

Addressing Anti-Black Racism in Ottawa

Forum Summary Report

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ottawa local immigration partnership | partenariat local pour l'immigration d'ottawa



City for All Women Initiative
Initiative: une ville pour toutes les femmes

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Thanks to the following for donating to cover the cost of the event:



Public Service Alliance of Canada
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The development of this report was funded by:



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FOREWORD

Ottawa Local Immigration Partnership (OLIP), City for All Women Initiative (CAWI), and local Black community members came together in August 2016 to hold a forum to explore the perspectives of Ottawa residents on how anti-Black racism affects their lives. This report summarizes what we heard.

Organizations



City for All Women Initiative (CAWI), www.cawi-ivtf.org, is a partnership among women from diverse communities, community organizations, academics, and the City of Ottawa. CAWI promotes and creates systemic change, using participatory and creative processes that draw upon the strengths, cultural expression, values, and knowledge that women across diversity have to offer.

For more information on Ottawa's black communities visit Profiles on CAWI sub-site: equityandinclusion.ca.

Ottawa Local Immigration Partnership (OLIP), www.olip-plio.ca, is a multi-sectoral partnership involving 60 organizations working together to strengthen local capacity to attract, settle, and integrate immigrants. Our vision is a vibrant, prosperous, and inclusive national capital that is strengthened by the contribution of immigrants.



Equity Ottawa is a multi-sectoral partnership, co-founded by OLIP and Centretown Community Health Centre, working to build organizations' capacities for equity of immigrants and racialized people. Engaging with Ottawa's diverse communities, service providers and other stakeholders, and with Ontario Trillium Foundation support, we seek to advance equity in Ottawa through collective action.

Forum Contributors, August 2016

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Ottawa Local Immigration Partnership (OLIP), City for All Women Initiative (CAWI), and local Black community members came together in August 2016 at a community forum to discuss how anti-Black racism affects the lives of Ottawa's Black residents. This report summarizes what we heard.

Our purpose in documenting participants' discussions, concerns and recommendations is to support continued reflection on anti-Black racism and to contribute to a collective effort to identify priorities and actions that advance racial equity in Ottawa.

Ottawa is home to an increasing number of Black residents, who account for more than one-quarter of Ottawa's racialized population. There is strong evidence that members of Black communities in Ottawa, Ontario, and Canada face major inequities. Numerous government reports and community recommendations have articulated these inequities. On top of these generalized and at times normalized equity gaps, concerns about anti-Black racism have gained greater public attention in recent months following the visibility of protests by the Black Lives Matter movement and the recent death of Abdirahman Abdi, a 37 year old refugee from Somalia, during an arrest by Ottawa police officers.

More than 300 people participated in the Anti-Black Racism Forum, held at Ottawa City Hall. Most attendees identified as members of Ottawa's diverse Black communities. One-quarter of the participants were young people, with many being university students. With regards to their professions, participants said they worked in social and settlement services organizations, social policy institutes, the field of law, and community development initiatives or agencies. Non-Black attendees included executives of social service organizations, members of the Ottawa police, provincial and municipal government representatives, and citizens.

Through eleven small group discussions, each led by experts from Ottawa's Black communities, participants identified many shared concerns that have persisted over time. They put forward recommendations for addressing anti-Black racism in education, employment, social services (focusing on mental health and gender-based violence), policing (including courts and prisons), community and civic engagement, Islamophobia, and media representation.

Remarkably, we found that two major concerns were put forward by all of the small group discussions. These two concerns, identified in the report as overarching, are: 1) Recognition of Anti-Black racism and institutional accountability for addressing it; and 2) Effective civic engagement of Ottawa's diverse Black community members.

1. Recognition of Anti-Black Racism, Accountability, and Oversight of Institutions

Participants see key institutions as insufficiently responsive to Black community concerns. Denial of anti-Black racism affects people's ability to trust certain institutions, such as police and the justice system. Participants want institutions' leaders to understand how anti-Black racism is systemic and how it affects their access to services and employment, their treatment in the education system, their well-being, and their safety and security. Participants also want institutions to understand how gender, age, abilities, sexual orientation, and other social categories affect people's experiences of anti-Black racism.

Participants want institutions to be accountable to Black communities and the public for addressing anti-Black racism. One important recommendation that arose in multiple sessions is for institutions to collect and make public racially disaggregated data, and set performance indicators to monitor progress in addressing racism and differential outcomes along race lines.

Participants are concerned about the lack of effective oversight of key institutions, for example in law enforcement, justice, and education. The City of Ottawa, the Province of Ontario, oversight bodies, and other institutions were identified as having key roles to play in ensuring accountability for addressing anti-Black racism.

2. Effective Civic Engagement of Ottawa's Diverse Black Community

The diversity within Ottawa's Black community and related difficulties of connectivity across cultures, combined with the varied experiences of anti-Black racism linked to individuals' social locations, were raised as obstacles hindering effective engagement and effective measures to hold key institutions accountable to the community.

The significance of this over-arching concern is elevated by the fact that Black people tend to be under-represented in staff and leadership ranks of most organizations that greatly affect their lives. Thus successful civic engagement by the members of Ottawa's Black community is essential in Ottawa's strategies to counter anti-Black racism. Participants identified the need for a well-connected, well-informed, and diverse population of Black community members who can provide a common, strong voice on issues of systemic anti-Black racism and promote positive change.

The Anti-Black Racism Forum was a clear manifestation of the strong engagement of Black community members. Most participants expressed a desire to hold follow-up forums to continue meeting and sharing with a wide diversity of Black community members.

While preparing this summary report, we have learned that Black community members who did not previously know each other have come together after the Forum to create new community initiatives, such as the **Young Leaders Advisory Council**, to engage Black youth.

Summary of Forum Recommendations

1. SOCIAL SERVICES, WITH FOCUS ON MENTAL HEALTH AND GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

Participants identified anti-Black racism, stigma and related barriers that prevent people from seeking or obtaining mental health services and services for survivors of gender-based violence. They noted that Black community members are more often frontline workers than in management, policy-making, or research.

Participants recommend that social service organizations acknowledge the impact of systemic anti-Black racism on clients and staff; address the barriers that Black community members, including those facing multiple forms of marginalization, experience; implement employment equity and anti-racism training; and improve engagement with and accountability to service users and the public.

Participants recommend that Black community members come together to hold social service organizations accountable for addressing anti-Black racism; participate in organizations' governance; create spaces for healing; and create coalitions for promoting Black people's voices and leadership.

2. EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

Black students' and families' experiences in navigating Ottawa's school system indicate that systemic and individual racism are impacting the quality and outcomes of education for Black students, affecting Black youths' life outcomes, including access to higher education and employment.

For example, many Black students feel excluded or face low expectations and high dropout rates. Another concern was that Ottawa's Black population is not adequately represented in or engaged with local school systems, teaching staff, management, and elected boards.

Beyond education, Black residents face barriers to employment, including systemic racism and lack of representation at management and policy levels.

Participants recommend that school boards, trustees, and governments acknowledge and address anti-Black racism and its effects on students' well-being, academic and career prospects. Participants call for collection of disaggregated data, extension of successful equity programs, and improved engagement and support of Black communities.

Participants recommend that Black community members work across the diversity of their communities to hold school boards and the provincial government accountable for addressing anti-Black racism. They want Black communities to support members navigating the education system, provide mentorship, and learn from diverse experiences.

Participants recommend that employers address barriers and implement employment equity.

3. POLICING AND JUSTICE

Despite measures that the Ottawa Police Service (OPS) has put forward in recent years, such as the Racial Profiling Policy and the Traffic Stop Race Data Collection Project, participants expressed major concerns with policing.

These concerns include a lack of trust in police, resulting from over-policing, public denial of racism, and lack of disciplinary actions against officers who exhibit racism or discrimination. Participants want the OPS's Community Police Action Committee (COMPAC) and Youth Action Committee (YAC) to be more transparent and accountable. Participants emphasized the need for more in-depth discussions around racism and racial profiling, in addition to community engagement events such as basketball games.

Participants raised concerns about the oversight roles of the Ottawa Police Services Board and of Ontario's Special Investigations Unit.

Participants recommend that the OPS acknowledge that issues of systemic racism exist within the OPS. They want the OPS to hire and promote racialized officers, address officer discipline for racist behaviour, extend race data collection to on-foot street checks, and monitor performance on key equity measures. They also want to see improved community engagement and accountability.

Participants recommend that the Ottawa Police Services Board hold the Chief of Police and OPS accountable for equitable policing. They also want the OPS Board to improve community consultation.

Participants recommend that the Ontario Provincial Government support and fund police services to address concerns around racial profiling, recruit more racialized community members, and improve community engagement. Participants want the Government of Ontario to hold police services accountable for addressing systemic racism and racial profiling, and make the Special Investigations Unit more publicly accountable.

4. MEDIA REPRESENTATION

Participants felt that Black communities were under-represented, particularly in Francophone mainstream media, and that stories often stigmatize Black communities. Participants raised concerns about the quality of community-based media programs, noting that opportunities to explore social issues and bring diverse Black communities together were not being utilized.

Participants recommend that Radio-Canada and mainstream media acknowledge that lack of positive coverage of Black communities and lack of engagement of Black experts on stories are part of institutional anti-Black racism. They recommend that mainstream media engage communities in order to address this.

Participants recommend that Black community-based media producers network with journalists, bloggers, podcasters, and journalism students in order to improve programming, connect Ottawa's Black communities, and strengthen the community's voice to counter anti-Black racism.

Participants recommend that Black community members strategize on how to improve representation of Black communities in Ottawa media, for example by engaging the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC), media ombudsmen, and the federal Minister of Heritage.

In conclusion, we believe the Ottawa Forum on Anti-Black Racism provided an important public space for giving visibility to anti-Black racism and its effects, and for putting forward ideas to address the challenges. These ideas will be of interest to the Ottawa public at large as well as the institutions named in the report, including social service providers, the Ottawa Police Service, school boards, media, the Government of Ontario, the City of Ottawa, and others.

A working group of forum organizers has taken on the tasks of informing stakeholders of the forum outcomes and furthering effective Black community building. Local institutions, leaders, and communities will need to work together to deal with the complex and historically rooted nature of anti-Black racism.

Our collective responsibility—to the Ottawa community and to future generations—is to consider and act on these recommendations and take other steps necessary to eliminate anti-Black racism and create an equitable society. Forum organizers, CAWI, OLIP, and Equity Ottawa invite others to join them in this endeavour.

I. OVERVIEW

Context

In 1992, Stephen Lewis, who had been appointed as the Ontario Advisor on Race Relations, identified anti-Black racism as one of the most pervasive forms of racism in the province, affecting the criminal justice system, law enforcement, employment, and education.¹

FORUM LEARNING HIGHLIGHT 1: OTTAWA'S BLACK COMMUNITY

there are over
60,000
BLACK COMMUNITY MEMBERS
IN OTTAWA-GATINEAU. THIS IS THE LARGEST
RACIALIZED GROUP IN THE REGION at 26%.



THE MAJORITY CLAIM ETHNIC ORIGINS FROM AFRICAN COUNTRIES

SOMALIA (9,120), CONGO (4,270),
BURUNDI (2,345), ETHIOPIA (2,060)

OTHERS CLAIM ETHNIC ORIGINS FROM CARIBBEAN COUNTRIES

HAITI (12,470), JAMAICA (7,070), TRINIDAD (1,680)




the majority are
PROTESTANT CHRISTIANS

27.1% IDENTIFY AS
MUSLIM



**Black residents make up almost half (47%) of Ottawa's
Francophone immigrant population.**

29.5 
IS THE MEDIAN AGE
FOR BLACK COMMUNITY MEMBERS
IN OTTAWA AND CANADA

Statistics are based on the 2011 National Household Survey (NHS), except the statistic on Ottawa's Black Muslim population from the 2001 NHS. Racialized refers to persons, other than Aboriginal peoples, who are non-Caucasian and self-identify as a visible minority.

¹ Stephen Lewis Report on Race Relations in Ontario (1992): <http://www.ontla.on.ca/library/repository/mon/13000/134250.pdf> Anti-Black racism is a term used in Lewis's report to describe the particular biases and stereotypes, implicit or explicit, which exist within many systems in Ontario and impact the lives of Black people particularly in regards to racial profiling by law enforcement, academic streaming in the education system, and disproportionate levels of unemployment or underemployment.

Unfortunately, almost a quarter century later, Lewis has stated there is little indication of improvement on these issues.²

Anti-Black racism persists at a time when an increasing number of Black people live in the province. In Ottawa, Black communities make up the largest racialized group in the city, accounting for more than one-quarter of Ottawa-Gatineau's racialized population. The Black population in Ottawa has increased significantly over the last two decades, mainly due to immigrant and refugee arrivals, although about one half of Ottawa's Black population are Canadian-born.

Recently, concerns about racism and its effects on Black communities have been gaining public attention, with the increasing number and visibility of protests by the Black Lives Matter movement, following numerous incidents involving members of the Black community and police officers, in both the United States and Canada.

Coinciding with the planning of Ottawa's Anti-Black Racism Forum, Abdirahman Abdi—a 37 year old Black man, a refugee living with mental illness—died during an altercation with Ottawa police officers. This added to heightened public concern and underscored the dire need for a public conversation on long-standing challenges.

FORUM LEARNING HIGHLIGHT 2: UNDERSTANDING ANTI-BLACK RACISM

Anti-Black racism describes the nexus of intersecting oppressions, rooted in history and in our systems, which Black people in Canada experience. Anti-Black racism devalues Black lives and disadvantages Black people in social, economic, and political life.¹

Individual racism: The conscious or unconscious beliefs, attitudes, and actions of individuals that attribute value and normality to White people and devalue racialized people.²

Systemic racism: The conscious or unconscious policies, procedures, and practices that exclude, marginalize, and disadvantage racialized communities. Systemic racism is supported by institutional power and by powerful, often unexamined ideas which make racism look normal and justified.³

1 Adapted from Sulaimon Giwa, 2016

2 From CAWI, Equity & Inclusion Lens, Diversity Snapshot: Racialized people, 2016: <http://www.cawi-ivtf.org/equity-inclusion/racialized-people>

3 Ibid.

About the Ottawa Anti-Black Racism Forum

In this context, the City for All Women Initiative (CAWI) and the Ottawa Local Immigration Partnership (OLIP) hosted a forum to explore how Ottawa residents felt anti-Black racism was impacting their lives. The intention was to discuss and draw attention to the effects of anti-Black racism, identify actions needed, and support effective community engagement of and organizing within Ottawa's diverse Black communities.

CAWI members and local Black community workers from the fields of education, settlement, health promotion, law enforcement, justice, and gender-based violence prevention came together to organize the Ottawa Anti-Black Racism Forum on August 8, 2016 at Ottawa City Hall.

2 How a 1992 report on racism in Ontario highlights current problems (Sep. 1, 2016): <http://tvo.org/article/current-affairs/shared-values/how-a-1992-report-on-racism-in-ontario-highlights-current-problems>

Over 300 people participated in the forum, the majority of whom identified as members of Ottawa-Gatineau's Black communities. Due to a broad outreach strategy and participatory planning, Forum attendees came from a wide diversity of Ottawa's Black communities in terms of countries of origin. One quarter of participants were in their twenties and teens, which was important for community representation as the median age for Black people in Ottawa is 29.5 years.³

Participants identified themselves as relatively active and well-informed community members, many of them working in social services, settlement, social policy, law, and community development. Many youth who attended were university students, working on post-secondary degrees in the fields of international development, public administration, law and social work. Non-Black attendees and allies in countering anti-Black racism included executives of social service agencies, elected officials, and residents.

Ottawa City Councillor Catherine McKenney and Deputy Mayor Mark Taylor addressed the forum, and Government of Ontario's Attorney General Yasir Naqvi also attended. The presence of elected officials was important, as participants were able to express their experience of anti-Black racism in the context of municipal, provincial, and federal jurisdictions and engage these levels of government in order to address systemic anti-Black racism.

The forum opened with presentations on the demographics of Ottawa-Gatineau's Black communities, and on the complexities and historic roots of anti-Black racism in Canada (Appendix C). Participants were encouraged to consider how to conduct inclusive organizing (Appendix D) and non-Black participants were invited to consider how to be an ally (see Forum Learning Highlight 5). Participants then moved to discussion sessions on topics identified through community consultation: employment, education, social services (focusing on mental health and gender-based violence), policing (including courts and prisons), the intersection of anti-Black racism and Islamophobia, and media representation.

Subject matter experts from Ottawa's Black communities and CAWI-trained facilitators led the group discussions.⁴ Volunteers from non-Black communities were note-takers in order to prioritize Black voices and participation.

Given the significant turn-out, high level of participant engagement, and the extent of concerns raised, OLIP and CAWI have produced this report for participants, stakeholders, and the public in order to help sustain attention and encourage action on anti-Black racism in Ottawa.⁵ The report also contributes to a collective effort, coordinated by Equity Ottawa, to engage stakeholders and communities in identifying priorities for advancing equity in Ottawa.

3 Statistics Canada, National Household Survey, 2011.

4 See Appendix B for information on session leads.

5 Since the forum, the visibility of anti-Black racism has increased in part due to the Ottawa Police Service's Traffic Stop Race Data Collection Project, Ontario's Independent Police Oversight Review, follow-up to the One Vision One Voice consultations with Black communities regarding their overrepresentation in Ontario's child welfare system, and consultations by Ontario's Anti-Racism Directorate.

LEARNING HIGHLIGHT 3: EFFECTS OF ANTI-BLACK RACISM

Employment and Income

- In Canada in 2006, the unemployment rate for Black people was 73% higher than for non-racialized people. As well, Black people earned 75.6 cents for every dollar a non-racialized worker earned.¹
- More than 40% of Black residents in Ottawa had incomes below the Low Income Cut Off (LICO) threshold—six times more than non-racialized people. Black women were more likely to be living below the LICO.²

Education

- Black students are disproportionately represented among early school leavers (36%) compared to Ottawa's general population (27%).³

Child Welfare

- African Canadians represent more than 40% of children in care in Toronto, although they are only 8.5% of Toronto's population.⁴

Policing and Prisons

- Ottawa Police stopped drivers they perceived as Black more than twice as often as their representation in Ottawa's population would indicate (8.8% of stops compared to 4% of drivers).⁵
- Canada's Black inmate population grew by 69% from 2005-2015. Black people account for 10% of the federal prison population, more than three times their representation rate in the population (3%).⁶
- Black inmates experience higher rates of segregation in federal prisons and are less likely to be granted federal day or full parole.⁷ Black people are also overrepresented in Ontario jails and youth detention centres.

Society

- In Canada in 2012, Black people were the most commonly targeted group for hate crimes motivated by race or ethnicity, accounting for 42% of racial hate crimes and 21% of all hate crimes reported to police. Victims of violent hate crimes targeting Black people were predominantly male (72%), and victims were often young (36% were under age 25).⁸

1 Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, Canada's Colour Coded Labour Market, 2006: <https://www.policyalternatives.ca/publications/reports/canadas-colour-coded-labour-market>

2 CAWI, Equity & Inclusion Lens, Diversity Snapshot: Racialized people, 2016: <http://www.cawi-ivtf.org/equity-inclusion/racialized-people>

3 Ibid.

4 One Vision One Voice: Changing the Ontario Child Welfare System to Better Serve African Canadians, September 2016: http://www.oacas.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/One-Vision-One-Voice-Part-1_digital_english.pdf

5 York Research Report Summary, Traffic Stop Race Data Collection Project: https://www.ottawapolice.ca/en/about-us/resources/.TSRDCP_York_Research_Report_Summary.pdf

6 Annual Report of the Office of the Correctional Investigator 2014-2015: <http://www.oci-bec.gc.ca/cnt/rpt/annrpt/annrpt20142015-eng.aspx>

7 A Case Study of Diversity in Corrections: The Black Inmate Experience in Federal Penitentiaries Final Report Office of the Correctional Investigator <http://www.oci-bec.gc.ca/cnt/rpt/oth-aut/oth-aut20131126-eng.aspx>

8 Police-reported hate crime in Canada, 2012: <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/85-002-x/2014001/article/14028-eng.htm>

FORUM LEARNING HIGHLIGHT 4: AN INTERSECTIONAL APPROACH TO ADDRESSING ANTI-BLACK RACISM

Individuals have multiple identities that affect how they experience discrimination and marginalization. Ottawa's Black communities' experiences of anti-Black racism are complex and vary with each person's:

- Socio-economic background
- Age (including youth marginalization)
- Gender
- Disabilities (including mental illness)
- Culture/country of origin
- Language
- Neighbourhood/region (stigmatization of living in socio-economically marginalized areas)
- Religion (including Islamophobia and lack of engagement with non-mainstream churches)
- Sexual orientation and gender identity

Using an intersectional lens, participants analyzed their diverse experiences, understanding that:

- Each of them might have very different experiences of anti-Black racism in the city;
- Some groups of Black community members might be more vulnerable due to social factors;
- Community outreach and engagement efforts to Black communities might be challenging given this diversity.

FORUM LEARNING HIGHLIGHT 5: HOW TO BE AN ALLY

Participants considered these suggestions¹:

- Listen.
- Be aware of one's own advantages and disadvantages, and how to use them to make a difference.
- Check one's own assumptions, to unlearn biases and stereotypes.
- Stand beside and walk with others.
- Speak up against hurtful comments and insulting actions, rather than wait for others to do so.
- Take steps to make workplaces and services inclusive, safe and welcoming.
- Help others understand discrimination and exclusion.
- Avoid the trap of "knowing what is good for them" and instead encourage their leadership.
- Share power.
- Recognize that being an ally requires ongoing learning.
- Listen some more.

*"It is not enough to say I did not intend to be hurtful;
it is the actual impact that matters, regardless of my intentions."*

1 From CAWI Equity and Inclusion Lens Community Handbook, 2015: <http://www.cawi-ivtf.org/sites/default/files/publications/ei-lens-community-agencies-2015-en.pdf>

Overarching Concerns Raised at the Forum

RECOGNITION OF ANTI-BLACK RACISM, ACCOUNTABILITY AND OVERSIGHT OF INSTITUTIONS

All discussions brought forward the **need to acknowledge that systemic anti-Black racism is a reality in Ottawa**. Participants said that when institutions and their leaders deny or downplay the impact of anti-Black racism, this compounds the already-challenging task of addressing it. Continued denial has a serious impact on people's ability to trust certain institutions, such as police and the justice system.

Participants want leaders of institutions to understand the impact of systemic anti-Black racism on their daily lives as Ottawa residents. They underline that anti-Black racism is affecting their access to services and employment, their treatment in the education system, their well-being, and their safety and security.

Many also want to see consideration of **intersectionality** of identities in understanding the impact of systemic anti-Black racism on Black youth, Black men, Black refugees, Black women, LGBTQ Black community members, socio-economically marginalized Black community members, Black community members living with mental illness, Black Muslim community members, and Black francophone community members.

Participants want institutions to be **accountable**. Participants in multiple discussion sessions expressed that public institutions lack accountability to Black communities, and the public in general, when it comes to understanding and redressing community concerns, following through on past recommendations, and holding institution staff accountable for discriminatory practices.

Participants expressed a lack of satisfaction with existing community advisory mechanisms (e.g. committees of the Ottawa Police Service and the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board). Some participants, despite identifying themselves as engaged and informed, were not aware of these committees. Some questioned the transparency of committee member selection, the accountability of the committees to Black communities, and committees' lack of consultation with the wider community.

Participants identified a need for institutions to collect and make public **racially disaggregated data**, and set performance indicators to **monitor progress** in addressing racism and differential outcomes along race lines.

In the face of so many challenges, and decades of unfulfilled recommendations, participants raised concerns about the lack of **oversight of key institutions**, for example in law enforcement, the justice system, and the education system. They called for oversight bodies to be more publicly accessible and accountable. Oversight bodies for these institutions, as well as the City of Ottawa, the Province of Ontario and others whose jurisdictions or mandates cut across sectors, have a key role to play in holding institutions accountable when it comes to addressing racism and implementing recommendations.

Many participants who have been active for decades on anti-Black racism expressed disappointment at younger Black community members' experiences of discrimination, feeling their efforts had been to no avail.

EFFECTIVE COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND BLACK COMMUNITY BUILDING

Participants expressed a high degree of frustration with the lack of Black community voice, resulting from **ineffective community outreach and engagement** by institutions and even by Black community organizations to Ottawa's diverse Black population.

The lack of acknowledgement of **intersectionality** was cited as one reason why outreach and engagement around services, programs, and participation tended to be ineffective. Another was lack of awareness of the actual **diversity** of Ottawa's Black communities, for example in terms of age and communities of origin. Participants identified the need for institutions and organizations to develop specific strategies to reach out to specific Black communities.

One systemic gap that participants identified in regard to making the forum and overall institutional engagement of Black communities in Ottawa accessible and effective was the lack of **accessible French-language resources and supports** for Ottawa's Francophone Black communities, including people of Haitian, Congolese, Burundian, Rwandan, and Djiboutian origins.

In brief, participants expressed a shared consciousness that acknowledging the diversity within the Black community will enhance: 1) the mobilization of a **common, strong voice against anti-Black racism**; and 2) **institutions' effective outreach and engagement** with diverse segments of Ottawa's Black community. At several sessions, participants identified the need for a **well-connected, well-informed, and diverse population of Black community members** who can advocate on issues of systemic anti-Black racism and promote positive change.

As a result of meeting at the forum, Black community members who did not previously know each other have created **new community initiatives** to more effectively engage Black ethno-culturally diverse young people. For example, some participants have come together to develop the Young Leaders Advisory Council to address the gap in mentorship for Black youth.

Most participants also expressed a desire to hold further forums, as they felt they benefited from meeting and sharing with a wide diversity of Black community members.

II. FORUM RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Social Services, With Focus On Mental Health And Gender-based Violence

CONTEXT

Abdirahman Abdi's death in July 2016 raised many questions about racism and police oversight. It also highlighted the lack of support and treatment for Black community members living with mental illness.

Black community members, including frontline workers within social service organizations, have raised ongoing concerns about the need for more awareness within social service agencies of the barriers that systemic anti-Black racism creates for Black residents. These barriers make it difficult for people to access supports that can foster wellness as well as treat mental illness. Barriers also prevent people from accessing services for coping with family or sexual violence.

SESSION PARTICIPANTS

Two discussion groups focused on mental health, and one on gender-based violence. Mental health session participants were predominantly youth workers, social service workers, health promoters, and community developers, as well as mental health counsellors who work at community resource centres, community health centres, youth-serving organizations, and organizations addressing gender-based violence.

Gender-based violence session participants were mainly staff and/or advocates within local agencies serving survivors of gender-based violence and LGBTQ communities.

Session participants identified socio-economic background, ability, language, immigration/refugee experience, gender identity, and sexual orientation as identity markers that elicit discrimination and inadequate access to health and social services focused on mental health. The same markers were said to have affected vulnerabilities around gender-based violence in Ottawa, as well as supports available to alleviate impact.

KEY CONCERNS

MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

The session lead provided a summary of current research on discrimination in mental health service settings. This included evidence that Black community members have more concerns about pursuing treatment for mental illness than non-Black community members, because of the impact of systemic anti-Black racism.

The reality of police brutality and anti-Black racism experienced everyday means that people hesitate to report illnesses in cases where the police may become involved. They also fear losing their children if diagnosed with a mental illness, stemming from the disproportionate rate at which Black families are investigated by Ontario's Children's Aid Societies.⁶

Images of Black community members in Canada or abroad experiencing violence—for example, police brutality or refugees fleeing—can trigger traumatic memories or fears. With other Black community members themselves coping with trauma, there are a lack of spaces for communal healing. Participants thought that service providers need to understand the mental health effects of this trauma, and the different comfort levels of service users.

Participants raised concerns that Black community members are more often frontline workers than in management, policy-making, or research. Participants who identified themselves as frontline workers in the social service and health sectors reported anti-Black racism towards themselves and/or their clients, and often felt helpless to address it within their organizations. They called for understanding of anti-Black racism and cultural competency at all levels of their organizations, including administration and management. Some stated that social service organizations need to go beyond “the language of anti-racism” to applying anti-racism approaches in serving clients and engaging staff.

Participants raised concerns about the lack of engagement of community members, such as Black community members living with mental illness, in discussions of how to improve services.

GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

Participants shared some of the barriers preventing Black community members from accessing services for survivors of gender-based violence (e.g. shelters, family services, child welfare, mental health services), and for LGBTQ community members. People needing services may not see themselves or their needs reflected, or validated. They may feel less comfortable or safe accessing services due to stigma or experiences of racism, and anti-stigma campaigns do not include faces or voices of racialized communities. Service providers do not adequately address intersectionality (e.g. queer, trans, people with language or financial barriers).

RECOMMENDATIONS

SOCIAL SERVICE ORGANIZATIONS

Recognition of Anti-Black Racism, Accountability and Oversight of Institutions

- 1.1 Acknowledge the impact of systemic anti-Black racism for clients and staff.
- 1.2 Address the barriers that Black community members, including those facing multiple forms of marginalization, experience in accessing services. Provide services that address the needs of racialized as well as newcomer communities.
- 1.3 Improve accountability to service users and the public for appropriate and equitable services.
- 1.4 Develop mandatory anti-racism training for all staff that focuses on treatment of clients, staff interactions, hiring, and promotion.

6 <http://www.oacas.org/what-we-do/government-and-stakeholder-relations/one-vision-one-voice/>

- 1.5 Implement employment equity initiatives that include racialized community members at all levels of the organization.
- 1.6 Create an environment and mechanisms for clients and staff to advocate around change within the agency.

Effective Community Engagement and Black Community Building

- 1.7 Consult with racialized clients experiencing multiple forms of marginalization (e.g. Black youth, Black residents of low-income housing, Black queer and trans people, Black people who have experienced gender-based violence, etc.), and integrate their needs into improved services.
- 1.8 Engage with diverse organizations, including tenant organizations in community housing neighbourhoods, and affordable housing groups; civic organizations led by ethnic and cultural leaders, and religious organizations with large Black populations (e.g., mosques with Black community representation, and predominantly Black churches—Evangelical, Pentecostal, and Orthodox as well as “mainstream” such as United or Anglican); and labour organizations, to more effectively reach out to, engage, and support Black communities.
- 1.9 Create accessible, culturally competent, “peer designed” (i.e., community designed) public education sessions for Black community members that explore their concerns in various public service areas, including mental illness as experienced by different Black communities.

BLACK COMMUNITY MEMBERS

Recognition of Anti-Black Racism, Accountability, and Oversight of Institutions

- 1.10 Come together to explore ways to hold social service organizations accountable for addressing issues of systemic anti-Black racism. This includes involving provincial bodies that govern these institutions.
- 1.11 Advocate for inclusion of Black community members in the governance (including boards) of social service agencies. residents of low-income housing, Black queer and trans people, Black people who have experienced gender.

Effective Community Engagement and Black Community Building

- 1.12 Come together to create spaces for support, healing and advocacy, including healing circles, to address tension and trauma resulting from racism, learn healthy coping skills, and explore advocacy tools (including art).
- 1.13 Create coalitions and networks to amplify Black people’s voices, including those of racialized survivors of gender-based violence.
- 1.14 Encourage, support, and mentor Black community members working or hoping to work within the field of social services.

2. Education and Employment

CONTEXT

Systemic anti-Black racism within the Ontario education system, and its effects on students' employment and life outcomes, are ongoing concerns. Experiences of Black students and their families in navigating Ottawa's school system indicate that systemic and individual racism are impacting the quality of education for Black students.

In a recent precedent-setting case, the mother of Ottawa student Winston Karam successfully sued the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board when they did not take action to address the anti-Black racist bullying he was experiencing at his elementary school.⁷

SESSION PARTICIPANTS

Three discussion groups on education and employment focused on concerns with the school boards, and the impact that Black students' experiences at schools have on their higher education and employment prospects. Participants included educators, current and former school students, university students, young professionals, and members of the public.

KEY CONCERNS

EDUCATION IN OTTAWA

Participants raised concerns about both systemic and individual anti-Black racism within Ottawa's education system. Many Black students feel excluded and alienated in school environments, because their experiences are not reflected in curricula, and their communities not always understood by educators. Low morale and disengagement are common in many schools. Low expectations by teachers and guidance counsellors and everyday racism and discriminatory behaviour feed into the low morale. Many students are not sufficiently engaged and there are high dropout rates, particularly in low income neighborhoods.

Participants expressed concerns that Black youth may be disproportionately channelled towards non-academic fields through streaming, and that Black students, particularly Black male students, are disciplined more frequently, due to bias.

Programs such as mentorship, buddy systems, and **Pathways to Education** are effective in raising graduation rates, but capacity and coverage limitations mean they can support only limited numbers of participants.

Participants discussed the reality that Black parents struggling economically or facing language barriers have less opportunity to advocate for their children or liaise with teachers, parent councils, or trustees. Participants were concerned that boards of trustees are not engaged with the impact of anti-Black racism on Black students.

⁷ More about the Winston Karam case: <http://www.nationalobserver.com/2016/07/21/his-ottawa-school-failed-stop-racist-bullying-then-they-blamed-him>

Another concern was that Ottawa's Black population is not adequately represented in local school systems, teaching staff, management, and elected boards, despite extremely diverse student populations. Some schools have become hubs for immigrants and refugees, many from the Black community.

Failure or limited success in the education system affects Black youths' life outcomes, including incidents with law enforcement, access to higher education, and good jobs. There is therefore much at stake with the education system.

EMPLOYMENT

Participants identified barriers to employment success that their non-racialized counterparts did not face to the same extent, such as lack of representation at policy levels, lack of culturally sensitive hiring practices, and lack of connections for finding work. Participants noted that employers do not always recognize qualifications of people who have worked or studied in other countries.

Some Black community members felt they were expected to confront anti-Black racism in their workplaces, but were then criticized for doing so.

RECOMMENDATIONS

SCHOOL BOARDS, TRUSTEES, AND GOVERNMENTS

Recognition of Anti-Black Racism, Accountability, and Oversight of Institutions

- 2.1 Acknowledge and address anti-Black racism and its effects on students' well-being, and on their academic and career prospects.
- 2.2 Collect disaggregated data on school performance, school drop-out rates, graduation rates, credit accumulation, student wellbeing, etc. Take action to address gaps.
- 2.3 Extend and increase resources for successful programs, such as Pathways to Education and mentorship, which assist Black students to deal with complex challenges. Enable students no matter where they live to access these programs.

Effective Community Engagement and Black Community Building

- 2.4 Increase Black community engagement with the education system. Organize public consultations with racialized community members in order to address their concerns around racial discrimination.
- 2.5 School board trustees must reach out to their communities to discuss anti-Black racism and its devastating impacts on the lives of Black students.
- 2.6 Ensure that committees such as OCDSB's Advisory Committee on Equity (ACE) represent the ethno-cultural diversity of racialized students. Consult with the public and review ACE's role in holding the school system accountable and facilitating engagement with Black communities.
- 2.7 Pursue resources to support Black parents to advocate for their children. Address issues of poverty and disadvantage that affect representation and engagement of Black families.

EMPLOYERS

Recognition of Anti-Black Racism, Accountability, and Oversight of Institutions

- 2.8 Implement employment equity, and remove workplace barriers for racialized people.
- 2.9 Recognize credentials, and ensure that recruiting is done in a culturally sensitive way.

Black COMMUNITY MEMBERS

Recognition of Anti-Black Racism, Accountability, and Oversight of Institutions

- 2.10 Work across the full diversity of Ottawa's Black communities to hold local school boards and the provincial government accountable to address the impact of systemic anti-Black racism in Ottawa's education system.

Effective Community Engagement and Black Community Building

- 2.11 Develop public education and communities of support to help Black families navigate the education system. Identify mentors and inspirational speakers who have faced and overcome the challenges Black students in Ottawa face.
- 2.12 Organize more discussions in order to hear and learn from the diverse experiences of Black community members.

3. Policing and Justice

CONTEXT

Concerns about anti-Black racism within the Ottawa Police Service (OPS) are ongoing, exacerbated by numerous, highly visible incidents since the 1990s (see box on right). The most recent, the death of Abdirahman Abdi while two police officers were apprehending him in July 2016, brought greater public attention to these concerns.

Among the many responses that the OPS put forward to such incidents and public concerns were the establishment of a Community Development Section, a Diversity and Race Relations Section, and the Community Police Action Committee (COMPAC).⁸

More recently, OPS introduced the Racial Profiling Policy, training for officers on implicit bias, and the Traffic Stop Race Data Collection Project as a result of settlements with the Ontario Human Rights Commission in a court case mounted after complaints by Black community members (see box).⁹

Despite the introduction of such measures, the participants of the Anti-Black Racism Forum expressed major concerns with OPS.

SESSION PARTICIPANTS

Participants discussed policing and anti-Black racism, as well as courts and prisons, at two forum discussion sessions. Members of the OPS, both civilian and sworn, participated in both sessions. Other participants included university students active in Black Lives Matter, Save Our Somali Youth, and the Justice for Abdirahman Coalition; community developers from local

⁸ The Community Police Action Committee (COMPAC), established in 1999, has positions designated for different Black ethno-cultural communities such as Jamaican, Haitian, Somali, and Black African Francophone.

⁹ Ontario Human Rights Commission, Ottawa Police agree to collect race-based data, http://www.ohrc.on.ca/en/news_centre/ottawa-police-agree-collect-race-based-data, (May 4, 2012).

Escalated Incidents Involving Police Officers and Members of Ottawa’s Black Community

1991: Vincent Gardner is shot while unarmed during a drug raid.

1995: Wayne Johnson drowns in the Rideau River after police respond to a domestic dispute.

1995: Ralph Kirkland is arrested after refusing to provide police with identification. He was fined and then sued by the police for defamation after he contended he was racially profiled.

2004: The Ambassador Bar & Grill restaurant is raided by police responding to a report of a Black man with a gun. All Black people in the restaurant were put in handcuffs. The only white person in the restaurant was left alone. In 2009, the restaurant owners reached a financial settlement with OPS. The Ontario Human Rights Tribunal recommended OPS introduce a racial profiling policy, which it did in 2011.

2005: Chad Aiken filed a complaint against the police after being stopped while driving his mother’s Mercedes-Benz. He alleged racial profiling. A partial settlement was reached in 2010, and included OPS’s Traffic Stop Race Data Collection Project.

2008: A video of Stacy Bonds’ treatment in the Elgin Street Station cellblock is released to media, causing public outrage.

2015: A report to the Ottawa Police Service Board revealed that between 2011 and 2014, 20% of street checks were on Black people. Black people make up less than 6% of Ottawa’s population.

2016: Abdirahman Abdi, a 37 year old refugee living with mental illness, died when police attempted to detain him. His beating by police was witnessed by neighbours and family and caught on video.

community health centres, settlement agencies managers, prisoner support workers, community youth workers, lawyers, government researchers, and crime prevention advocates, as well as people with lived experience in low-income neighborhoods.

KEY CONCERNS

OVER-POLICING AND RACIAL PROFILING

Participants expressed not trusting that police are addressing racial profiling when the President of the Ottawa Police Association and the Police Chief have refused to acknowledge in the media that there are issues of racism within the OPS. Community workers and researchers expressed concerns about lack of public awareness about how the OPS was implementing policies and training to address racial profiling.

Participants raised concerns about street checks and stops by police. They shared stories of police stopping and questioning Black boys as young as 9 to 12 years of age in socio-economically marginalized neighbourhoods across the city.

Those working with youth from these communities expressed concern that Black children thought police viewed them as suspicious, which affected their perception of **police as a force to fear and avoid, not as an institution that is there to serve and protect them**. Some noted that youth may not realize they are being discriminated against, because high levels of scrutiny are normalized.

For parents from newcomer communities, often with refugee backgrounds, learning that their children had been stopped and questioned by police was said to be traumatic.

Black parents expressed a strong concern that this over-policing is connected to the criminalization of Black young men and their over-representation in prisons. They saw this matter as requiring urgent attention.

Forum participants also shared as a serious concern the dramatic overrepresentation of Black community members in provincial and federal prisons. Participants fear that the overpolicing of their communities combined with lack of supports to help Black community members and their families navigate the criminal justice system, was resulting in this dramatically high incarceration rate.

LACK OF EFFECTIVE COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Session participants who identified themselves as being well informed about civic issues shared that they were not aware of the work of OPS's Community Police Action Committee (COMPAC) or Youth Advisory Committee (YAC). Some expressed surprise at discovering there was a representative for their particular community on COMPAC, or questioned the selection process and mandate of YAC, challenging whether it addressed important issues like racism. This led to questions about these committees' accountability to the communities they intend to represent. Participants also asked whether there were independent assessments of the impact of these committees in relation to their mandates.

People questioned the impact of community engagement events such as police-youth basketball games. They emphasized the need for more in-depth discussions between police and communities, particularly in socio-economically marginalized communities, around issues of racism and racial profiling by police, in addition to community events like BBQs and basketball games.

Participants raised concerns about the extent to which community consultation opportunities are promoted within Black communities and socio-economically marginalized communities. Given that significant numbers of Ottawa’s Black communities are more comfortable expressing themselves in French, the lack of bilingual community consultations was raised as a serious barrier.

Participants observed that the police service does not reflect Ottawa’s changing demographics. They raised concerns about the decrease in hiring of Black police officers, and recommended that more racialized officers should help with outreach and recruitment, as people will be more likely to consider a career in policing if they see people like themselves in the role.

LACK OF POLICE OVERSIGHT

Session participants raised concerns about the role of the Ottawa Police Services Board in holding the OPS chief and senior executives accountable for addressing issues of racism and racial profiling. They also questioned what requirement the Board’s community representatives have to consult with communities. They thought the Board should play a stronger role in requiring that the OPS address the decrease in hiring of racialized police officers.

Participants noted a lack of awareness within Black communities about the process of filing complaints against police, and about their rights when approached by police. Some participants thought independent community groups should conduct public education on residents’ rights against police brutality. Participants were concerned that OPS’ racial profiling policies have not led to disciplinary actions against officers who exhibit racial profiling or racist tendencies in their work. Participants expressed that the Special Investigations Unit (SIU) lacks transparency and accountability to the communities it is supposed to protect from police brutality.¹⁰

RECOMMENDATIONS

OTTAWA POLICE SERVICE

Recognition of Anti-Black Racism, Accountability, and Oversight of Institutions

- 3.1 Acknowledge that there are issues of systemic racism within the OPS.
- 3.2 Make clear, publicly accessible guidelines on how officers will be disciplined if they exhibit racist behaviour. Educate the public about these guidelines.
- 3.3 Set measurable performance indicators for the implementation of the OPS Racial Profiling Policy with clear deadlines to be met.
- 3.4 Hire and promote officers from racialized communities. Set clear targets for increasing the number of racialized residents hired as police officers, including in higher ranks of the OPS. Update racialized communities regularly about how the OPS is progressing on key equity measures.
- 3.5 Extend the Traffic Stops Race Data Collection to include on-foot street checks and stops.

Effective Community Engagement and Black Community Building

- 3.6 Increase the accountability of the Community Police Action Committee (COMPAC) to the racialized communities it represents. Consult with communities about what the criteria for their community

10 The Special Investigations Unit (SIU) was established in 1990 in response to public outrage and protest, particularly by Toronto’s Black communities, around police brutality. Concerns about the SIU’s credibility arose early on and are documented in Stephen Lewis’ “Racism in Ontario: Report to the Premier” in 1992.

representative should be, what they would like to see this person do on their behalf, and how they want the representative to communicate with them.

- 3.7 Promote the work of the YAC among Black youth. Address their concerns about the YAC.
- 3.8 Set measurable performance indicators for COMPAC and YAC based on community consultations.
- 3.9 Support racialized officers doing outreach to racialized communities, including youth, to address community-police distrust and promote policing as a viable career option.

OTTAWA POLICE SERVICES BOARD

Recognition of Anti-Black Racism, Accountability, and Oversight of Institutions

- 3.10 Hold the Chief of Police accountable for effective implementation of policies and training aimed at addressing racial profiling, and other measures of equitable policing.
- 3.11 Hold the Chief of Police accountable for ensuring more outreach is done to recruit racialized police officers in order to better reflect Ottawa's changing demographics.

Effective Community Engagement and Black Community Building

- 3.12 Organize regular community consultations that focus on addressing community concerns around racism and policing.
- 3.13 Ensure that community representatives on the Ottawa Police Services Board do regular public consultation on community-police concerns.

ONTARIO PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT

Recognition of Anti-Black Racism, Accountability, and Oversight of Institutions

- 3.14 Designate funding for police services to take the necessary steps to address concerns around racial profiling.
- 3.15 Hold police services accountable for setting measurable performance indicators for the implementation of policies to address systemic racism and racial profiling.
- 3.16 Amend the Police Services Act to outline disciplinary actions to be taken when police officers demonstrate racism and racial profiling.
- 3.17 Make the Special Investigations Unit (SIU), and their reports, publicly accessible and accountable.
- 3.18 Fund supports to help Black community members and their families navigate the criminal justice system. This should include ensuring that Francophone Black community members have easy access to services and resources in French.
- 3.19 Eliminate the institutional barriers that prevent successful reintegration into the community after incarceration; fund specialized programs for Black community members coming out of detention to reintegrate into their communities and find employment. For those at risk of incarceration, fund and support programs designed to improve their access to employment and community support.

Effective Community Engagement and Black Community Building

- 3.19 Designate funding for police services to recruit more racialized community members.
- 3.20 Designate funding to ensure that police's community engagement initiatives become more effective and are not reduced due to budget cuts.
- 3.21 Improve engagement of Black community members, including youth, in the justice system.

4. Media Representation

Media in Ottawa

Local English and French mainstream media outlets include newspapers, radio and TV stations. A few have hired reporters from Ottawa's Black communities.

Community media organizations such as Rogers TV, and campus radio stations such as CHUO and CKCU, carry programs for specific Black ethno-cultural communities in English, French, and other languages.

For decades, The Spectrum newspaper provided information for Black community members of Caribbean origins about social and political issues, including community-police relations.

Now, Black on Black, a radio program on CHUO, shares information and raises social issues with Ottawa's English speaking Black communities. Black Ottawa Scene is a website collecting the stories of Black community leaders and changemakers. Frequence Antilles, also on CHUO, plays a similar role for Francophone Black communities.

CONTEXT

Media, both mainstream and community-based media, play an important role in the quality and accuracy of public conceptions and discourse about the realities of community life.

Mainstream media can help shape the public's image of a racialized community both positively and negatively.

Community-based media can and do play a key role in supporting racialized communities by offering community-specific programming produced by racialized community members.

SESSION PARTICIPANTS

The Forum included one session on media, held in French due to participant preference. Participants included Black community members from predominantly Francophone communities such as the Haitian, Congolese, Burundian, Djiboutian, and other Western/Central African communities. They included university students, community-based media producers, journalists, and civil servants.

KEY CONCERNS

MAINSTREAM MEDIA IN OTTAWA

Participants felt that Black communities were under-represented in Francophone mainstream media, despite the fact that Black communities make up a significant part of Ottawa's Francophone community. As well, stories about Black communities that focus on issues such as gangs (e.g. in Vanier and Lowertown) further stigmatize marginalized communities. Black communities' countries of origin are often portrayed as dysfunctional and poor when discussed. A lack of positive Black community news coverage, and lack of stories that normalize Black communities as part of Ottawa's Francophone communities, adversely affect Black communities, and young Black males and socio-economically marginalized Black communities in particular. Participants expressed a higher level of satisfaction with how Black communities are portrayed on CBC Ottawa's radio and TV coverage, with positive news stories, a diversity of Black subject matter experts interviewed, and a balancing of negative topics such as gang violence with coverage of what Black communities are doing to address the problem.

COMMUNITY-BASED MEDIA IN OTTAWA

Participants raised concerns about the quality of community-based media programs focused on Black community audiences. They felt that the opportunity to use media to inform community members and explore relevant social issues was not being utilized.

They also noted that many programs in community-based media were specific to certain Black ethno-cultural communities such as Haitian, Jamaican, or Somali, with only one English program, Black on Black, aimed at bringing diverse Black communities together.

RECOMMENDATIONS

RADIO-CANADA OTTAWA AND MAINSTREAM MEDIA

Recognition of Anti-Black Racism, Accountability, and Oversight of Institutions

- 4.1 Acknowledge that lack of positive coverage of Black communities and engagement of Black subject matter experts on stories that affect Black communities is part of institutional anti-Black racism. Improve and balance coverage to address this gap.

Effective Community Engagement and Black Community Building

- 4.2 Organize a forum with local Black community connectors and subject matter experts, and producers and reporters from Radio-Canada, to network, explore stories, and discuss how to address negative coverage of the community.

BLACK COMMUNITY-BASED MEDIA PRODUCERS

Effective Community Engagement and Black Community Building

- 4.3 Create a local network of ethno-culturally diverse Anglophone and Francophone Black community-based media producers, journalists, bloggers, podcasters, and journalism students, with the aim of connecting Ottawa's Black community members and strengthening the community's voice to counter anti-Black racism.
- 4.4 Work with organizations such as the National Campus and Community Radio Association (NCCA), local journalism programs, and individuals with backgrounds in journalism and communications to improve the capacity and quality of local Black community-based media programming.

BLACK COMMUNITY MEMBERS

Effective Community Engagement and Black Community Building

- 4.5 Strategize together on how to address problems with representation of Black communities in Ottawa media, for example by engaging the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC), media ombudsmen, and the federal Minister of Heritage.

III. CONCLUSION AND NEXT STEPS

The Ottawa Forum on Anti-Black Racism brought together community members with lived experience of anti-Black racism, allies, and representatives of local institutions.

We believe the Forum provided an important public space for giving visibility to anti-Black racism and its effects, for naming specific challenges, and for putting forward ideas that will address the challenges discussed. While a large proportion of Forum attendees were members of Ottawa’s diverse Black community, the content of this report and the solution ideas proposed are of interest to the Ottawa public at large and to the institutions named in this report: social service providers, school boards, the Ottawa Police Service, media, the Province of Ontario, the City of Ottawa, and others.

The entire Ottawa community and stakeholders need to be concerned about anti-Black racism, how it manifests itself under different systems, and how it disproportionately affects Black residents while diminishing the lives of all residents.

A working group of Forum organizers has taken on the tasks of informing stakeholders of the Forum outcomes and furthering effective Black community building, working with Black community members.¹¹ Local institutions, leaders and communities will need to work together to deal with the complex and historically rooted structural forces that produce and reproduce inequities, and address the relationships of power and privilege that maintain those inequities.

Our collective responsibility—to our Ottawa community and to future generations—is to consider and act on these recommendations and take other steps necessary to eliminate anti-Black racism and create an equitable society. Forum organizers, CAWI, OLIP, and Equity Ottawa invite others to join them in this endeavour.

11 See Appendix A for insights into effective Black community engagement.

APPENDIX A:

Towards Effective Black Community Engagement

The Ottawa Anti-Black Racism Forum had an immediate impact on Ottawa’s Black communities, as it not only provided a space for people to discuss their concerns about systemic anti-Black racism within institutions in Ottawa, but also recognized the gaps in how these institutions and even Black community initiatives have engaged and consulted Black communities.

Ottawa’s Black communities are very diverse in terms of ethno-cultural origins, socio-economic background, religious identity, migration experience, age and language. On top of that, issues like mental illness, gender-based violence, and LGBTQ issues have seldom been discussed in Black community forums due to stigma. Unfortunately, active outreach to Black communities has seldom consciously tried to reflect this diversity. In organizing this forum, we tried to be different with how we did outreach, and we feel we were successful in attracting forum participants who more accurately reflected the demographics of Ottawa’s Black communities. How we achieved this was simple. We found talented and skilled Black community members from a diversity of identities to lead our sessions. We then worked with them and multiple Black community connectors to promote the forum via social media and email networks. As always, word of mouth was important, and speaking on Black community radio programs was essential. People trusted that it was worth their time to attend our forum because “people like them” told them it was worth their time.

We opened the forum by simply listing some aspects of the demographic diversity of Black people in Ottawa in terms of age, ethno-cultural origins, and religious identity—and people’s surprise at some of these facts was visible.

We also presented a definition of intersectionality which attempted to firmly establish the forum as a space for Black community members with identities that have been stigmatized to feel safer in sharing their realities. One session focused on the intersection of anti-Black racism and mental health was led by a young Black woman who lives with a mental illness. Another session that focused on gender-based violence provided space for participants to address the barriers faced in accessing supports by women and LGBTQ Black community members in Ottawa.

We acknowledged that religious identity is also an important factor in the lives of Black people in Ottawa and we created a healing space at the forum for Black community members impacted by Islamophobia in the city, as we recognized at the forum that 27% of Black people in Ottawa identify as Muslim and therefore face prejudice on yet another front.¹

1 The Black Community of Ottawa: An Analysis of Socio-economic Inequality Using the 2001 Census Data. Social Planning Council of Ottawa.

With many young Black community members attending the forum—as it should be, given our communities’ demographics—new initiatives grew out of the forum. This includes the **Young Leaders Advisory Council (YLAC)**, which brings together racialized young professionals to offer support to each other and other aspiring professionals in their communities.

Forum participants have also subsequently worked together on two important consultations in Ottawa, one on Ontario’s Independent Police Oversight Review (IPOR) led by Justice Michael Tulloch and the other by Ontario’s Anti-Racism Directorate led by Minister Michael Coteau. At both sessions, we were able to ensure that insights on systemic anti-Black racism also reflected intersecting realities such as gender-based violence, barriers to Francophone Black communities accessing justice, the intersection of anti-Black racism and Islamophobia, challenges facing Black refugee children in Ontario’s education system, difficulties accessing services for Black people living with mental illness, and reflections on Black LGBTQ youth homelessness.

Our hope is that moving forward in Ottawa, we can continue to work together to address systemic anti-Black racism in the city. We are currently in the second year of the United Nations International Decade for People of African Descent (2015-2024). According to Ban Ki-Moon, former Secretary General of the UN, “We must remember that people of African descent are among those most affected by racism. Too often, they face denial of basic rights such as access to quality health services and education.”² So, it is an ideal time for Ottawa to address issues of systemic anti-Black racism within its city’s institutions.

However, we can only do so by also engaging the full diversity of Ottawa’s Black communities by taking the time to do effective outreach, identifying and addressing gaps in how well our initiatives reflect the demographics of our communities, and recognizing that our people are our strength. We have a gold mine of talent, skills, and insights in Ottawa’s Black communities, if we only break out of the confines of our limited social networks, commit to sharing information, resources, and opportunities widely, and recognize that none of us can fight systemic anti-Black racism in Ottawa on our own.

Chelby Marie Daigle
Anti-Black Racism Forum Steering Committee

2 <http://www.un.org/en/events/africandescentdecade/>

APPENDIX B:

Discussion Session Leads

SOCIAL SERVICES WITH FOCUS ON GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

Yamikani Msosa is currently employed at the Sexual Assault Support Centre of Ottawa as the Public Education Coordinator and is a member of the Executive Board of the Ontario Coalition of Rape Crisis Centres. Her feminist activism started at Ottawa Coalition to End Violence against Women, then transitioned to Immigrant Women Services of Ottawa.

SOCIAL SERVICES WITH FOCUS ON MENTAL HEALTH

Fatimah Jackson-Best is a healthcare researcher, advocate, and academic. Her PhD research project focuses on Caribbean women's maternal health. She is a Global Health Research Fellow at the School of Nursing, University of Ottawa.

Ayan Yusuf is most commonly known as a strong advocate for mental health. As a person who suffers from mental illness herself, she has made it her life's mission to raise awareness and strike at stereotypes and stigmas associated with mental health.

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

Idil Abdulkadir is a high school teacher and community educator in Ottawa. At the time of this report she is completing her Masters degree with a focus on the school and university experiences of Somali students in Ontario.

Elaine Hayles sits as a community representative on the Advisory Committee on Equity (ACE) for the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board (OCDSB).

Sherwyn Solomon has been an educator for 17 years. He has been fortunate to work with students from kindergarten to grade 13 in 3 provinces in both private and public schools. In the past he has worked as the District lead in equity, led the one of the Ministry writing teams for the new equity course, and co-written a book on equity and inclusion in schools. Currently, Sherwyn works as a principal in a small elementary school in Ottawa.

POLICING

Dr. Sulaimon Giwa is a critical race scholar and researcher with an interest in racialized policing. He works at the Ottawa Community Immigrant Services Organization (OCISO) as a case manager for a Crime Prevention Ottawa funded project called Time for Change, a gang exit strategy.

Ketcia Peters is a business professional with extensive experience in areas of strategic planning, human resources and business development. As the Haitian Community Representative on the Community Police Action Committee (COMPAC) she grew passionate about issues of community policing, race relations and social justice. She has been newly elected as the Community Co-Chair of COMPAC.

MEDIA

Sarah Onyango is a French translator by trade, Kenyan-born. She hosts the monthly African cultural program Fontonfrom, on Rogers TV Cable 22 - Ottawa as well as the weekly radio programs, Black on Black and Afrika Revisited on CHUO 89.1FM. To make it easier for the Black community to stay connected, Sarah created a website called BlackOttawa411 which has become a virtual community “hub” of sorts. Sarah is also a board member of Black History Ottawa, where she is responsible for public relations and outreach activities.

ISLAMOPHOBIA AND ANTI-BLACK RACISM

Sakinna Gairey is a University of Ottawa student who spearheaded this year’s BLK Frosh aimed at creating an inclusive alternative orientation week for Black students on campus. Sakinna is currently exploring the concept of home, community and Blackness and how it affects our daily lives.

Sarah Musa is a Somali-Canadian writer, spoken word artist, community organizer, workshop facilitator, and aspiring filmmaker.

APPENDIX C: Agenda



AGENDA

Anti-Black Racism: Understanding its Impact in Canada

Jean Pigott Hall, City Hall

August 8, 2016 - 6:00 – 9:00 PM,

Co-sponsored:

City for All Women Initiative (CAWI), Ottawa Local Immigrant Partnership (OLIP)

MC: Valerie Assoi and Valerie Stam, CAWI

Time	Agenda Item																						
6:00 – 7:00	Plenary <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Opening - Indigenous Welcome - Michelle Penney, Saulteaux Nation, from Yellow Quill, Saskatchewan - Overview of Evening - Deputy Mayor Mark Taylor - Hindia Mohamoud, Ottawa Local Immigrant Partnership (OLIP) - Presentation: Black Communities in Ottawa Sulaimon Giwa, Yamikani Msosa, Chelby Daigle - Discussion Group Orientation 																						
7:00 – 7:10	Move to Discussion Groups																						
7:10 – 8:15	Discussion Groups (11 break out groups) <table border="0" style="width: 100%;"> <tr> <td>Social Services (A)</td> <td>Councillor's Lounge, 2nd floor</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Social Services (B)</td> <td>Jean Pigott Hall (left of stage)</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Education/Employment (C)</td> <td>Jean Pigott Hall (centre)</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Education/Employment (D)</td> <td>Jean Pigott Hall (centre)</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Education/Employment (E)</td> <td>Colonel By (2nd floor)</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Education/Employment (F)</td> <td>Colonel By (2nd floor)</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Islamophobia (G)</td> <td>Festival Control (by Laurier entrance)</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Gender Violence (H)</td> <td>Festival Boardroom (by Laurier entrance)</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Policing (I)</td> <td>Honeywell (2nd floor)</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Policing/Courts/Prisons (J)</td> <td>Richmond Room (2nd floor)</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Media (K) (French only)</td> <td>Jean Pigott Hall (circle at the back)</td> </tr> </table>	Social Services (A)	Councillor's Lounge, 2 nd floor	Social Services (B)	Jean Pigott Hall (left of stage)	Education/Employment (C)	Jean Pigott Hall (centre)	Education/Employment (D)	Jean Pigott Hall (centre)	Education/Employment (E)	Colonel By (2 nd floor)	Education/Employment (F)	Colonel By (2 nd floor)	Islamophobia (G)	Festival Control (by Laurier entrance)	Gender Violence (H)	Festival Boardroom (by Laurier entrance)	Policing (I)	Honeywell (2 nd floor)	Policing/Courts/Prisons (J)	Richmond Room (2 nd floor)	Media (K) (French only)	Jean Pigott Hall (circle at the back)
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8:15 – 8:25	Return to Plenary																						
8:25 – 9:00	Closing Plenary <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Welcome back Action Steps Shared Councillor Catherine McKenney Next Steps Indigenous Closing Song 																						

APPENDIX D:

Community Organizing Tips for Inclusion

Consider your own diversity and the impact that has on your organizing

- Be aware of how your lived experience may cause you to have insights or blind spots on a given issue, or some else's lived experience.
- Ask yourself what power you have in a given situation as a result of an area of advantage in your life (i.e. gender, race, religion, ethnicity, socio economic status, gender identity, sexual orientation, language, abilities, education, immigration status, etc.).
- Take care to not exert that power in a way that keeps those with less power from coming forward or speaking up (for example, be aware of how much space you take up in a meeting, conversation or initiative).



Consider the diversity within communities and how that informs your organizing

- Catch yourself when assuming that particular groups of people are all the same. There is diversity of experiences, values and opinions within communities. Recognize that no one person from a particular community speaks for/ or represents that whole community.
- Be aware of diversity within a community, in terms of ethno-cultural backgrounds, gender, social – economic levels, social class background, education, age, sexual orientation, gender identity, religion, language, immigration status, and abilities.
- Ask who is not included in the organizing you are doing, and why? Then consider how to include them.
- Recognize the contributions that can be made by all people in a given community.
- Consider the barriers people may face to participating (i.e. time of meetings, childcare or transportation costs, computer access, literacy and language) and how to address them.