



Community Equity Council

Listening Circle

Wednesday, June 3rd, 2020

Community Equity Council Leaders from the Black Community

In response to the death of George Floyd and the protests and marches originating out of the United States and being held around the world to end racism, the Community Equity Council (CEC) called two meetings in the week of June 1st.

- June 2nd was with the CEC members
- June 3rd was with formal and informal leaders of the Black Community

This report provides a summary of the two meetings. There were many consistent messages and this report showcases the key messages from the Black community and includes additions from CEC community members (n blue).

Key messages from the community:

A. General message:

1. Find as many ways as possible for the OPS to engage with the community. Make the community part of the everyday work of the OPS so that decisions are continually informed by community.
 - a. The CEC
 - b. Listening Circles
 - c. Pick up the phone and call individual community leaders
 - d. NRTs and other aspects of community policing

B. The Impact on Black and racialized community

1. This is one situation of many situations. It is profoundly disappointing and weighs on all of us. It is exhausting.
2. It has triggered some community members back into previous trauma.
3. It has reminded people of their own negative experiences with the police.
4. The coverage has merged the US story, Canada story and the Ottawa story. Some people cannot see the difference because they are experiencing the feelings of systemic and targeted racism. It actually does not matter where it originated from, it leads to really difficult feelings and increases distrust between community and the police.

C. The specific impact on Black and racialized children and youth

1. Children and youth have witnessed the video, they have seen on the news and seen police at the US be violent both in Mr. Floyd's death and in the protests; and they have seen their parents and community members being upset by the actions of the police.
2. They are unsettled and looking for answers. *When we as parents try and explain, we are mad, angry, frustrated and disappointed. How do we explain it all and also keep our sanity?*
3. *Some of our children have asked us if the police are going to kill us. How do we answer that?*
4. Social media has been a primary tool for messaging to children and youth, particularly during COVID – 19. 95% of social media reflects emotions and strong feelings of hurt, anger and fear. It has heightened their sense of vulnerability.
5. They need to see the broader community come together and change those negative messages.
6. How will the OPS help our children stop being afraid of the police?

D. March for Justice

1. This march is intended to be a peaceful march. The language of protest is not what the original organizers proposed.
2. Ensure that OPS members come with a good attitude to the March.
 - a. Recognize the pain and anger and have compassion.
 - b. Listen to people when they are speaking to them and don't get defensive.
3. Send messages that you recognize that the role of the OPS is to ensure that there is a safe space for people to march. Do that in advance in the media releases.
4. Recognize that the black community is not united around the March. It exposed fissures in our community about who leads, how we engage, how we support our young people and how organizations can sometimes become gate-keepers.
5. No dogs at the March. They are a trigger for people.
6. Do not go in full military gear and don't have a dominant presence.
7. Be helpful (hand out masks or sanitizers).
8. Ensure that there are public health messages about maintaining and respecting social distancing.
9. Avoid the performance activities of taking a knee unless it is authentic.
10. *DC Steve Bell provided some aspects of the intended approach: balance of uniform and non-uniform people; as minimal presence; facial expressions will be professional and pleasant; working with the organizers to maintain safety; focusing and messaging to everyone that we are working with people to have a safe march; crowd control (if required will be focused on de-escalation; because of COVID-19 there will be less buses coming in from other places and by-laws will not be ticketing people for not adhering to COVID-19 restrictions.*

E. Follow-up after the March

- a. This will be a setback for the OPS and the black community.
- b. The OPS will need to find more ways to connect with the broader racialized community in Ottawa. We have to create spaces for people to be angry and sad and say what they need to say to the police.

- c. Increase the capacity of the OPS to speak the language of the community they are serving. There needs to be French or bilingual police officers in the French speaking communities of Ottawa.
- d. OPS needs to have some consistent messaging for the community that both acknowledges the problem but also is strength-based:
 - Systemic racism exists in our society and in OPS.
 - Racism in our society is as pandemic as COVID -19.
 - It is causing a constant level of mental health distress.
 - We have to shift the paradigm of thinking – we are all human, we are all equal, we all want a better place for ourselves and for our families.
 - To get to that change we need systems transformation.
 - Every person will either have to stand up for change or be seen as condoning racism in its practice.
 - We have to redirect our anger and sadness into positive change.

F. Clean up anything in the OPS that is outstanding and undermines relationship

- a. Go back to the database and pull out files where racism was evident and learn from them. Clean them up.
- b. In the community, these files are still alive through story.
- c. We have to get on the same page of what is the basis of our relationship and what do we commonly understand as racist, unacceptable behaviour.

G. Anti-Racism Campaign

- a. YAK has done a check-up challenge with the Youth Services Bureau and is thinking that an anti-black racism campaign would be good to do next. (CEC Anti-Racism committee could help with this campaign)

H. Need to go beyond training.

- a. OPS has had a number of trainings and it is clear that OPS members have an intellectual understanding of the issues but all have not established this learning in their behaviour.
- b. If we want to change behaviour we need to go beyond training to experiential learning. We have to connect the heart of each OPS member back into the community.
- c. Listening Circles for each OPS member.
- d. Each OPS member needs to attend events in the community that is intended to build connection and relationship.
- e. Address the OPS work environment that results in a 1,000 micro-aggressions directly related to racism and other forms of discrimination being peoples' experience.
- f. Training needs to be rooted in the community and the actual experiences and approaches that work for the multiple Ottawa communities.

I. Change the OPS accountability to the community

- a. The perception is that an OPS member can do anything, including kill people, and get away with it.
- b. Accountability needs to be transparent and in the community which is where we all live – not some far away process.

- c. When the OPS makes a mistakes – admit it. When you kill someone it is a failure.
- d. Need to have the facts about the OPS. It is frustrating when we are talking about US data or even data out of Montreal or Toronto. We need to honestly say what is going on in Ottawa.
- e. How will we as a community respond to the decision out of the death of Abdirahman Abdi. We need to recognize that this is a situation that could really undermine relationships.

J. What is the broader role of the community in the change in the OPS?

- a. The CEC needs to discuss and provide advice on the community members who do not trust the police and what do we need to address to increase that trust?
- b. Listening Circles need to address the question, “How do we keep our community safe?” What do we want the police to do to keep our communities safe? What do we not want them to do?
- c. The Neighbourhood Response Teams need to be evaluated by the community.

K. Look at new models of policing

- a. Bear Clan models for the Indigenous community.
- b. Look at restorative justice approaches to addressing the issues.