



Our Volunteers Make a World of Difference

A native of Hartford, CT, 52 year old Richard Blanks, also known as Rikc (not a typo) is a father of 7 children, husband to Antoinette Blanks and a community member that is making a difference for the NCCJ. Blanks first heard about the NCCJ and the Community Conversation on Race dialogue program through his employer, the Metropolitan District Commission (MDC). As part of the continued effort to raise awareness of diversity issues, the MDC contacted the NCCJ to facilitate a series of small group dialogues during the spring of 2008. “When I heard about the program, I really wanted to be involved” said Blanks. Over a course of six weeks, a group of twelve co-workers met once a week for two hours over a period of six sessions. The conversations moved from sharing personal experiences, to considering multiple viewpoints to considering strategies for taking action. Blanks found the experience very rewarding, “because you got to hear different points of view from your fellow co-workers.” The conversation brings together racially, ethnically, socially and economically diverse participants to talk with each other about the impact of race and racism. “It was very rewarding for co-workers to be so open. We all come from different cultures and backgrounds. I would have loved the conversations to go on longer-- they were good discussions,” said Blanks. He also credits the Community Conversations on Race program with raising awareness of not just racism but other forms of discrimination that may have a direct affect on an individual’s life experience. Blanks added that he

“really heard how older people are discriminated against in the workplace just like young people struggle.” At the end of the final session, participants are asked to take action on an individual, collective or institutional level.

At an individual level, Blanks has spoken with people about stereotypes and negative comments in the workplace and also with family, friends and neighbors.

Encouraged and motivated by the work of the NCCJ, Blanks continues his level of individual commitment by volunteering as an NCCJ community facilitator. During the fall of 2008, The NCCJ partnered with the Hartford Stage to moderate ten post-performance discussions for the world premier of African American playwright Daniel Beaty’s *Resurrection*. The play follows the relationship of six African American men that range in age from ten to sixty and the day to day discrimination that many black men endure. As a black man, Blanks was deeply touched by the play and its cast of characters. “Some black men don’t demonstrate affection. It doesn’t affect your gender or sexuality to show emotion.” said Blanks. He also enjoyed the opportunity to moderate with NCCJ facilitator Marsha McCurdy. “It was really nice; I wish we had more time. People wanted to continue discussing the play on their way out of the theater.”

When asked about the state of race relations today, Blanks believes that the world still has a long way to go in terms of race relations. “It is really great that so many people came out to elect the first African American President. I never thought I’d see that in my life” shared Blanks. He added there is no quick fix to change racial attitudes, “There is no lighting in a bottle, and the reality is it’s a long protracted struggle.”