



**Building Bridges for the Success of our Children and Youth
Community Round Table
May 15, 2017**

Summary of Question and Answer Session

Following opening ceremonies, remarks from the moderator, and presentations, there was an opportunity for community members to ask questions of members of the Community Advisory Council. The information shown below is not a verbatim account, but rather a summary of the questions and answers. The names of community members, families/youth involved with the Society, and staff who are not members of the Community Advisory Council have been removed to protect confidentiality.

Community Advisory Council members present: Sandra Forsythe (Council Co-Chair), Wanda Secord (Council Co-Chair), Verilyn Alleyne, Bryan Buttigieg, Naveen Balakrishnan, Leroy Clarke, Michelle Davis, Rafael Francis, Akilah Janeef, Larry Johanson, Dawn Walcott Parris.

Moderator: Larry Johanson

Questions & Answers Session

Question: We have heard a lot about what you (Durham CAS) are doing with respect to black youth connecting to the community. But we haven't heard about what we are doing to train the staff, first responders who come into contact with the youth.

- **(Dawn Walcott Parris, DCAS Director of Services and Council member)** All Durham CAS staff and board members went through Anti-Oppressive (AO) training a number of years ago. As new staff come on board, they go through the AO training. AO is also taught in social work training now through the educational system, but we have additional training within our organization.

Follow-up Question: Police officers and other first responders who serve the community make it mandatory that the (AO) training happen every year, not just initially or through education.

- **(Dawn Walcott Parris)** This is a good point, it is not something we do annually at this point, but DCAS AO committees offer learning events throughout the year, and staff are required to attend a number of them each year. This creates a baseline when staff come on board; training sessions are held on a regular basis.

Question (submitted by email): Are you focusing your AO on racialized communities or also using an AO lens to work with people who have white privilege and help them to disrupt that white privilege to harm others?

- **(Wanda Secord, DCAS Executive Director and Council member)** One of the pieces around AO is the concept of white privilege, power and privilege. It is a concept we have had to grapple with and understand, that it is inherent within our system (all CAS's). One of the key concepts we focus on during our training is what is in our "backpack" that staff are carrying (people are in different social locations). Is it something we learn once and forget? No -- we have to continually remind ourselves of this and be aware of it. It is not something you do and check off, you need to constantly be mindful of this.

Question (submitted by email): Tell us how you can recognize resistance in your own words, what resistance in staff looks like (resistance to AO), and what can be done about it.

- **(Wanda Secord)** The idea of AO is something that I have learned and continue to have to learn and be aware of. It is not something you learn right away, you evolve, and continue to learn. Staff are at different places in their AO learning. It is part of social work education now. We need to be aware of where there is resistance. If we are not aware of it, it is hard to deal with it. We have embraced AO as a practice, there is an expectation that staff work within an AO framework. For those who may be struggling -- and we all do at some time -- how do we help and assist each other? We use our infrastructure, and coach and mentor those who are struggling to improve their AO practice.

Follow-up discussion:

- **(Raphael Francis, Council member)** As a retired post-secondary educator, there have been a number of times when I have wondered if we would ever see the day when some things were removed from our vocabulary. The community at large may not realize how oppressive some terms are that involve the word "black". Examples – in an airline crash, the cockpit voice recorder and data recorder, although painted orange are referred to as "black boxes". Other terms: Black sheep of the family, black book (addresses, phone numbers), black Friday. These terms are very impactful on black youth and children, and a professor (who is usually a white professor) is oblivious to this. In AO training, these things must be borne in mind.
- **(Leroy Clarke, Council member)** We internalize things, as black people do use the same terminology unfortunately. How do you know what resistance looks like? It would be nice to have a day to day regular event that would spell resistance out. Do you have an example of how to recognize resistance in staff and how you would deal with it? *(To Wanda Secord)* You must have seen it – do you realize how sensitive you are to this kind of thing?
- **(DCAS Director of Human Resources)** Body language shows resistance (covert and overt resistance). Overt (resistance) is easy to deal with, but covert (resistance) is more difficult to deal with – e.g., whispering, on phones, etc. At the end of a session, I have a conversation with them, and try to talk to staff as much as possible. People won't come to me and tell me they are resistant, but they will tell their colleagues. If that comes back to me, I want to know how to help them move on their journey. People can either move on with the journey, or self-select out.
- **(Leroy Clarke)** In-service training – is there any way to measure the competency, any objective way of measuring this?

- **(Dawn Walcott Parris)** Typically we don't test people following their attendance at training. But there is an expectation that anything presented will be integrated into their work they are doing. If they are having difficulty with that subject matter or experience, there will be a conversation with the supervisor / manager around what the learning has been or hasn't been.

Question: You could train someone and have competency measures – someone could pass these measures but not buy into what you want them to buy into. Racism is something people want to cling onto because of the privileges they have. The mere fact that we are gathering means a problem has been recognized. We are here to solve the problem. To show the statistics does not solve a problem. What if 60% of staff are black, but deal with all of the clients – what is wrong with that? You are being asked how you deal with pushback from staff who are white and don't embrace people and deal with them respectfully, equally. If you think just talking to someone and working with them will change it -- why are you (Durham CAS) so afraid to get rid of bad apples in an organization and bring in people who do what we want them to do?

- **(Wanda Secord)** These are strong points – the first approach would be training, coaching, etc., but at the end of the day if that is a barrier that cannot be changed, then we have to ask the question, is this a person we want to have working in our organization?
- **(Community member)** They have such people and they keep their jobs. In the police, when people are not meeting their requirements, they get repercussions (they get reprimanded, or dock in pay, or removal in rank or fired). Durham CAS doesn't do that. How many families get destroyed by holding on to the bad apples? You also need to look into the complaint process – internal or CFSRB (retired CAS workers).
- **(Wanda Secord)** If this individual (in the audience) has specific instances, please bring to their (the agency's) attention so we can address them.
- **(Sandra Forsythe, Council member)** Respectfully suggests (to the audience member) that you try again for whatever situation you are referring to.
- **(Community member)** The ACLC (African Canadian Legal Clinic) will be taking on her case, as a human rights case.

Comment: I am glad to see we can sit and have a conversation together. The council has met for the last 3 years. The CAS has been one that hasn't budged in many years. Now several of these forums (Building Bridges) have happened to bring us up to where we are now.

Comment: For transparency and credibility – those questions that you received from the community I would hope they would be given to the panel (Council) to respond to so they can be addressed and the response posted on the Building Bridges website.

- **(Akilah Haneef, Council member)** Agreement to this – I will bring the remaining questions to the Council.

Question: How is this information being disseminated to the community after the meeting, and how are we outreaching to the community, especially to young people? Maybe you are preaching to the converted here. How are we getting the word out – are we utilizing social media – technology? In the presentation regarding educating black youth (in care) regarding culture – we heard about food, hair care. There are

conversations that have been had for years. We are still here, where are we moving beyond that – what does black culture look like?

- **(Sandra Forsythe)** We put the flyer out to email contacts, and I go out to different West Indian stores and posts the flyers (acknowledged not very good with social media).
- **(Raphael Francis)** We do have a presence on Facebook (just recently), a Building Bridges Facebook page. We can post questions, video clips, other issues of interest to the public or suggestions from the public. There is also a Building Bridges site on the Durham Children's Aid Society website.
- **(Community member)** Suggest using Instagram, Snapchat, which are used by the younger population. Facebook is for older adults.
- **(Community member)** How to reach the audience – if you don't know how to reach the community – you have to get out there, to black churches in Durham, make community announcements, to youth groups, flea market.
- **(Akilah Haneef)** Those of us (community members) on the Council *are* the community – we are the “bridge”. We are of the community, and for the community. They are not CAS.
- **(Community member)** How many people did each person bring tonight?
- **(Akilah Haneef)** I brought several, but want to be clear, they are the community. They don't just sit with Durham CAS. People are in communication with them.

Comment: This is meant to be a collaborative event – collectively we can do something.

- **(Leroy Clarke)** We all have to take ownership – this is not just a CAS problem. You are here now, you can be an ambassador as well. It is important that we all see ourselves as working towards a solution. I am not saying there have not been bad experiences, but we have to try to address that. It is a bit better now – we have an opportunity to make a difference through this structure.

Comment: We have to be careful when using comments like “it is a bit better now”. We don't want to make this about anti-black racism – but that is the majority of (it). Only 7% of Durham's population is black, but from the PowerPoint slide 13.39% of children and youth in care identify as black/black mix. We can't tiptoe around the black issue. (It was said it is not an anti-black racism issue, but an anti-minority issue.

- **(Community member)** It was mentioned – without diminishing the importance of anti-black racism.
- **(Bryan Buttigieg, DCAS Board President and Council member)** The original letter to the Board President came from leaders of the black community. They called out that it had to be about more than the black community. Obviously the emphasis is there, but we cannot disassociate from other groups. The intent was not to diminish black racism, but to recognize the same conversations of power and oppressions can be applied to other races as well. Other communities need a voice, need to come forward. It is meant to be an inclusive argument.
- **(Community member)** We need to be mindful based on history, issues have been swept under the rug.
- **(Bryan Buttigieg)** We can't solve racism, but at the same time we can call out questions like (the audience member) and how do we increase awareness on this council?
- **(Leroy Clarke)** As a member of the council, we address some of the same issues you are talking about, we are very cognizant of this.

Comment: The black community has a race relations committee in the police service and the board of education. We are a long ways away, but have 3 years together with CAS. We have to help them make it happen.

Question: I would like to hear more about the ten year period (International Decade for People of African Descent) - are the objectives being met and benchmarks being met, and the work done towards achieving them / deadlines?

- **(Bryan Buttigieg)** This is a really important point – how we do set benchmarks? At the board level, how do they assess the agency? The agency’s work is not numerical – the board can get basic statistics, but so much of the work is subjective, people working with other people, it is difficult to measure. Sometimes what is easy to measure is what you end up focusing on because it’s easy. I would like to come back with a scorecard each year, but we also have to be careful what and how we measure.

Comment: What we are trying to achieve is a collective effort – the black community has a role and responsibility in making sure certain things are achieved. So benchmarks come from both sides – we should be working towards a collective goal.

- **(Michelle Davis, DCAS Board member and Council member)** This is a trust thing – systemic issues – the way this can work is by having good information, evaluations. When the board looks at evaluating their one staff (the Executive Director) there are ways to do that, evaluations, etc. Today, at the end of this meeting, there will be evaluations. I encourage people to fill these out; they are not taken lightly. It is a trust issue. I am a part of the community too and have taken a particular interest, and I seek out opportunities to get involved. I do not see the black community as others – I am not a part of those networks. It is on both sides – we need to communicate out, we need to find out what the agency is doing, hold the board accountable for its governance as it relates to child welfare – but we have to ask the community the same things.

There is a historical context, there are things that keep happening. I encourage people to keep talking. Now that we have the Community Advisory Council, these things are being discussed – these things are important.

Don’t give up, continue to communicate with us. We spoke about engagement, there are many ways to engage – we do what we do best. Not everyone is on social media – but we trust that the process is about advancement and we can find our way in it. I don’t want to see things take 10 years. I want the most vulnerable in the community to be reached, and to get what they need, so that people have real informed choices where they live. I implore people to make it a two way street, they (the Community Advisory Council) are listening.

- **(Dawn Walcott Parris)** In looking at some of the activities, there has been an emphasis on physical care things. There is some of that, but I want the rest of the work of the Collective Hands Committee and the AO Youth Lead to be recognized. They are doing a lot of work on youth self-esteem. This work moves them in a positive direction, the work being done is really helping that. There are other things that are bonuses on the side. There are critical and core issues being discussed to help the kids cope and prepare them for the future. I encourage community members to speak more with members of the Collective Hands Committee.
- **(DCAS staff and Collective Hands Committee member)** These are issues that are long standing issues, and will continue to be. We have 5-10 individuals attending these groups, and if their hair is not right, we pick up the phone and call their caregivers directly, and the committee members can take them to the appropriate hairdresser. Workers can speak to caregivers about cultural issues/resources. Before there was not the immediate caregivers

to take on the role, there is more accountability for black youth on the workers' caseloads for physical presence. If we have a youth that says they we don't have money for hair care, we tell them there is. We do see a difference in the appearance of kids who show up to the groups. The workers are going to other workers, speaking to them about this, and encouraging them to get the youth to come to these groups. Now they have funds for black youth in care to get specialized care. We won't be able to solve it in a month or two, but the caregivers know that they are out there.

- **(Larry Johanson, Council Member and Moderator)** There was a question about what does the culture look like? Kofi Morris (led the Libation ceremony) did a fantastic thing by introducing major concepts about African culture and connectedness. He could be an incredible resource to the CAS when designing programs around black culture / identity / pride, etc. There was a teacher in Windsor who taught (black) students to understand they are not just products of slaves. We did not know we also came from princes and princesses. White kids didn't know this, and learned things. Black people themselves as parents need to know it is incumbent to emancipate themselves and emancipate their kids. We are talking about families and parents – reach out to the parents because they didn't get proper parenting, they were parented by slavery (slavemasters), and we need to exorcise.
- **(Community member)** Staff are doing wonderful work, for instance the trip to Africville (Nova Scotia). But what are we doing to let these kids know we are indigenous – that they didn't come from somewhere else. The amount of power this knowledge gave me, I know who and where I came from. We need to be more open, honest – I feel the staff are doing wonderful work, need to dive deeper.
- **(DCAS staff member)** We do dive deeper – so many youth have been part of collective hands, you need a whole meeting to find out what this committee has done. They (staff) are doing great work, the youth are coming out proud, and strong.
- **(Community member)** Suggestion using technology – take clips / videos of what they are doing and share these to lecture children.
- **(DCAS staff and Collective Hands Committee member)** We have been videotaped by the Office of the Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth. The kids have been videotaped talking about their about their dreams, the hopes for the future. Before I was a CAS worker, I was a strong black woman. I project this to the youth I work with – I tell them this is not the beginning, this is the middle, and I have a lot of things I have to do. They were talking last week about skin colour.
- **(Community member)** You can get distorted in colour, it is a self-fulfilling prophecy. We start to internalize things.

Closing remarks by forum moderator