

ACT Rochester “Hard Facts” Report – August 2020 Update

At our meeting on November 19, we reviewed the findings of “Hard Facts” and spent most of our time in breakout groups looking at causes and solutions:

- What are some immediate and longer-term actions that can be taken to address the report’s findings?
- How can individuals become personally involved?
- How are our organizations using the report to inform our DEI training or strategic planning processes?
- How do we communicate the report content to the widest possible audience?

While discrimination and racism have played and are continuing to play significant roles in American history and culture, “Hard Facts” documents that for almost every indicator, our Rochester region is performing even more poorly than New York State and the country.

The racial disparities are wide and impact individuals and families throughout their lives and even into future generations.

These “Hard Facts” should make it impossible for anyone to ignore the profound entrenchment of structural racism throughout our region.

We are an exceptional community, and not in a good way.

Following are the notes from our November 19, meeting. The PowerPoint presentation is attached.

ACT Rochester Hard Facts Study Findings and WDN Breakout Group Discussion Questions:

About the Findings:

- It is a matter of national concern that the child poverty rate for the entire nation is 20%, but for African Americans it is 35%. The rate is much higher at 49% in the nine-County Rochester region and 40% for Latinos.
- The region’s African American children test at 20 percentage points lower than their statewide counterparts on the all-important grade 3 reading assessment. For Latino children, it is 16 percentage points lower.
- At the national level, African American incomes are at only 63% of White residents. In the nine-County Rochester region, the corresponding number is dramatically lower at 49%.
- Despite our region’s relatively affordable housing, the homeownership rate here is lower for People of Color compared to the nation as a whole.

- Compared to Whites, the value of homes owned by People of Color in our region is only about half (59% for African Americans, 44% for Latinos).

Questions About the Findings:

- What are some factors that might contribute to much poorer outcomes for People of Color in the Rochester region when compared with their counterparts nationwide?
 - Lack of educational resources for children
 - Low graduation rates
 - High unemployment rates
 - Low incomes
 - Gentrification – you can observe this in Rochester. On Union Street, as soon as you cross East Main, it is a totally different environment and there are many neighborhoods like that. Buildings are way out of range for people of color to afford. COVID impact of not being able to physically distance pushes neighborhoods out, pack people and congregate. Everything is connected, causes further discrimination and inequality.
- What role has racism played in creating our current outcomes? What role does it continue to play?
 - Racism has always been here – continues to promote hate
 - Has become more prevalent in the past ten years, especially the last four years
 - Real estate – red lining
 - Housing – slum landlords
 - Double standards in arrests and sentencing. As a result, unfavorable background checks make it difficult to find employment.
 - Systemic Racism – living in bubble – opened eyes – report hit close to home – needs to be equity and fairness – what can I do to use my voice – moving forward – advocate.
 - Inequity in healthcare contributes to systemic racism. We don't look at health care as a basic human right. If we did we would not have inequities. Today people have to pay for it and many can't afford it.
 - This pandemic has exposed a lot – pushed a lot to the forefront – the community has to be accountable
- When considering solutions:
 - What are some immediate actions that should be taken?
 - How do we communicate this information to others?
 - Have an open forum to discuss this sponsored by WDN
 - Become familiar with the data
 - Convene stakeholders
 - Invite ACT to present at our organizations/leadership teams

- What are some longer-term actions?
 - Build relationships needed to move forward
 - Build Knowledge
 - Collaborate – ROC2025, RMAPI
- What is the role of individuals in promoting solutions?

One of the breakout groups took a different approach to responding to the questions:

Rather than look at solutions to the issues addressed in the “Hard Facts” report, we concentrated on:

- Taking in the enormity of the findings (devastating)
- Taking in the emotional impact rather than staying cerebral

We wondered how to get the word out to more groups. We decided to choose between one and three people to ask if they were aware of the report. Offer to send it to them and then have a conversation about it. We think it is important to ask people why they are not aware of these findings. It is probably due to living segregated lives and rarely interacting with people whose life experiences are so different from ours.

Informed by the work of Tema Okun, we spoke about how White Supremacy Culture makes us rush to solutions rather than taking time to struggle with the underlying causes.

Tema Okun is a Racial Justice Educator, Facilitator, and Author. Tema has spent over 30 years working and learning alongside organizations, schools, and community-based institutions focused on racial justice and equity. She is white and Jewish, a writer, artist, and poet deeply committed to racial justice and Palestinian solidarity. She is the author of the award-winning book, *The Emperor Has No Clothes: Teaching About Race and Racism to People Who Don't Want to Know* (2010), and is at work on a second book about the stake white people have in racial justice. She is based in Durham, where she has deep ties to and love for her community.

Questions About the Use of the Report for In-House Initiatives and Strategic Planning:

(Due to the time constraints of our meeting, we were unable to fully address these questions but agreed that we would take them up at a future meeting.)

- Who in your organization is aware of the ACT Rochester latest analysis on race and ethnicity?
- Who has read it?
- Is this data used as part of your in-house DEI training or strategic planning process? If so, how?
- What other recommendations do you have to use this report and communicate its content?