

Meeting Minutes

Anti-Black Racism Working Group

Wednesday, August 10, 2022, 6:30 pm

Online – Zoom Web Call

Attendees: Stephen Linton (Chair), Charmain Brown, Bernadette Hood-Caesar, Shaibu Gariba, Titi Katibi, Teronie Donaldson, Marsha Hinds-Layne, Romina Diaz

Library Staff: Sabrina Yung (Notetaker for this meeting)

Absent: Samantha Adebiji, Nicole Facey

1. Land Acknowledgement & ABRWG Ancestral Acknowledgement

2. Conflict of Interest Declaration (Standing Agenda Item)

- Stephen (Chair) shared with the group he has registered and will be running for the position of School Trustee with the Durham District School Board, for Pickering. It is unclear if there is a conflict of interest in relation to his volunteer role with the ABRWG. Sabrina will investigate the matter and provide information/an update to the group.
- Stephen also noted that he may be involved with an 'all candidates' event that might be in the works, as a community member is seeking library spaces and resources to host the community event. Shahin and Joel were not aware of the pending event at the time of the meeting, however we believe the proposed idea may have gone directly to CEO, Jackie, who is away currently. Staff will follow up with Jackie upon her return to further verify if any involvement with this event may pose a conflict of interest.
- In light of this disclosure, the group agreed that today is focused on information sharing and no voting or decision-making is anticipated, therefore, there was no concern for Stephen to remain a participant in the meeting today.

3. Review of May Meeting Minutes

- No omissions or edits were brought forward.

4. Events at PPL – Introduction and Overview

- As part of the 2022 Work Plan, the goal of today's meeting is to begin the discussions about Pickering Public Library events, from an anti-Black racism perspective.
- Shahin Dashtkian and Joel Sutherland were invited this evening to present about the events team and events planning process at library.
- A copy of today's presentation will be shared with the group after the meeting.

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- Staff focused on speaking to key themes and problem statements that emerged from the community survey, as areas requiring attention and improvement.
 - **Theme 1: Black-Focused Events Year Round**
 - Under this theme, we acknowledge and explore the community feedback indicating there is a lack of Black history/heritage celebration and education outside of February (Black History Month), when it comes to library event offerings.
 - The desired outcome: The library will work closer with Black community partners to plan and deliver a greater number of Black-focused/inspired programming throughout the entire year. Staff will also be better trained for planning and facilitating anti-Black racism and related events.
 - Teronie: Picture going to the supermarket and seeing foods you are unfamiliar with, if you start to incorporate them into you dishes, you become more familiar with them. Similarly, with events, the more we see events and the effort peppered throughout the year, it will reduce the skepticism that may be associated due to past experiences.
 - Charmain: Thinking about how to honour Black knowledge and Black ways of knowing for those that are not Black. This is not only about educating Black people – we know about us. We also want to support, teach, educate those who are not Black. I encourage thinking about how to dismantle racism. Joel, libraries are open to everyone and that is something we value. One thing our children’s team is doing is not just stand-alone events, but weaving DEI programming into our regular offerings such as the classic Storytime. Families of many different backgrounds come to our regular Storytime. So, we are intentionally featuring stories from and for different audiences, reflecting dates of significance, selecting books that depict diverse identifies in everyday experiences, and being intentionally cognizant of what story books we’re choosing to feature.
 - Titi: Another thing to be cognizant of, especially for programming that caters to the Black community, is in the marketing and making sure that it’s inclusive. Is the wording inclusive enough to encourage other communities to attend.
 - Teronie: Unfortunately, within our community, there is a devaluation of ourselves because we don’t see ourselves in community events. A lot of those feelings and experiences lingers.
 - Romina: We can use the passport concept to challenge people to learn and to attend events they normally wouldn’t. If we bring bias to the forefront and challenge people to go to events, to challenge their perspectives.
 - Charmain: I think there is merit in that, but I challenge that idea, considering that it may be tokenism. We should normalize what we do and present. If the book is about friendship – normalize different

identities, as opposed to pointing out the uniqueness in a tokenizing manner. Would want us to be mindful of how the passport experience may be perceived – if I completed all these events, I'm woke.

○ **Theme 2: Lack of Black Representation Leading Events**

- Under this theme, we acknowledge and explore the community feedback indicating concern that staff may not be able to effectively plan and lead Black-focused events on their own, due to lack of lived experience. Clients do not see Black facilitators represented or leading events for all ages.
- The desired outcome: Increased representation of Black facilitators in library events. Following staff training, foster stronger connections with Black community partners and external guest presenters to plan and deliver events regularly.
- Teronie: What kind of staff training are you/would you be doing for staff? Suggestion was for example, if going to offer a financial literacy event/workshop, consider seeking out a local Black professional to use their lived experience, as a living example, to provide the workshop. Joel and Shahin shared that the training would in part focus on ensuring staff are equipped with the skills and knowledge for responsive program plan, by building up skills for engaging community feedback, input, and involvement when it comes to selecting topics of focus and planning events. We want to improve on how we prioritize focuses and topics that are responsive and not selected at random or in a silo by staff. We also want to recognize that staff do not represent the lived experiences of all community members, and to ensure events are responsive to diverse needs, we want staff to develop the understanding and skills to engage with community experts and how to seek out external guest presenters to help facilitate the events the community is seeking.
- Romina: What channels does the library utilize in order to listen to the community speak? Shahin/Joel: We utilize various forms of community engagement. We have staff that sit on various committees and partnership networks throughout the Pickering and Durham Region. This allows us to connect with various community agencies that are experts for various audiences in the community. Additionally, we use surveys, focus groups, and the [online events proposal](#) to gather ideas. Our resources are limited and so we cannot accept every suggestion that comes our way and may have to determine which proposals can be most feasible. We also have a [school visit/outreach form](#).
- Romina: Can we advertise the online events proposal form? Is there a way to put in place limitations, such as an event idea within the budget of 'x' – requirements that help keep ideas within scope? Sabrina/Joel: We do raise awareness about this form from time to

- time, although not regularly due to the volume of interest and staff capacity to respond. However yes, we can look into increasing the promotion of this input opportunity, so that it's more transparently communicated to the public.
- Shaibu: Can/do Durham libraries collaborate and share information when it comes to planning events? Shahin/Joel/Sabrina shared that public libraries are very open to sharing and we do often collaborate with not only Durham libraries but at times, York Region libraries as well.
 - Marsha: Tap into various consultants for the various diasporas. Find out from them what the synergies look like. Forging those kinds of relationships as well – perhaps they are looking for space for their existing events and we can connect the community with those experiences.
- **Theme 3: Creating Safe Spaces for Black Clients in All Events**
- Under this theme, we acknowledge and explore the community feedback indicating Black clients do not feel safe, secure, and welcome at library events. There is concern that clients do not see their rich and diverse culture, celebrations, beliefs and values represented in library events offered.
 - The desired outcome: Create safer and more welcoming spaces at all events for Black clients. Staff establish a stronger understanding of the barriers Black clients have encountered and why library events have not been a safe space for Black community members, in addition to what steps staff can take to provide a more welcoming, inclusive experience.
 - Marsha: We know there are various communities within the Black community that would need targeted encouragement to come into a space like the library, example Black males between 18 to 35, single Black mothers – I'm interested to hear about how you approach that.
 - Marsha: Disaggregate the Black community. Caribbean diaspora – independence days, different festivals, there is so much you can do to get your yearly calendar more reflective. African people have their total calendar of events as well. Even after that disaggregation, how can we tap into particular populations and how they each interact with materials?
 - Romina: How does the library currently plan events through/with a DEI lens? How do they ensure they are not planning with a current bias or missing a crucial DEI lens? Shahin shared that that is an area of growth we're hoping to develop and formalize. We want to create more community involvement in the planning process, to gain more direction from diverse community members and experts. Joel noted that we do have staff that use their lived experiences to guide their planning, however where there is a topic outside of their

lived experiences, we want to provide opportunities that are reflective of the community through external community members.

- Charmain tabled for consideration, having ABRWG members visit the library to see and observe in person, events, and the public spaces in action. Charmain shared her positive experience during a recent visit. The Group acknowledged and discussed there are members that have not been to some or all the Pickering Public Library locations in recent times and all members would benefit from observing present day client experiences to inform their feedback during these ABRWG discussions. The group also noted it would be nice to meet each other in person, given that the meetings remain virtual and most ABRWG members have not had the chance to see each other in person.
 - Sabrina and Joel offered to host and/or arrange hosted tours of Central and George Ashe, and perhaps we can offer different days/times, so members view a variety of different experiences as different audiences tend to use the space at different times.
 - Sabrina will send out a survey or Doodle to try to organize availabilities.

5. UN International Decade for People of African Descent Proclamation Approval Follow Up

- There are no updates at this time.

6. Youth Subcommittee Update

- There are no updates at this time.

7. Other Business

- Reminder, September meeting will include:
 - People and Culture recommendations progress update from Clara.
 - ABRWG only Events discussion debrief (second meeting with Events team is October 12)
 - Reference check question follow up.
 - Meet and greet with is Director, Engagement & Client Experience.