

DCAS and Community Advisory Council Building Bridges Q&A June 25th, 2020

Q – Does Durham CAS see themselves accountable to the African Canadian Community? If so, please show examples. If not, what are the next steps?

This question was not answered. Moderators went to the next question without responding.

Q – How are White foster and adoptive parents of African Canadian children trained in advocating for them when they face racism, and what tools does the Durham Children’s Aid Society (DCAS) give them to combat this situation should it arise?

A – All foster parents are required to attend PRIDE training; this training provides a significant amount of information that speaks to racism and inequalities within racialized communities. Both Children in Care (CIC) and Foster regulations provide a guide to foster parents and workers on how to advocate for children who experience discrimination. DCAS provides annual training around AOPDEI to our foster parents, as well as a review of child in care rights. DCAS also has four foster parent advocates who are available to assist foster parents when needed. Social workers also attend training that advocate for children and youth.

Q - Pertaining to the auditing process, when a person wishes to become a foster parent, is there an aspect of focusing on race relations – what does the training look like in terms of raising African Canadian children?

A - DCAS works within the household to ensure foster parents have the supports that they need.

Q – What does training look like when it comes to African Canadian children and youth being raised in a family not representative of their biological family and/or not of their direct kinship?

A – At DCAS, 30% of the foster parents are African Canadian, which is a testament to the black community supporting children within the community. DCAS does discuss cultural aspects with foster parents including keeping them connected to their community through events/activities such as church or social groups. When a child comes into care, DCAS strives to maintain as much stability in that child’s life as possible (same school, same activities, hair care, food, etc.). We are very mindful to create a space for a child in the home where the child feels they have a voice and are comfortable.

In addition to the above, it is important to recognize that DCAS has a program for black youth in care in which concerns raised by the youth can be brought forward. Black youth and Black staff come together for learning, discussions, activities, etc. Another DCAS program is Collective Hands.

Q - We know the Society was wanting to make a decision to change the intrusive approach that polices black families. Has Children’s Aid implemented more anti-oppressive practices, specifically to ensure accountability and anti-black racism?

A - Often referrals come from the Durham District School Board and police. Our local Immigration Council has done a lot to collaborate with these groups including anti-bias sessions to ensure we are all on the same page. The change must take place not only within the agency,

but also with community agencies as well to dismantle and debunk systemic racism, have to address bias in larger organizations. There are several factors that support DCAS to ensure accountability:

- Through internal auditing and how we address our data collection
- Having other agencies supplying programs and partnerships, specifically with an accountability structure in place

Q - CAS cannot audit CAS; what external organization is CAS using to provide accountability?

A - We are working with a number of organizations which are internal and external audits. Herman can address this further.

CAC members have seen a shift with DCAS based on the work that has happened for the past 6 years. It has not always been comfortable; tough questions were asked. Members of the CAC are now in a place where things more civil. It was very uncomfortable at the beginning. Our most vulnerable children are at the mercy of an institution that wields a lot of power; we needed to go through this difficult process and think how we must move forward.

Q – Does DCAS evaluate and monitor their programs and performance to see what is working and what is not? How often are these monitored and what are the results?

A - DCAS believes in continuous evaluation as a means of improving its activities and programs. Therefore, we regularly evaluate our programs and performance. Two forms of assessment take place regularly:

- Ministerial evaluations or audits
- Internal evaluations

Ministerial Evaluations or audits take place annually or quarterly. They include our Quality Improvement Plan (QIP), our Foster care licensing and our Crown Ward Audit. The results of these assessments are shared with respective teams, and improvement activities are identified and implemented. The results are also presented to the Board of Directors. For example, we have implemented a case activity tracker to support our employees in increasing our compliance rate with the QIP.

Internal evaluations are summative evaluations. They are usually done every two years on programs such as the DCAS Clinic, the volunteer program, the Prenatal Support Program and the Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) Program. We also share the results of these evaluations to respective teams and implement subsequent recommendations. We are currently evaluating our Prenatal Support Program. DCAS also welcomes all feedback (complaints and compliments from staff, families, community, etc.) as a means to improve services.

Q – Please give some thought to how Jennifer French can be a partner specifically with anti-racism/black racism/oppression work? What does it need to look like to provide supports and accountability across the province?

An area the CAC has been discussing which is above and beyond the local CAS, is that records stay on file for perpetuity (we will take this up with Jennifer another time).

Children's Aid Societies (CAS) are one portion of a very large systemic whole. There have been many Ministry initiatives put in place to monitor CASs but not as many Ministry initiatives are in place for other portions of the system. For example, Identity Based Data collection has not been implemented across all children serving agencies. This does not give a fulsome picture of the trajectory of a child's life through other systems in the community. Information and data is collected through Children's Aid Societies but not in Children's Mental Health or the education system.

Q – Does DCAS see themselves accountable to the Black Canadian community and if so how?

A – There are very few CASs with a well established Community Advisory Council (CAC). The work that takes place within the CAC is work for our community. One Vision One Voice (OVOV) holds CASs accountable to the African Canadian community. OVOV includes the 11 Race Equity Practices outlined in the Practice Framework document; these are principles which are used by child welfare staff across the province to improve outcomes for African Canadian children and families who come into contact with the child welfare system. In the presentation prior to the Q&A period, CAC members and DCAS staff spoke to OVOV deliverables and implementation processes of these deliverables at DCAS. CASs are graded on implementation and outcomes; the next report card will be given out in 2021. The Ministry will be launching the third phase of OVOV in the near future. DCAS holds themselves fully accountable to community partners, our Board or Directors and young persons with a focus on outcomes and measurability of our actions.

Q – Does DCAS have an anti-oppressive policy in place?

A – DCAS does have an anti-oppressive policy. DCAS is also developing an equity tool to review all policies as many of our policies are outdated (language, etc.). DCAS is currently in the process of updating all organizational policies.

Q – Can you provide the process DCAS follows when racism or oppression is suspected with school referrals?

A - At DCAS, we practice from a Signs of Safety (SOS) lens including all referrals that come through screening. We ask questions that is strength-based in keeping children and their families at the forefront of their decisions.

There are questions that are dedicated to culture, heritage and language which help us to determine the family strengths and the support systems that may already be in place. Many of the questions asked are open-ended, that can generate conversation around the callers concerns and what prompted them to make a call to our agency.

Screeners have the opportunity and responsibility to ensure that our agency collects referral information from a non-biased/discriminatory point of view. If Racism/oppression is suspected within our referral process, it is brought forward to a Supervisor/Director and staff to discuss further to determine next steps. This may include having a further conversation with the referral source to provide education on Duty to Report and to determine the impacts of the Society's involvement in this particular situations.

Q - How is DCAS ensuring that their staff have the knowledge and skills to gather race - based data from the people you support from the intake to investigative process?

A - The Intake Department recognizes that we are mostly likely the first point of contact/service with the agency. As such, we continue to ensure that we collect data from a strength-based perspective to ensure we are meeting the needs of our community and its members. DCAS recognizes the need to collect race-based data as our community is diverse in an array of cultures.

Our agency continues to work from AOPDEI lens that is inclusive of children and their families and their voices. It is imperative for children and families to feel safe and supportive in their community and should be able to make decisions that best suits the need for their family unit. It's a continuous process of learning, starting with asking the right questions at the start of the first contact with a referent and throughout the involvement process with the recipients of service.

In addition to the formalized training there was dialogue and discussion at individual team and intake department meetings in 2018 (to answer questions and provide support to staff as they moved from knowledge to skill building through application and practice).

In 2020, the service supervisors in collaboration with Rona will be doing a series of discussions at intake department meetings, that will continue to provide context and support for the importance of gathering race based data from the people we serve. Topics include unconscious bias, disproportionality, white privilege, understanding systemic racism and the role of child welfare. This will continue to provide a context and a platform for discussion and information sharing on the importance of gathering race based data at intake and investigation and integrating into case management decision making.

Q – Is there a full or part time staff member who is able to monitor files across CAS regions?

A – DCAS does not monitor files in other regions due to privacy issues. If required, DCAS would connect with another region to provide assistance. Every DCAS family situation is served by a Family Service Worker (FSW); FSWs are accountable to their supervisor and the supervisor in turn to the service director of that department. In that sense, there is monitoring of case activity and the direction of each particular family DCAS is connected with.