

Culver City Equity and Human Relations Advisory Committee
Equity and Human Relations Awards Ad Hoc Subcommittee
April 28, 2026

Members of the 2025/2026 Equity and Human Relations Awards Ad Hoc Subcommittee are Haifaa Moammar, Denice Renteria, Rebecca Rona-Tuttle, and Carlos Valverde.

Presentation Date for 2026 Awards We expect that the 2026 awards will be presented in late spring or summer. As before, the mayor and city clerk will determine the date.

Medallions: Since the inception of the Awards program, medallions have been presented to the award recipients. As of 2026, the City's system for honoring individuals has changed. This will mean that the City Council will present a proclamation to each recipient.

We request that the recipients be handed their medallions during the presentation, by City Council or EHRAC.

Four awards: Ideally four awards will be given, but this is not mandatory. If EHRAC reaches the conclusion that no one within a particular category is worthy, an award in that category will not be given.

Nominations received: The city received a total of 14 nominations. In several cases, someone was nominated more than once. We received nominations for 3 students, 3 individuals (meaning adults), 1 business and 2 nonprofits.

Top two: Our 2025/2026 Awards Ad Hoc Subcommittee has reviewed the nominations and now recommends the top two finalists, as well as the one business.

Descriptions of finalists: The descriptions that follow are direct quotes of portions of the nominations. The individuals and nonprofits are listed in alphabetical order by last name.

Follow up to this meeting: After the award recipients have been selected, the ad hoc subcommittee will prepare brief summaries of the recipients to share with City Council to enable them to determine whether to issue a proclamation for each of the recipients we recommend.

Explanation: All the nominees, including those not described here, are accomplished individuals. We as a committee need to focus on those accomplishments most tied to equity and human relations.

Student

Lailanie Azam

Lailanie strives to support teens facing mental health challenges, especially those impacted by social media pressures and the stigma surrounding seeking help. The peers she serves are navigating issues such as anxiety, grief, bullying, and sexual assault.

Through her involvement with Didi Hirsch Mental Health Services' Teen Line hotline program, Lailanie provides direct peer-to-peer crisis support to adolescents. She has assisted over fifty teens from around the world, offering active listening, empathy, and grounding techniques during crisis. She has completed over 65 hours of

weekly seminars focused on understanding psychological disorders and struggles. Her service addresses the need for accessible, youth mental health support. Lailanie also encourages callers to seek continued help beyond the hotline.

Lailanie serves as secretary of Culver City High School's Muslim Student Association, where she helps promote multi-cultural understanding. Through participation in intercultural summits and Collaboration with Culver High's Jewnity (a club centered around the Jewish student body), she has helped organize fundraisers for social equity efforts. These summits have helped foster conversation and community understanding.

Beyond her direct service, Lailanie supports underserved women and children facing inequities. Through her small business selling button pins and keychains, she raises funds for organizations such as The Malala Fund and the Syrian American Medical Society, contributing to expanded access to education and healthcare in minority regions.

Lailanie's impact shows in both the local community and beyond. Through her services like supporting teens in crisis and benefiting broader initiatives, she's committed to uplifting marginalized youth and women through direct service and advocacy.

Student

Yazmin Lopez

Yazmin Lopez is striving to assist young people in the community, particularly those who may feel disconnected from law enforcement or unsure of their future paths. Many of these students need mentorship, guidance, and positive role models, as well as opportunities to build confidence and leadership skills.

Yazmin addresses these needs through active involvement in the Culver City Police Explorer Program, where they mentor fellow Explorers and help create a supportive and inclusive environment.

As a Sergeant, they take on a leadership role by guiding their POST, setting expectations, and helping others grow. Additionally, as a Drill Instructor for the South Bay Regional Explorer Academy, they dedicate their weekends to training and mentoring new Explorers, helping them develop discipline, teamwork, and confidence.

They also work to bridge the gap between law enforcement and the community by building trust and fostering positive interactions. By promoting the Explorer Program at their high school, they have helped expand awareness and involvement, giving more students access to these opportunities.

Individual (adult)

Sameen Ahmadnia

Sameen has been dedicated to immigrants' rights since before she was in law school.

Following the 2016 election, she led and organized a "Refugee Ball" as an alternative inaugural ball in Washington, DC, focused on uplifting the voices of our immigrant community who had been under attack by xenophobic rhetoric during the presidential election, raising about \$10k for immigration non-profit organizations.

In Culver City, Sameen has continued fighting for immigrants in her day job as well as in her free time. As an asylum law expert and practitioner, she has represented numerous immigrants facing persecution, including dozens of LGBTQ+ and sexual assault cases.

Sameen... assists immigrants from every part of the world. Many of them have come to the US seeking not only economic opportunity but freedom from political, religious, sexual, and gender oppression. Sameen's paid and volunteer work protects them both from the regimes they are fleeing and the current American one. She has kept numerous families and individuals together, safe, and free to pursue their American dreams.

Since her child has entered CCUSD, she is consistently available to parents for help with immigration questions, giving generously of her time and skills. She also organized a "Know Your Rights" presentation and event for Culver City families who may be facing immigration persecution in the current administration.

Individual (adult)

Emilie Debinie

Emily has served the community in many different roles, most recently as a member of the housing and homelessness committee. Emily played a vital role in voting for and implementing Project Home Key. She regularly is leading clothing drives and donation drops to assist the unhoused community.

Emily has also played a significant role in advocating for the Palestinian community in Culver City and raising awareness regarding the ongoing genocide. As one of the few Palestinian Christians in Culver City, Emily has dedicated her time to raising awareness through inviting guest speakers to speak on the ongoing genocide, planning video screenings, and creating spaces where everyone is welcome and accepted.

Emily was also vital in planning an interfaith gathering recognizing Ramadan, Shabbat, and Lent. Her actions and dedication reflect the true meaning of community.

Emily is a passionate, caring, kind, and smart person that people naturally gravitate towards. Her compassion is shown in everything she does and her dedication to bringing awareness is unwavering.

Business Owner

Jennifer Casper, Owner of Village Well Books and Coffee

Jennifer hosts programs for the community, like the ICE Awareness event last Sunday night. She has created a space for people to congregate and/or work. [She] Has Story Time three times a week for the community's littlest people.

She has Open Mike night for community members to express or showcase their work. And dozens of other events every month for a broad spectrum for people to gather and have a community experience.

She works and supports others in learning to fight ICE safely. The story times are done in Spanish. She offers a space for people who are lonely to come together around shared interest. She hosts open mic nights to offer a safe space for people to express themselves.

Loneliness is a rampant mental health issue, she offers a place people can go for free when they need company.

Executive director of a nonprofit

Joelle Kirtley, Founder and Executive Director of Mass Liberation

Organization's purpose: With empathy and love, addressing the harms of incarceration by educating and empowering returning citizens with evidence-based, whole-person approaches.

Ms. Joelle Kirtley, as founder and chief director of Mass Liberation, takes personal care and investment for the community she assists. The organizational focus is to provide resources and support to the formerly incarcerated; their needs are diverse - housing, reentry navigation, employment readiness, financial opportunities, educational and vocational opportunities, tech support....What stands apart is the feeling that remains with participants. They are welcomed for the resources and support, stay for the community, and leave with family.

As chief executive and CEO, Ms. Kirtley is both behind the scenes at organizational levels, and present on the front lines. She leads by example, and is an inspiration to everyone she works and interacts with.

Ms. Kirtley is practical and hands on. She encourages, contributes, guides, appreciates, and moves with heart throughout all. She operates with a level of intent to restore people's sense of personal value and gracing strength to their journey. Ms. Kirtley is humble. She works tirelessly not for accolades and affirmations, but because that's who she is.

The population is broad and diverse. Mass Liberation under Joelle's care promotes inclusivity, there is an acceptance and felt dignity among the site in whole. Mass Liberation's transformational work melts away at long-held stigmas and conscious or unconscious prejudice. There are long-term offenders who routinely enroll, attend, and remain as Mass Liberation family.

It can seem relatively straightforward for the average citizen and even for many returning citizens. But there is a level of urgency in many of the intangibles that Mass Liberation provides selflessly for their community. Medical needs such as enrolling and obtaining a provider; services to aid someone in acquiring their birth certificate and social security, learning to drive, building resumes, preparing for interviews.... these can be realistic obstacles for someone reentering free society, and the care and warmth that Mass Liberation extends, goes a long way towards shifting perspective and the heart, to instill an attitude of self-empowerment, and embracing all as opportunities.

Yana Grammer, Executive Director of New Earth Life

Organization's purpose: Educational and job training programs, along with wrap around support for youth aged 13 - 15 and their families, to help them dream big, make positive life choices, and discover their unique talents as future leaders.

Based in Culver City, New Earth Life serves young people ages 13–25 who are navigating significant life challenges, including those impacted by the juvenile justice system, foster care, community violence, and systemic inequities. Many of these youth come from underserved communities and face barriers such as limited access to education, employment opportunities, stable housing, and positive mentorship.

The organization also extends its support to families, recognizing that long-term success is rooted in strong, supported home environments.

The youth and families served by New Earth Life have a wide range of interconnected needs. These include access to safe and supportive spaces, educational support, job readiness training, emotional and mental health resources, and positive outlets for self-expression. Many participants are seeking guidance, stability, and opportunities to rebuild confidence, develop life skills, and envision a future beyond their current circumstances. Families often need additional support in navigating systems, strengthening relationships, and accessing community resources.

New Earth Life takes a holistic, wraparound approach to meeting these needs. Through its art, education, and job training programs, the organization provides youth with meaningful opportunities to discover and develop their talents while building critical life and career skills. Creative expression is used as a powerful tool for healing and self-discovery, while educational support and workforce development programming prepare participants for long-term success. In addition, the organization offers mentorship, case management, and family engagement services, ensuring that both youth and their families receive consistent guidance and support.

Youth who once faced significant barriers begin to demonstrate increased confidence, improved decision-making, and a renewed sense of purpose. Participants often re-engage with education, secure employment and build healthier relationships with their families and communities. Families report stronger communication and greater stability.

Yana Grammer is deeply motivated by a genuine passion for people and an unwavering belief in the potential of every young person she serves. As Executive Director, she leads with compassion, integrity, and purpose, consistently demonstrating her commitment to both her staff and the youth of New Earth Life. She is driven by the desire to see others thrive, empowering young people to rise above their circumstances and realize that their futures can be greater than they ever imagined.