

2023 HUMAN RIGHTS AWARD NOMINATION FORM

Email completed form to sarah.encinias@normanok.gov, or print and mail completed form to: Norman Human Rights Commission, City of Norman, PO Box 370, Norman, OK 73070. Nominations are due by October 18, 2023.

1. Person Being Nominated:

Name: Red Dirt Collective

2. List volunteer, services, organizations, professional affiliations (if any) and describe how this person has demonstrated outstanding effort, achievement and/or leadership in the promotion of human rights and equality (such as successes, results, impact, personal risks taken, time expended, sacrifices made, years of service, inspiration or motivation given, cooperation fostered, organizations or programs created, example set and innovations undertaken):

(Attach additional pages if needed.)

According to the bylaws of the Norman, Oklahoma Human Rights Commission, which was established by a vote of the people, the Commission's first responsibility is "to study problems of discrimination in any or all fields of human relations and to encourage fair treatment and mutual understanding among all residents; and to combat those misconceptions, prejudices and stereotypes that tend to prevent individuals from reaching their full potential as human beings." I can think of no organization that reflects these community values in their actions and initiatives than Red Dirt Collective, a group I am nominating for the 2023 Norman Human Rights Award.

Red Dirt Collective, in just four years, which includes the entirety of the coronavirus pandemic, has shown their commitment to encouraging "fair treatment and mutual understanding" among all Norman residents and especially those living in poverty and near poverty in our community. By focusing on people who live in a part of Norman with some of the highest rates of hunger, housing insecurity, unemployment and poor health outcomes, they help all of us better understand some of the unique issues and challenges and causes specific to the poverty that exists in Norman. More importantly, they are organizing and partnering directly with the women, men and children who live every day with these challenges and whose lives and futures depend on addressing them.

It was remarkable to watch, primarily on social media, this small, all-volunteer, grassroots organization of Norman residents, build a network of outdoor food pantries throughout the central and east parts of Norman for those who were struggling to provide for the basic needs of their families during the pandemic. To witness the compassion and respect shown to the hundreds of participants who attend the Mutual Aid Fairs put on by Red Dirt Collective has been inspiring. Their Community Garden not only helps provide healthy and nourishing produce but also the opportunity for recipients to work side by side with those organizers making that garden possible. Red Dirt Collective is helping educate all of us in Norman who want to see change in the parts of Norman most damaged by out-of-state investors and landlords. The members of Red Dirt Collective have not only been open to the input of Norman's churches and nonprofits and agencies who have been addressing these issues in Norman for decades but welcome our cooperation and experience. Finally, their efforts and conversations about unmet needs have inspired initiatives like Norman Care-a-Vans and Dinner for Friends, both of which address the concerns and critical challenges of our unsheltered residents in exceptionally effective and caring ways.

Again, this is all being accomplished by informed and dedicated volunteers, funded primarily by donations from the community and RDC members themselves. No staff, no salaries, no office space; the commitment is real and ongoing.

Thank you for the opportunity to nominate the Red Dirt Collective for this recognition.