

BELMONT AGAINST RACISM
PO Box 649
Belmont MA 02478

June 4, 2009

Dear BAR Members,

This letter reviews the 2008-2009 year for Belmont Against Racism (BAR). Our **annual meeting** will be held **Friday June 12, 2009** at the First Church Unitarian/Universalist on 404 Concord Ave., Belmont starting at **6:00 pm**. We will discuss the **Boston/Belmont dialogues**, progress and future plans. Sandwiches and light refreshments will be served.

Following the annual meeting, the Second Friday **Coffeehouse at the UU Church** will be a **fundraiser for BAR** starring “Richard Curzi and Positive Energy” (starting at **7:30 pm**). This should be lots of **fun**, with music and dancing from the 60s and 70s! We hope that you can join us for both events.

Friday June 12, 2009 - Boston/Belmont Dialogues: A Progress Report

This year, the annual meeting will focus on our new initiative for communicating about issues of race. Inspired by Mo Cowan and Sam Williams, our two featured speakers at the Martin Luther King Jr. breakfast this past January, BAR is sponsoring a series of dialogues between members of the Belmont and Boston communities. After some considerable planning, the first two-hour dialogue was held on Sunday, May 31 with a “pilot” group of 17 individuals.

The purpose of a dialogue is to encourage person-to-person communication within a small group. Issues of race can be difficult to broach when the focus moves from the abstract to the personal. Dialogues create a setting where experiences and attitudes can be expressed in an honest but respectful manner. They provide a forum for focusing on an issue that defines so much of American history and continues to shape our lives today.

At the meeting, dialogue participants will describe the planning process, impressions from the first dialogue, and our hopes for the future. We are delighted and honored that a number of dialogue participants are Belmont METCO parents, providing a unique and thoughtful perspective that encompasses both Belmont and Boston. Our facilitator, Matt Thompson, is director of staff diversity at MIT's Department of Human Resources. He brings a high level of intelligence, empathy, and organization to a challenging process.

We will also describe how a dialogue series is structured, what it is like to participate, and how you can become directly involved in the future.

Fun and Fundraiser – Immediately following the Annual Meeting

All work and no fun is NOT what BAR stands for. So what could be better than to follow our annual meeting with a relaxed and entertaining musical event! “Richard Curzi and Positive Energy” are always one of the highlights of the season for the Second Friday Coffeehouse. Best of all, the proceeds from this light-hearted evening of “classic” rock-and-roll (\$10 at the door, \$5 for seniors and students) will be donated to BAR.

Looking Back on the Year

As we prepared for the 2008-2009 year, the BAR board of directors met last summer to reflect on our mission and plan for the future. At the meeting, we decided to focus our energies this year on two major themes:

1. Working on Boston/Belmont connections, with a particular focus on doing a better job of communicating with Belmont’s METCO parents; and
2. Encouraging programs at our elementary schools that can serve a similar purpose to our sponsorship of the after-school transportation fund at the high school

There are, of course, many other areas worthy of attention. But we felt these were two places where it was possible to make tangible progress on a local level.

Selecting a small number of themes seemed to be a good way of harnessing the energies of an all-volunteer organization, which are by necessity limited by the constraints of work and family obligations.

We made some progress, particularly in the first theme (Boston/Belmont connections). The MLK breakfast featured two prominent members of Boston’s African-American community. Mo Cowan is a member of one of Boston’s most prestigious law firms (Mintz, Levin). Sam Williams has devoted his life to serving underprivileged youth through Boston’s Urban Ministry.

It was fascinating to hear from two very different individuals, who are both making a real difference in our community while pursuing unique paths to success. The timing of the breakfast, on the day before the inauguration of our first African-American president, made the occasion particularly uplifting and poignant.

The MLK breakfast is also the central event for supporting the After School Transportation Fund. Even in this year of great financial hardship, our members and supporters recognize the importance of having all of our high school students participating in after school activities, and being able to return home safely (and in time to get some homework done!). The Belmont community has ensured this program will continue, without requiring any funding from the taxpayers, through contributions and pledges of \$10,000.

As mentioned before, the presentations at the MLK breakfast helped to catalyze an effort to create a series of Belmont/Boston dialogues on race. We are very grateful to Denise Dabney and Burrell (Tony) Clark, parents of one of our Belmont METCO students, who have been instrumental in organizing this process along with Kathryn Bonfiglio, BAR board member (and past-president of BAR). In particular, these dialogues would never have begun without Denise's active encouragement and support.

At the elementary school level, we provided some limited funding for the continuing excellent work of the Boston/Belmont Friends Network at the Burbank School. At the Winn Brook School, a mentoring program involving teachers and METCO students is making great progress and also received a small amount of funding from BAR for some fun activities. We send our best wishes to Bruce MacDonald, retiring principal of the Butler School and champion of diversity in our town. At the Wellington School, the enormous challenge of preparing for a new Wellington has understandably been the major focus of parental involvement.

As most of you know, the tragic murder of Herman Taylor III (Belmont choice student, Belmont basketball team member, and innocent victim of gun violence) in 2006 was a devastating blow to his family and our town. We have reported over the years about the courage and determination of his family, and BAR's role to help in some small way to support their efforts for peace and justice in Dorchester and beyond through the HT3 (Herman Taylor III) Network and Fund.

Recently, the family did see some measure of justice (a first-degree murder conviction). We are very grateful to Charlene O'Connor, long time BAR board member, who stood with the family throughout the arduous trial. In addition, five BAR board members (including Charlene) marched with the family at the annual Mother's Day March for Peace, sponsored by the Louis D. Brown Peace Institute. Tina Chery, founder of the Institute and Peace March, was our featured speaker at last year's BAR annual meeting.

BAR board members also attended a luncheon in Boston honoring Marisa Coleman-Luse, Herman Taylor III's sister. We urge all BAR members to continue their support of the HT3 Fund, Herman Taylor III's family, and the important work being done by Tina Chery and the Louis D. Brown Peace Institute. Sarah Coleman, Herman's mom, has told us on many occasions how important the Belmont community has been on her long journey since the summer of 2006. Thank you.

Looking Forward

The upcoming annual meeting marks the end of my two-year term as president of BAR, which has been a truly inspiring experience. I am very grateful to Jonathan Jacoby, the incoming BAR president, who has served as my vice-president for this past year. Every member of the BAR board has provided invaluable support and help throughout my term as president. They are a wonderful group of people, contributing their time and considerable skills, and always doing it with a sparkle and sense of humor.

I would be remiss if I did not give special mention the two BAR board members who are “retiring” after many years of service. (They may think they are “retiring”, but we know better!) Mike Collins has been a guiding light for BAR since its inception, and has always been my touchstone for knowing if we were still heading in the right direction. Carol Sabia has been board secretary for as long as I can remember, and her calm efficiency and steady dedication will be greatly missed.

All other BAR board members (including myself) will be returning next year. June Roberts, Lisa Eschenbach, Steve Friedman, Katie Platt, Shauna Townsend, Charlene O’Connor, Jonathan Jacoby and (last but not least) Kathryn Bonfiglio each deserve special commendation.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge the hard work and dedication of Fran Yuan, Gladys Unger and all the members of the Belmont Gay-Straight Alliance (BGSAC), a sub-committee of BAR. They are true leaders for justice and mutual understanding among all members of the town of Belmont.

BAR is a Community Organization

Looking forward to the next year, we hope that **you** will consider taking an active role in BAR. We recognize that everyone has many commitments, so think about picking a single activity of interest next year and joining in. If you have children in our public schools, please remember that BAR is always interested in supporting Belmont/Boston programs at every level of our school system.

To learn more ways to be involved, or make comments and suggestions, please visit us on our web page www.belmontagainstracism.com or contact us at belmontagainstracism@gmail.com. We welcome your ideas and opinions.

Yours truly,

John Robotham, President

for the BAR board of directors:

Jonathan Jacoby, Vice-president
Carol Sabia, Secretary
Steve Friedman, Treasurer
Kathryn Bonfiglio
Michael Collins

Lisa Eschenbach
Charlene O’Connor
Katherine Platt
June Roberts
Shauna Townsend