman mayor in West Virginia, and Faith Holsaert, an activist in Albany, Georgia. We conducted a Religious Diversity Forum at St. Paul's in 2014 with speakers from the African Methodist Episcopal, Hindu, Buddhist, Baha'i, Jewish, and Muslim communities.

### ***Arts***

In February, 2002 we held a program by Al Anderson— "Sunday Afternoon with Al: A Program in Song and Story about Growing up on Scotts Run". In 2013 and 2014, we had art exhibits at Arts Mon in conjunction with our Martin Luther King, Jr. Day events with art by local students. Our 2014 theme was "Every Good Thing Begins with a Dream." We also put a Lady Justice scarecrow at the WV Botanic Garden as part of their fundraiser and encouragement for visitors to become members of the Garden.

### ***Working with other groups***

At our 2015 picnic we got updates on various groups working on social justice and made a good new contact with the Morgantown Police Department as it works to do more outreach in the community,

and the Morgantown Police Department became an organizational member. We have participated in events connected to WVU's Diversity Week, including a newspaper series on "There's A Place for You in Our Community" in 2016 in cooperation with the *Dominion Post*. We have written letters of support and published a series of articles in the *Dominion Post* relating to social justice issues.

Some of our endeavors in recent years include: support for the Designing Across Divides conference, participation in the first Morgantown Pride Block Party in Greenmont, participation in the "Still, They Resisted" program that focused on "Exploring the lesser known heroes of the LGBTQ rights movement of the last 50 years", and participating in the WVU "I Belong" event.

We continue to work with the League of Women Voters, Greater Morgantown Interfaith Association, NAACP, WVU Native American Studies Program, WVU LGBTQ Center, Dismantling Racism, PFLAG, and other groups to publicize social justice issues. In fulfillment of our Mission we have continually worked to bring together the various local groups to talk about how best we can work together.

### **Publicity**

We distribute a monthly e-newsletter, have a website at [ccsjwv.org](http://ccsjwv.org), and a Facebook page.

### **Honors**

We were honored to receive one of the Morgantown/Monongalia County League of Women Voters' first social justice awards in 2015 and recognition from the Human Rights Commission in 2017.

We hope through our actions and the support of so many people in the community, we will continue to address issues of social justice to keep Morgantown a welcoming, open, inclusive community dedicated to treating one another with civility and respect.