

# Roseville panel discussion on race sparks growing community conversation series

More discussions are scheduled for 2018.

By James Walsh Star Tribune  
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PROVIDED BY NYIA HARRIS

Ask A Muslim Woman panel

It was after the July 2016 shooting of Philando Castile by a St. Anthony police officer, and Roseville resident Nyia Harris wanted her community to hear the perspective of black men — regarding policing, bias, everyday life.

So she went to Do Good Roseville and pitched “Ask a Black Man,” a February panel discussion and question-and-answer session that ended with a standing ovation by its audience of 100 people.

“I wanted black male voices to be out there,” said Harris, a mother of two and a part-time teaching assistant at her children’s school. “But I was going to be one and done.”

Not so fast. The enthusiastic response by the public that night, and a continued hunger for honest conversation, has instead fueled continuing conversations that show no signs of abating.

Ask a Black Man led to Ask a Black Man-Part 2 — which included three white men on the panel. That led to Ask a Muslim Woman, Ask a Community Youth and Ask a Veteran. In 2018, planned panels include Ask A Dreamer, Ask A Muslim Woman-Part 2, Ask An Adoptive Parent and Ask a LGBTQIA (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex, Asexual).

Harris serves as the moderator. Each panel discussion includes questions submitted on note cards from the audience, which has ranged from 60 to nearly 200 people. All she asks is that people be civil and respectful. They have been, she said, thanks in part to the presence of community access television.

Since Nyia Harris, above, initiated the “Ask a Black Man” program in Roseville, it has expanded to include Muslim women, veterans and other groups seeking a voice in the community.

“It feels like it’s turning into a thing,” said Harris, whose husband was a member of the first two panels.

The growth of the “Ask” panels delights Kathy Ramundt and Sherry Sanders, founders of Do Good Roseville, a grass-roots community organization founded in 2015 to share ideas and allow Roseville residents to get involved and have an impact on their community.



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“It really has taken off,” Ramundt said. “I just think the time is right, right now. People are interested, more so than at any other time.”

Said Sanders: “We’ve always believed that you have an idea that can build community, bring it. People need to hear other people.”

The result has been that in a little more than two years, Do Good Roseville has expanded from a group that collected coats, hats and mittens for children in need to partnering with the Ramsey County Library, area churches and the YMCA to host discussions on topics of intense local and national interest.

“It was not the original idea to have a social justice group,” Sanders said, pointing to early efforts for a volunteer fair and community gardens. “What’s cool about what we are doing is it’s just the three of us. And if we think of something interesting, we can make it happen.”

Harris, who has also hosted an art show on race, never intended to become a conduit for such serious discussions. But the native of Apple Valley said her family has come to love Roseville, and she’s gratified that she and her friends are helping get people talking. Even if it was sparked by the tragedy of Castile’s shooting.

“I’m a resident who cares,” she said. “And I don’t see an end in sight.”