

**Community Equity Council
Somali Listening Circle
September 14, 2019**

Community: Somali Community Members



Noura Ahmed, Member of a CEC committee, with Sahada Alolo, Community CEC Chairperson, and Joan Riggs, CEC Facilitator, organized the event.

Approximately 40 community members attended the session, being the majority of them were mothers and grandmothers from the community.

Each person was given the opportunity to speak to the following three questions.

1. How would you describe the relationship between the Indigenous, racialized and faith based communities and the OPS at this time?
2. What do you hope the CEC discusses and provides recommendations around that would support your work?
3. There is a common theme emerging from our work that the OPS will treat the community the way you treat each other. Are there issues that you would like to have the CEC discuss that relate to internal OPS systems and processes.

A. The Starting Point for Our Relationship

1. The relationship between police and community is damaged and this has been going on for years. The current relationship with the police is not good. Trust is low. The relationship is characterized by confrontation and fear. The community described a number of situations, perceptions and experiences.
 - Some members described the relationship with the police as, “when we have serious problems with our children, we call the police for help, but they do not help, they take our children away.” The community is afraid to speak out.
 - Young Somalis are charged for very minor offences, and this follows them the rest of their lives. One small mistake and their lives are ruined.
 - The decisions that officers make can help the lives of our children or can cause greater problems.
 - The power police hold over us is not positive. Our youth are getting beaten up and locked up.

- Somali people have been murdered and their murder has never been solved.
- Senseless losses are becoming normalized. No one follows up and it seems like no one cares. Every Somali household is worried about our children.
- We are taxpayers and we need protection just like everyone else. Who do we go to if we cannot trust the police?
- Why not shoot people in the leg and then question them about why they did what they did. It seems like the police are there for violence and not for peace. We have to work together. Shootings are not investigated fully.

Who do the children and youth go to if they don't trust the police?

2. We work very hard to raise our children well. Many mothers work 2 or 3 jobs. We try to do the right thing by them. But sometimes our children run into problems:
 - There are serious problems in our community – drugs, guns. Dealers are providing drugs for free to get the youth addicted.
 - We also have our own problems in our community. Our families have become weakened because of the poor job that has been done to support settlement into Ottawa society; our community organizations are divided on how to move forward.
 - The majority of people who get in trouble were born here or came here as young kids.
 - We have serious issues in our community around drugs and guns.
 - There is so much displacement and systemic racism in the schools and the day to day systems our children are in. By the time they are dealing with the justice system and police there is no trust that there will be anything but racism. Settlement is not easy in this community and there are not sufficient supports.
 - Children and youth that do not have support do not succeed. The solution for them is to drop out of school. We have heard of a 9 year-old child dealing drugs. If you hear of that, sit down and talk to the family, let them know their child has been introduced to drugs. Next thing we know the child is murdered due to guns. Where are the guns coming from? How do they end up in the hands of teenagers?
 - We came to Canada for a better life, and sometimes it feels like it is worse here.

Children and youth need support throughout that time of life. The children are not doing well. It is catastrophic. They are not loved the way they should be.

3. Systemic racism:
 - The systems are intertwined: police, child welfare, schools, health, etc. and racism pervades them all.
 - Police have a different response to our children.
 - Not all police officers are bad, but the system continues to perpetuate racism.

- Racism has been built into some systems to serve some people and not Black people.
- There are stereotypes about our children. If they get into trouble, the response is very judgmental, especially in schools.
- The majority of our children were born in Canada or came here at a very young age, so there is something very wrong that their lives are being impacted in this way.
- We are often confronted with aggression, violence and condescension in the relationship, when we ask questions.

B. Changes Needed

1. Work together when a situation arises with a Somali youth

We all need to be part of the solution. Get at the source of the issues. It will take both community and OPS to address the issues.

- When there is a problem with a Somali youth, consult with the Somali community. All are willing to be part of the solution, but don't know where to start.
- We need to have ways to convene when issues arise and connect to more meetings and conferences.

2. Training for Police members

- The mindset needs to change to be conscious of racism and address it.
- Training for police needs to address the range of concerns: dealing with youth who have committed minor offences, addressing systemic racism, how to work with diverse cultures and communities in a respectful way, working with organizations in the Somali community, etc.

3. The police need to work in community with community and build trust through relationships

Improvements will come from trust. Officers need to come to our housing, community centres, the spaces we are in.

- Officers need to be able to bring a calming presence, and not bring more violence and aggression.
- Officers need to come to our community, our organizations, the spaces we are in.
- Learn what is going on in our community.
- Develop relationships with organizations in the Somali community.
- There are many people who are willing to work with the police.
- We need to have ways to come together when issues arise.
- The CEC may be able to act as a bridge, to help build relationships.
- We need education in the community about the OPS.
- The community needs to be part of building the solutions.

4. Somali presence in OPS

I would like to see my children in the police, not just the look and faces but the actual spirit of the relationship. There needs to be respect for other cultures. How do we get there?

- It would be helpful to have more Somali members on the OPS.
- We would like to see our faces in the police force, and more importantly respect for our community, for all communities.

5. The OPS needs to establish an open, inclusive and healthy work environment.

- There is a need to look within first. Are OPS officers supporting each other? It is clear that the internal service is not where it needs to be. If OPS members do not feel safe within the service, how can community members feel safe?
- The mental health of police officers is important.

6. Address the number of guns in our community.

- Need gun control.

C. Next Steps

1. Catalyst will prepare a summary of the discussion. (October, 2019)
2. The report will be circulated to all Community Equity Council members and to the Noura Ahmed for review. (October, 2019)
3. The report will be directed to the Leadership Table to discuss how to move forward. (November, 2019)
4. Final recommendations go to the CEC.