

## **Partnership and Accountability Circle Report on Year One**

Action 19.2 in the Toronto Action Plan to Confront Anti-Black Racism calls for the City to outreach, recruit and appoint diverse people of African descent to advisory bodies in the City of Toronto. The Partnership and Accountability Circle (PAC) was established with a mandate to guide and support the full implementation of the Action Plan.

The PAC is informed by African values, principles and practices and reflects the diversity of Torontonians of African descent. Membership of the Circle is comprised of 12 Torontonians with diverse lived experiences, education, professional expertise, and historical knowledge of anti-Black racism in Toronto. This includes:

- 4 elders who represent the wisdom of the community to hold the integrity of the Circle's principles, values and practices;
- 4 youth, defined as being between the ages of 13 to 29 with diverse lived experience; and,
- 4 people who represent key stakeholder groups of Black Toronto communities.

As part of reflecting on Year One, the PAC has written this report. The report is organized by the key priorities approved by City Council for the Year One work plan and is structured as follows:

1. Creating Culture Change at the City
2. Investing in Black Children and Youth
3. Connecting Black Torontonians to Civic Decision-Making
4. Improving Customer Service

This report includes a review of the City's activities by the PAC in the above four priority areas with recommendations.

### **1. Creating Culture Change at the City**

Changing culture at the City of Toronto is crucial to supporting Black Torontonians who interface with various facets of the City on a daily basis. The establishment of the Confronting Anti-Black Racism Unit (CARB) is a substantial statement that the City is committed to creating change, taking action, and developing policies and procedures to remove the systematic barriers experienced by Black Torontonians in the city.

#### ***Establishing a Black Staff Network***

The Black Staff Network creates a space dedicated to the personal and professional development of the City's Black staff and provides a sense of belonging, appreciation and championship within the corporation. The number of Black staff that attended its events and the feedback that they gave indicate that the Black Staff Network has reignited their agency in the City. It is also a recognition of their value and their contributions to the City.

### ***Engaging City staff and Toronto Police Service (TPS) in a mandatory learning program***

A comprehensive curriculum for the implementation of the Action Plan has been developed for all City of Toronto staff. The TPS has also developed an in-service anti-Black racism training module for all its officers.

As a further development of this action item, a milestone achieved is the Community and Police Eliminating Anti-Black Racism Team, mandated by action 17.4 and is expected to have its inaugural meeting by early July. This derived out of a discussion that addressed creating and embedding a sub-committee focusing on addressing anti-Black racism within TPS operations and interactions. However, there is an overarching mindset that permeates the TPS that still needs to be dismantled - a mindset that was exemplified by the extremely low 27% response rate in feedback regarding the training.

## **2. Investing in Black Children and Youth**

The complexity of issues found in working with Black/African/Caribbean children and youth, in combination with the multifaceted problems of the Ontario criminal justice, child-welfare and educational systems, led the city to realize the necessity of interdisciplinary policy interventions, programs, scholarship and activism. These are the key contributions of the City of Toronto's Confronting Anti-Black Racism Unit (CABR) that invest in children and youth.

### ***Awarding Black Youth Leadership Grants: Action 1.3***

The Confronting Anti-Black Racism unit worked with established and emerging partners across sectors of Black communities on innovative "holistic interventions" that address the "root" or "underlying causes" of youth disengagement while investing in youth for the long term, with significant policy implications. As part of this work the City, in partnership with United Way of Greater Toronto, awarded the Black Youth Leadership Project Grant of \$520,000 to three Black-led organizations focused on creating and supporting innovative Black youth leadership programs. They are the Delta Family Resource Centre, Dance Immersion and CEE Center For Young Black Professionals. Short-term outcomes from this grant have included over a hundred youth participating in a civic engagement leadership series. All three organizations aim to increase Black youth arts administrators and demonstrate how with the arts Black youth professional achievement, with youth from socially and economically disadvantaged communities can have more positive outcomes. Short-term outcomes from this grant have included the development of a curriculum and the delivery of arts administration training as well as mentorship and placement opportunities for Black youth in the arts. Arts therapy for youth who have been traditionally denied arts opportunities in the community is used for a variety of purposes: to heal, educate, and "reform," or to improve self-esteem, emotional literacy and aid socialisation by providing creative opportunities for self-understanding and expression (Milliken, 2002). The arts and arts therapies have taken various forms, from formalised, structured therapeutic programmes with groups or individuals to activities that are designed for leisure, outside of any formal therapy or rehabilitation programme for academic and economic success.

Another key measure to counter the structural and systemic racism faced by Black youth was the investment in the CEE Centre for Young Black Professionals and Harriet Tubman Community Organization with a grant of \$104,594 to increase the representation of young Black leaders in the social services sector. Racism and anti-Black racism are inhibitors in the hospitality sector, which has failed to adequately engage with Black youth. The Kitchen

Masters program created in December 2018 was designed as a wraparound program that provides youth in Ontario Works with training and employment support in the hospitality and food sector. CABR recognized the potential of the hospitality industry to provide economic and career opportunities to Black youth. Given that racism, discrimination and anti-Black racism, whether overt or inadvertent, are still “alive and well” in Canada, this program not only creates socio-economic opportunities for Black youth but also highlights the need for strategies to address racism, discrimination and anti-Black racism in order to develop and sustain their engagement with the industry.

### ***Advocating for Opportunities for Youth with Criminal Records: Action 13.5***

As a response to mounting demands to address Black youth unemployment and underemployment, Confronting Anti-Black Racism Unit (CABR) supported two youth job fairs in March and October 2018, in partnership with Social Development, Finance and Administration. They focused on clients who have had conflict with the law and targeted job fair preparation supports offered across Toronto Employment and Social Services (TESS) offices. CABR captured the anti-Black racism sentiment, the starkness of racial disadvantage and the severity of its impact on the life chances and outlooks of Black youth. Thanks to dramatic changes in the City of Toronto’s policies, a substantial number of Black professionals were able to secure employment in the City of Toronto’s CABR unit. The race-crime criminological nexus has direct implications for Black youth living in the City of Toronto. Torontonians of African descent have an unemployment rate of 13 percent, nearly two times the provincial rate (Stats Can 2016). Given that all meaningful employment and, to some degree, educational certifications require criminal record checks, education and employment prospects are bleak for young Black men when released from prison. Culturally relevant and culturally meaningful programming and educational engagement with subsequent employment opportunities can also work to deter youth from illegal associations and develop their sense of worth, pride, esteem, confidence and resilience. Some of the best teachers and mentors for socially disadvantaged youth are youth themselves.

Action 13.5 calls on the City to support the removal of barriers to employment for diverse Black communities. TESS organized an employer-focused webinar on hiring individuals with criminal records that was attended by 80 private and non-profit sector employers. In addition, relevant TESS staff were trained on how to engage with employers on the topic of criminal records, with 90% of staff attending the session reporting an improved understanding of the issue and 82% reporting increased confidence in engaging employers around inclusive hiring practices. As over-policing and incarceration rates among African Canadians increase this project and policy intervention responds to the stigma of structural and systemic anti-Black racism grounded in Black youth unemployment. While little research in Canada has focused on the consequences of criminal records and employment of Black youth in Canada, this project with solid data will become a body of evidence on economic opportunities, criminal records and Black youth employment. We hope to see the impact of these interventions in Year Two with concrete measures of employment for youth with criminal records.

### ***Collaborative Service Planning with SLGBTQ2S Youth: Action 2.1***

The Confronting Anti-Black Racism Unit (CABR) recognizes the intersection of racial justice, sexual orientation, and gender identity, challenging the myths and biases that continue to hamper the rights and opportunities of Black lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (BLGBTQ) people.

Action 2.1 in the Action Plan calls on the City to consult and invest in effective programs and services for Black queer and trans youth. Parks, Forestry and Recreation consulted 174 Black queer and trans youth on how to provide better access to recreation programming. CABR hosted a one-day conference, “Black Lives Getting Better Together (BLGBT) Sposium,” focused on Black queer and trans youth and service providers. The degree to which Black queer youth feel race is central to their self-concept relates to their engagement in Black activism. Present-day social justice movements and organizations such as Black Lives Matter (BLM) respond to a history of racial injustice and queer erasure within LGBTQ service provider organizations and the wider community by leading intersectional resistance that affirms the diversity of the Black community.

CABR recognizes we live in a heteronormative society, and, given the identity politics of being Black while simultaneously being queer (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or questioning [LGBTQ]), sought to understand predictors of activism orientation among Black queer youth. One BLGBTQ youth view commonly stated at the conference was that “they’re invisible; not seen or valued as part of the Black community or experience.” Another was that most of the coverage was “presented from a place of pathology rather than normalcy,” i.e., stories about “their survival,” demanding respect and accountability from the Black community and society in general. They also spoke of how the violence and discrimination perpetrated on Black LGBTQ bodies is much more pervasive and institutionalized than what we see for gays and lesbians today in general society. One sentiment echoed by the youth attending the conference was that “anti-Black racism is anti-Black racism, is anti-Black racism. Against trans folks, it’s wrong. Against lesbians, it’s wrong. Against Blacks, it’s wrong. Against anyone, it’s wrong.”

Stories about violent attacks on gay people, bullying and suicides of gay youth, service provider bias and employment discrimination reinforce the perception that inequality exists and evoke African Black and Caribbean Canadians strong condemnation of injustice of any kind. One of the more notable takeaways was that service providers need to move beyond participatory and inclusive planning towards Black-queer- and trans-youth-led planning and provision. Listening to experiences is one thing. Creating space for Black queer and trans youth to lead and be paid to do so was another view. This led to the establishment of an ongoing reference group of 30 Black queer and trans youth to continuously provide input on programs and services. Parks staff has also provided career mentorship opportunities to the youth, including training on how to apply and compete for City jobs.

### **Recommendations**

- Establish “cradle-to-career” mentorship intervention programs for youth from kindergarten to post-secondary degree completion
- Establish cross-sector partners for Black youth and children with common goals and expand on best practices already working in their local community
- Understand and address systemic, cultural and historical oppression faced by members of Black communities
- Engage in evidence-based decision-making informed by local data that show areas of need and promising practices that are already working for Black youth and children
- Collect essential disaggregated race, gender and sexual orientation data in the labour market

- LGBTQ service providers need to provide and create culturally relevant supports and systemic change that would benefit Black queer and trans youth
- Meet the specific needs and aspirations of Black queer and trans youth
- Advocate for better protection and supports for Black children and youth

Overall, these recommendations aim to challenge the “deficit narrative” about the educational aspirations of low-income Black youth, reducing epistemological barriers BLGBTQ youth, Black children and youth face, especially about post-secondary affordability and the admissions process, employment and political civic engagement. This can be achieved by increasing access to guidance counselors who provide information on the admissions process and cultivating partnerships with non-profit organizations who provide financial literacy.

### **3. Connecting Black Torontonians to Civic Decision-Making**

The Confronting Anti-Black Racism Action Plan identified community engagement and Black leadership as a key issue that could be remedied through a series of activities, including creating opportunities for Black Torontonians to be engaged in decision-making within various areas of the City of Toronto. A key initiative completed by the Confronting Anti-Black Racism Unit (CABR) in Year One is the ‘Blacks on Boards’ initiative aimed at actively increasing the number Black Torontonians who are appointed to City agencies, boards and commissions. The PAC supported this initiative by participating with the City of Toronto as part of selection committee tasked with the review and selection of the community agencies that would receive funding to develop and implement board governance training to members of the Black community. This work was important to ensure that the organizations tasked with this work had the governance knowledge, coupled with the administrative and operating structure, and the community connections required, to develop a pool of Black talent for board appointments. The opportunity to sit on the selection committee ensured that a critical lens from the Black and non-profit community was present in the decision-making.

To support the mandate of increasing opportunities for Black Torontonians to participate in City decision-making, CABR planned and rolled out two ‘Blacks on Boards’ events in collaboration with the City of Toronto Public Appointment Office. These events, which generated over 200 attendees, alerted not only the staff members from the City’s Appointment Office but the broader community of the wide talent pool of highly skilled Black professionals that exists within the City of Toronto and is interested in board leadership. Additionally, the ‘Blacks on Board’ initiative was key to educating Black Torontonians of the leadership opportunities that exist within the City of Toronto and the process to access them.

### **Recommendations**

- To that end, the City of Toronto should consider designating a number of appointments as reserved for members of the Black community within City agencies, boards or commission that are providing services in heavily populated Black locales, or that are heavily utilized by Black Torontonians.
- Finally, though Black-led and Black-serving organizations have the above-mentioned but time-specific funding to provide board governance training to Black Torontonians, the City of Toronto through its Public Appointment Office should provide a permanent

training resource specifically geared towards Black Torontonians to sustain an increased level of Black appointments.

#### **4. Improving Customer Service**

The City has helped to formulate a disaggregated race-based data collection strategy that will be crucial in providing evidence-based data on anti-Black racism and guide the City of Toronto to improve its customer service towards Black Torontonians. This data will highlight systematic issues in areas such as policing, Children's Aid and housing, and their impact on the city's Black citizenry. The Confronting Anti-Black Racism Unit (CARB) has also established a community of practice for demographic data collection in the City to highlight best practices and to share them. In addition, it has established a Black experts working group to provide guidance and feedback on demographic data collection questions. Customer service is integral to the work of the City and these are important steps taken by Unit to improve the customer experience of Black Torontonians interfacing with the City.

There are specific recommendations pertaining to the TPS and how it can combat anti-Black racism in its work and engagement with the Black community. We observed a resistance among its members to create a committee/subcommittee focused on this objective.

#### **Recommendation**

- Focus on the Toronto Police Service. Based on the statistics and research gathered, the mandatory learning program for City Staff and law enforcement officers in the frontline of the TPS is the only key deliverable that has come to fruition. The leveraging of Black subject matter experts knowledge and embedding said capacity within the organization has yet to be completed. The community's interaction with TPS has a long-standing history of tension and pushback. This pushback was made even clearer when PAC members sat in on the TPS community liaison committees' meeting, alongside active police officers. It is critical to maintain pressure and focus on this effort in order to properly evaluate (1) that this initiative becomes a reality in the TPS, (2) how its evolution positively impacts the community, and (3) if it is not successful, how can we readjust based on the results of its existence.