

CPGLCC Member Feature – Metropolitan Community Church of the Spirit

Harry Young, CPGLCC Executive Director, had the opportunity to connect with Deb McClain with Metropolitan Community Church of the Spirit's Hand Up ministry, to learn more about the program and what it means to be a faith-based, not-for-profit chamber member. Hand Up has been serving our community since January, with the leadership of Deb McClain, MCCA member and past president of CPGLCC.

Harry Young: *Tell me about you and your organization, specifically the homeless outreach ministry.*

Deb McClain: I have been attending Metropolitan Community Church of the Spirit (MCCA) since 2004, placing my membership with the church shortly thereafter. I was looking for a place where I, as a faith based woman and part of the LGBTQ community, could attend and serve without someone trying to "fix me." The fact that MCCA is an intentionally diverse spiritual community really spoke to me. No matter where you've come from or who you are, all are welcome. A message of hope and transformation extends far beyond the walls of our church, reaching out to our community. MCCA had been giving our "care bags" filled with socks, snacks, water, and basic toiletries every month in tandem with "Food Not Bombs," a humanitarian group who uses our commercial kitchen to provide a hot meal every Monday night for the last six years. After a personal life change for me this past January, I decided to help with this ministry one cold Monday night – another life changing event for me. Those on the streets solicited us to also provide gloves, scarves, hats, boots, coats, clothing, and backpacks...person after person making requests. How could I say no? The next morning I put out a social media post while I looked out and saw a newly fallen snow had hit the ground overnight. Within 24 hours of my post, donations for the things we needed started pouring in, and other ministries reached out willing to collaborate and help us fulfill the requests from those in need. This is where the MCCA Hand Up ministry to the homeless and working poor began. With my best friend, Teddy Maurer, by my side, we started making the rounds to collect donations the very next day. Today, we have a core group of volunteers and others that join us when their schedule permits. With generous cash donations we are able to purchase much needed shoes and other items. As one of our patrons has said, we make the "Monday Night Magic" happen. We consistently serve between 45 to 60 people each night, some regulars and many new faces each week. Our free pop-up shop is at the corner of Second and Market Streets in Harrisburg from approximately 6:00-7:30 p.m. every Monday night no matter the weather.

HY: *As a not-for-profit faith organization, what does membership in CPGLCC mean to you?*

DM: My membership and participation with CPGLCC has allowed me to meet so many amazing people whom I may have never met. For example, I met Rob Visscher, Executive Director of Mission Central, who immediately reached out to help us meet the needs of the homeless in Harrisburg from the first post in January. Mission Central has been one of the most vital providers of donations, we successfully collaborate to be missionaries in our own community. Without my active participation in CPGLCC, I would have never met Rob, and the Hand Up ministry would struggle to meet the needs of the people we meet on the street. Relationships build business along with other skills and talents. I personally have found my membership and engagement with CPGLCC have brought more than just business since I became active and involved in 2007; it has literally provided me the opportunity to meet quality people from across the country who have enriched my journey and will remain friends for life.

HY: In your opinion, what is the most pressing issue facing LGBT business owners and professionals in Central PA?

DM: In my opinion, the most pressing issue facing LGBT professionals is that we can still be fired for living our authentic lives. Although some local municipalities have adopted nondiscrimination ordinances, discrimination still looms over us like a dark cloud. If someone is fearful in their work place, it can limit them from taking leadership roles and cause them to hold back when there is an opportunity to speak up in the workplace. I have found that LGBT business owners have struggled in their pursuit to win diverse supplier opportunities. Even though Pennsylvania has opened the doors for the LGBT Business Enterprise Certification to be accepted, as well as many large corporations, looking to increase engagement with diverse suppliers – there are still barriers that prevent small business owners from capitalizing on these opportunities.

HY: Why is LGBT+ inclusion important in both business and the not-for-profit sphere?

DM: I personally am one of the 75% of LGBT adults that switch to brands, businesses, and service providers that support the LGBT community, and I also prefer to do business with other CPGLCC members. The LGBT community has a reputation for being loyal, generous, sophisticated buyers and supporters of businesses and causes that are inclusive. Many will do background searches before spending their money. As a whole, LGBT consumers are making a huge economic impact, reportedly to be more than \$917 billion dollars in 2017. If a business or non-profit operates with a closed mind and not supportive of inclusion, people will also close their wallets, limiting their opportunity to increase revenue.

HY: Why do you think Central PA is a good place for LGBT+ individuals to live, work, and play?

DM: First, living in Central PA gives you the best of every season of the year. It is truly a lovely place to be - from the lush mountains, farm lands, and orchards to the creeks and river. We are close to several major cities - Philadelphia, Baltimore, Pittsburgh, and the bright lights of New York. Second, working - we have various opportunities afforded to people who want to work in a small, privately owned shop to international businesses all within a short drive and yes, some with 100% Corporate Equality Index Scores! In addition to having a governor who strongly supports the LGBT community and diverse businesses, we have some amazing people from the LGBT community in service to the Commonwealth - this speaks volumes to Gov. Wolf's commitment to being inclusive. The City of Harrisburg also has LGBT professionals being represented in various capacities as well - making sure the voice of our community is represented. The City of Harrisburg, the City of Lancaster, the City of York, Camp Hill Borough, and Carlisle Borough have all adopted local LGBT-inclusive non-discrimination ordinances, which shows we are at the forefront of enacting local LGBT equality laws. Lastly, the opportunities for dining, arts, culture, camping, and entertainment are plentiful - something for everybody no matter your age or passion.

HY: What is the best way to get involved with Hand Up?

DM: I am pleased to report that over the last six months the Hand Up ministry volunteers have been able to celebrate with many who have gotten jobs. Provisions of steel toe boots to laborers have aided in these results, assisting people to secure income to get housing. Many hands make light work; we sort and organize our donations every Sunday afternoon from 11:30-1:30 at MCCA located at 2973 Jefferson Street, Harrisburg, PA 17110. If you want to volunteer once a month or more, we'd be glad to have you join us - church membership is not required. Tax deductible donations can also be sent to this address with

a note it is to be designated for the homeless ministry. We rely on the cash donations from generous people like you to keep these folks in shoes, socks, undergarments, etc. Thank you in advance for your kind consideration to help. Sharing hope for a brighter tomorrow through a Hand Up.