Across Boundaries’ Statement RE: Anti-Black Racism

The last few weeks have been extremely hard and yet, just when we thought it couldn’t get worse, it has.

Today I share with you our agency’s reflections and position on the tragedies and fatalities around us.

The recent violent deaths of D’Andre Campbell and Regis Korchinski-Paquet and violent murder of George Floyd and others in the United States have had significant impact on many individuals, particularly members of our Black communities, which includes our service users, staff and Board.

The level of violence directed at the Black community is unbearable to witness but even more so to experience.

For some of us, these tragic incidents have triggered memories of the killing of Andrew Loku, our Service User, at the hands of the Toronto Police five years ago. That was a very difficult time for Across Boundaries and it continues to be so up to this day. At that time, we immediately named Anti-Black racism, and joined the calls for an SIU investigation, unredacted SIU report, an inquest, and sat through 21 days of heartbreaking details of Andrew Loku’s last day and ultimate death.

At the conclusion of the inquest we left with a level of satisfaction that for the first time in Ontario, the verdicts in a Black man’s death resulted in a clear reflection of Anti-Black racism being core in the police response, and clear recommendations for the Toronto police Services, Toronto Police Services Board, Ministry of Community Safety and Correctional Services, and others.

Today, we are forced to ask to what extent any of those recommendations have been reviewed or implemented by any of the institutions named. The Ontario Human Rights Commission released its findings on the public inquiry into racial profiling and racial discrimination of Black Persons by the Toronto Police Service.
The following quote from the report does not need interpretation:

“...It confirms the long-standing concern of Black communities that they are over-represented in incidents of serious injury and deadly force involving the TPS. It demonstrates that the more serious the police conduct and lethal the outcome, the greater the over-representation. It reveals serious use of force in interactions where there was a lack of a legal basis for police stops and/or detentions of Black civilians in the first place, and inappropriate or unjustified searches of Black civilians”  

But, let’s also take this opportunity to say that anti-Black racism and other forms of discrimination do not begin and end with our police institutions. While we acknowledge that it is at the hands of police that we see the most traumatic and immediate consequences, we are all complicit. This includes health, mental health, child welfare, media, and others that are on the periphery of systems of care and work together to sustain and nurture systemic, ongoing violence against our communities.

Anti-Black racism is real, it is global. It is not just an act of commission, but also of omission, negligence, and targeted lack of oversight.

Anti-Black racism is not going to go away if we deny it, minimize it or mock it.

It is hoped that the tragic recent events and the spotlight on anti-Black racism will pave the way for us to move forward as a global community, by first and foremost accepting that this insidious disease is real and pervasive, by looking internally to see how we continue to promote it, and to take honest and meaningful actions to address it.

Then maybe, just maybe, at some not so distant time in the future we may begin the healing process.

In solidarity and with a heavy heart

Aseefa Sarang
Executive Director