



**Durham Children's Aid Society
Building Bridges for the Success of our Children and Youth
Community Round Table
November 21, 2015**

Further Questions and Recommendations from Q&A Sessions and World Café

There were a number of questions submitted in writing at the Black Community Roundtable event which were not asked/answered due to time limitations. There were also some recommendations for change or improvement to CAS services to Black children, youth and families, from the World Café segment. These items are documented/summarized here. Questions are presented verbatim as originally written.

Question 1:

Signs of Safety (SOS) practice does not service or work to specifically address anti-black racism. This is an issue that should be resolved with the community by community?

Answer:

Signs of Safety (SOS) is a model that is designed to respect and involve the entire family in discussing any worries about child safety and protection held by CAS, professionals and family members themselves. It facilitates family built plans to resolve concerns and create safe homes for their children. , At this time the model does not specifically address anti-Black racism. Families are encouraged to invite any individuals/groups to participate in the family conferences that they feel would be important to them in planning for the safety and wellbeing of their children. These individuals can include community members, faith group members, advocates, etc. Throughout this process there is opportunity for awareness and education on cultural practices and needs. As SOS is implemented, we will be working to integrate Anti Oppressive Practice (AOP) throughout the model.

Click [here](#) to visit the Signs of Safety website to learn more.

Question 2:

Do you have specific program for Black families and Black children in care? Who runs those programs? Who holds the agency accountable to the service excellence in that program? And is your Anti Oppression Leader in charge of that?

Answer:

Under our AOP initiative we have an internal AO Steering Committee with six Sub Committees. One of those Sub Committees is called *Collective Hands* and is focused on issues impacting Black families and children. Collective Hands also functions as a resource group for staff to consult on cases and attain more awareness. Recently, Durham CAS started a specific

program for Black children in care to support identity development, stronger cultural connections and deeper understanding of Black heritage. For example, this program was kicked-off with Black staff taking Black youth to Buxton Museum - a day trip to learn about the Underground Railroad. Other sessions include cooking culturally traditional foods, having relevant guest speakers from the Black community, learning about culturally significant days such as Kwanzaa, Emancipation Day and more. The Anti-Oppression Integration Leader oversees this program along with the Director of Child and Youth Services. Service Excellence for all programs and services in the agency are ultimately overseen by the Director of Services and the Executive Director. The Board of Directors holds the agency accountable for overall service delivery.

Question 3:

Is this a commitment from Durham CAS to hold these consultations on an ongoing basis, what will you do with the information gathered? And how soon will the public expect feedback?

Answer:

Durham CAS remains committed to anti-oppressive practice and ongoing consultation and engagement with the Black community. The Building Bridges session of November 21st was just the beginning. Over the next several months, there will be regular meetings with the Building Bridges planning committee, comprised of staff and community leaders. One of the initiatives that the planning committee will be reviewing is the date for our next community consultation session in 2016, with the intent of holding these consultations annually as required. Information that is gathered from these consultations will help inform our service planning going forward. Based on discussions with the Planning Committee, Durham CAS will post information on the [Building Bridges](#) section of our website. In the meantime, if you have any questions, please feel free to send us an email at buildingbridges@durhamcas.ca or contact Tahmena Bokhari, Anti-Oppressive Practice Integration Leader at tahmena.bokhari@durhamcas.ca or 905-433-1551 ext. 2699.

Question 4:

Is there a criteria when placing African/Black children in foster care? For example would you place male children with 2 males or 2 females?

Answer:

There are comprehensive criteria that are followed for any child that is placed in the care of CAS. The criteria are based on a multitude of needs including cultural, behavioural, educational, physical, etc, and meeting a child's needs is paramount. Every effort is made to place a child with a culturally appropriate family, provided it meets the primary needs for that child. Placement staff work closely with foster care staff to find the most appropriate match. Currently, of the 47 Black children placed in family based care, 33 (70%) reside with culturally matched caregivers. Durham CAS is committed to anti-oppressive practice which means that we are inclusive of the broad range of diversity in our community. We value human rights for every individual and abide by legislative measures to ensure this, such as the Accessibility for

Ontarians with Disabilities Act and the Ontario Human Rights Code, which has recently added gender identity and gender expression as two areas which cannot be violated, along with race, sexual orientation and so on.

Question 5:

Do you have exit interviews for board members who have left?

Answer:

Durham CAS does not currently conduct formal exit interviews for board members who have left. However, the Board Governance committee will be reviewing a more formal evaluation component for active, retiring or resigning board members.

Question 6:

It appears as though education or other institutions need “education” on what is considered abuse or neglect? What steps can Durham CAS take educate these players? How does your staff team learn to communicate differences in culture to those who may not understand, i.e., the video the “mom” said she would “beat” her children, but it was not what she meant? How do you translate this to create greater competency?

Answer:

Durham CAS continually engages with the community through a variety of formal and informal methods. One of the most active engagement and education initiatives is the agency’s Speakers Bureau. Trained staff speak with service partners, community groups and organizations on a variety of topics including, but not limited to: Duty to Report requirements, signs and types of abuse, the role of the CAS, positive parenting techniques, and how the community can become more involved.

We are committed to building positive relationships with the community and service partners, and encourage the public and professionals to call and consult with us if they are concerned about the safety of a child. This also provides an opportunity to identify and discuss cultural differences and appropriate services. When we become involved with a family, we encourage open dialogue to help increase our own cultural awareness and provide the best support possible. Staff are encouraged to obtain an AO consult with the Anti-Oppressive Practice Integration Leader to better understand how oppression and power imbalances may be playing a role.

As we progress further on our AOP integration journey, staff are continuing to work on identifying the application of AOP principles in service delivery, and have just begun to process deeper understandings such as anti-Black racism, anti-colonialism, etc. Our staff capacity, funding and mandate does not allow us to train those outside of our organization on anti-oppressive practice. We do work with community partners on joint visions around equity and inclusion. In situations where power imbalances, inequity and racism are identified as possible factors impacting a family by other systems, our staff would “ally” with the family to address those concerns with the other systems.

Question 7:

One of the challenges observed is that our youth become disconnected from their community, what steps are being taken to keep youth connected, especially when they are brought into care, i.e., not just kinship?

Answer:

When a child/youth is brought into care, a multitude of needs are carefully assessed and reassessed on a regular basis. For example, a comprehensive *Resource Admission Form* is completed that details everything about the child; strengths and challenges, needs, supports currently in place and supports that are needed, along with who the child's family and community connections are. Every effort is made to keep children connected to their own communities and families are invited to participate in the planning for their children. In addition, we have a group of Black staff who provide awareness on the needs of Black children, such as Black hair and skin care sessions, understanding of emotional/mental health issues, and opportunities for community connectedness and social/cultural exposure. Through our AO journey, we have had AO Responsive Dialogue sessions and other staff training opportunities where we discuss current issues impacting Black youth and families so that our staff are aware of these matters within an AO context and how staff may work most effectively with children and youth.

Question 8:

AOP practice often sees the family as expert in their experiences. How is your agency working to address this when you're mandated to investigate cases of abuse?

Answer:

AOP is about the application of understandings of power and privilege to direct service with families, and is the 'how' of meeting our Vision and Mission. Our agency has been on the AO journey for 3.5 years and developing our staff capacity to ally with families and work in an anti-oppressive and culturally appropriate manner is an ongoing learning process. This process often starts with critical self-reflection wherein practitioners are able to understand their own social location and how their own use of power/privilege is impacting interpretations and decision-making. Staff are expected to demonstrate that they are working from an AO lens. Further to this, the anti-Black racism, anti-colonialism and other anti-oppressive paradigms may be utilized as appropriate. Recently the Society committed to *Signs of Safety* which positions families as the expert and in leading their own change process.

Question 9:

Where are we (Durham CAS) as of today in our understanding and response to how different cultures raise, interact with and discipline their children?

Answer:

Many members of our community ask about appropriate forms of discipline and what is legally acceptable. As an example, in the case of spanking, child protection workers would be looking to see if an instrument was used or if an infant was involved. Another example is around leaving children alone at home or unsupervised, in which case Children's Aid would have to assess if this would be a child protection concern. Cultural norms around these matters can and do change. Child protection workers have to consider various factors in determining whether a child has been harmed or is at risk based on the Eligibility Spectrum, which is based on the Child and Family Services Act (click [here](#) for more information on this). This is where our staff have to apply professional judgement, training and expertise, and utilize cultural competency skills. Durham CAS worked with a local Coalition to elaborate on positive discipline. You can view the information by clicking [here](#).

Durham Region's cultural landscape is constantly changing and there is still a lot of work we need to do internally. It remains an ongoing goal to educate ourselves and eventually those we work with on the cultural needs and differences of the families we work with, as well as continuously develop our understanding of anti-oppressive practice. Continued meaningful engagement with the community is critical for us to increase our awareness of cultural practices, challenges and opportunities, while at the same time providing accurate information about the role of CAS. It is about mutual education, respect and understanding.

Other statements and/or recommendations for change or improvement to CAS services for Black children, youth and families:

Statement(s):

- Use culturally specific services for the African Caribbean community.
- Use agencies that are culturally specific to move staff along the anti-racism continuum.

Response:

Durham CAS continually engages with the community through a variety of methods with the ultimate goal of providing the most appropriate and responsive services possible. We have begun the process of identifying and reaching out to culturally specific groups and organizations in and beyond our Region so that we can work together to provide culturally appropriate services to families. This work will continue to be a priority for Durham CAS over the next six months, and beyond. We encourage the community to assist us in identifying culturally specific services, inclusive of those for the African Caribbean community.

Statement(s):

- Get an AO Director with power who has the ability to make decisions on specific cases.
- Need an AO Director with power and to use culturally specific Afro-Caribbean community services.

As stated during the Q&A session on November 21, 2015, the Anti-Oppression Practice Integration Leader (AOPIL) position works throughout the entire organization at all levels, from front line staff and caregivers, to the Executive Director, Leadership team, and the Board of Directors. A significant component of the AOPIL's responsibility is to consult with staff on specific case issues in order to assist them in making the most appropriate service decisions possible. This also includes connecting staff and families with culturally appropriate services in the community.