



Equity Champion Interview: Nadine Marsh-Carter

Please share a bit about how and why you got involved with RMHF.

I was honored to be invited to serve as a Trustee in 2006. As a non-profit leader, I was so impressed with RMHF's commitments to impact investing and to strategically addressing factors that contribute to poor health outcomes. Their forward-thinking approach aligns with my values.

On a personal level, I come from a family of medical professionals. Since my early role models were committed to improving the health of our community, I felt called to serve in a similar way. The Vernon J. Harris Clinic is named after my grandfather, a physician who served from his Church Hill office for decades. My mom, Diane Harris, practiced dentistry here for nearly 30 years. And my aunt, Jean Harris, was the first African American and first woman to graduate from MCV (she later became Virginia's Secretary of Health and Human Resources).

How would you explain the concept of "equity" to one who is not familiar?

Equity is a multifaceted concept, but the bottom line is that equity occurs when the "playing field" is level. Equity is achieved when systemic barriers have been eliminated so that we *all* benefit. Equity enables us to leverage the talents and perspectives of all so that our entire community advances.

Why are you personally passionate about being a champion for equity?

Advocating for equity has been one of my lifelong commitments. Growing up in Church Hill, I saw the multi-generational impact of inequities. In addition to healthcare professionals, I also come from a family of legal advocates who worked tirelessly to promote equitable outcomes for all. Even as a young person, I understood how systemic barriers were negatively impacting our community. I watched great jurists, dedicated public servants and grassroots leaders from all facets of our community working together to chip away at the systems that supported inequitable outcomes. I witnessed first-hand the impact their work had on the individuals involved – and the successful strategies that ultimately made a difference. Inequity is difficult to overcome, and I wanted to do my part. So I began to practice law.

I have since shifted to non-profit work, addressing implications of inequity in the lives of children and youth. As an adoptive parent, it has felt like a natural evolution for me. At the heart, in many ways my work and my passion have always been about helping to create an equitable society. It drives me every day.

What do you wish our community understood about equity?

Our community needs to recognize that *when we achieve true equity, everyone wins*. It takes time and ongoing, often difficult work to achieve. I think Glenn Harris described it best when he said that equity is a process *and* an outcome. We have to work on both. Equity shouldn't be viewed through a scarcity mindset that sees it as a threat to those who have. If our community embraced that fact, the process would be far less challenging and we would experience more positive outcomes sooner.

What would you like to see the community doing right now to advance equity in our region?

I would like to see our community even more comprehensively address trauma's impact on the social determinants of health, especially on children. Working in a field with traumatized children, I see that we're making progress but, there is more work to be done to address trauma within families— and to support the healing that can occur when children are part of a safe, supportive family who has been equipped to meet their needs. I firmly believe that *healthy families are a cornerstone of a healthy community*. So I am hopeful that more is invested in promoting healthy parenting and families. It's not easy work, but the positive ripple effect would be tremendous.

What's already being done that makes you feel proud or hopeful?

I'm proud and hopeful about The Possibilities Project (TPP), a program of Children's Home Society in collaboration with Better Housing Coalition, which provides housing and comprehensive services to youth who have aged out of foster care. TPP draws upon the expertise of many organizations to empower youth for success. It's based on best practices. And its model is producing impressive results for underserved youth who otherwise face dire outcomes.

What's especially exciting is that TPP is grounded in equitable principles. We've incorporated the youth voice in all aspects of TPP program design, implementation and evaluation. It's culturally sensitive. The staff is diverse. It takes a holistic approach to service provision. And there's an advocacy component of TPP that is working to change systemic barriers which for years have kept Virginia ranked practically at the bottom of the nation for youth aging out of care. We're already seeing outcomes in TPP participants that are much higher than national

averages (100% employed, 100% in safe, stable housing, and 80% completing an educational or vocational program). Through TPP we are changing the paradigm of service to aged out youth. We are confident it will provide a model, or roadmap, for other communities to ultimately replicate.

What most excites you about the future as it relates to equity and health?

I really appreciate the willingness of leaders from all segments of our community to acknowledge that inequities exist. In order for true systemic improvements to be made, one has to first recognize the issue and then embrace the fact that everyone ultimately benefits when inequity is eliminated. I see more people are engaging in candid, albeit difficult, conversations with a spirit of warmth and a focus on successfully achieving mutually beneficial goals. This new energy is exciting. Plus, it's encouraging that foundations like RMHF are investing in addressing the social determinants of health because ultimately, we will see greater equitable outcomes.

Nadine is President & CEO of Children's Home Society of Virginia (CHS), an agency which has served Virginia's vulnerable children and youth since 1900. Nadine's connections to CHS run deep – she has provided legal counsel to adoptive families, served on its board of directors and ultimately adopted her children from the agency. Prior to CHS, Nadine practiced law for several years at the civil rights law firm of Hill, Tucker & Marsh. She also served as the Executive Director of Volunteer Families for Children. Nadine was recently selected as a 2018 Richmond Times-Dispatch Person of the Year, and was elected as Pat Asch Fellow for Social Justice. She is a trustee on the Longwood University Board of Visitors and a member of the Virginia State Bar association. She served a brief tenure on the Richmond City Public Schools Board and has served as a Trustee of the Richmond Memorial Health Foundation, the Family & Children's Trust Fund of Virginia, the National Network for Youth Policy Council, the Mid Atlantic Network for Youth, the Old Dominion Bar Association, Richmond Court Appointed Special Advocates, Church Hill Activities and Tutoring, and Virginia Premier Health Plan. She holds a Juris Doctorate from the T. C. Williams School of Law and a Bachelor of Arts Degree from the University of Richmond.