

# Community Consultation on **Child Welfare Services** to Black, African, Caribbean, Canadian Families, Children and Youth

Between the summer of 2014 and January 2015 Young & Potential Fathers, Millan & Associates, Black Creek Community Health Centre, Jamaican Canadian Association and Redemption Reintegration Services organized and facilitated four community consultations on Child Welfare Services to Black, African, Caribbean, Canadian, Families, Children and Youth.

As the minutes from the four consultations were reviewed there was one theme that stood out loud and clear, Toronto's Black communities feeling that "there is a high level of cultural insensitivity within child welfare services".

Repeatedly it was mentioned that members of the community fear child welfare services and that they don't trust these "institutions" because of their ability to and history of breaking up families.

When discussing concerns and solutions it was mentioned repeatedly in all consultations that there is a need for more culturally grounded support for families involved or at risk of getting involved with child welfare services. Additionally it was made clear that there is a need in the community for more education around child welfare services, how to navigate it and the external supports available to families and children involved with child welfare institutions.

Throughout the consultations groups identified some areas of concern that are often related to child protection including:

- Domestic Violence
- Sexual Assault
- Physical Abuse
- Spanking of children
- Underemployment
- Neglect
- Mental Health
- Poverty
- Low literacy

Participants from these consultations especially those who work at and with community organizations would like to hear from CAS what are the areas of concern that they would identify and the underlying causes for child protection services.

It was noted that there are many knowledge gaps and family challenges that often aren't addressed resulting in intervention solutions often being utilized instead of supportive **preventative solutions** being explored and implemented.

In addition to several mentions for the need for a black child welfare service, it was repeatedly mentioned that there is a great wealth of knowledge, resources and services within the community that are not being explored, utilized or empower to help address concerns and create solutions that would benefit the children and communities impacted by child welfare.

## **What is your experience of child welfare services?**

- Children being taken away from their family without just cause or an unbiased investigation.
- Children are removed from their home and placed with families that are not ideal (culturally, adults don't genuinely care, different values, etc.).
- Not enough time is spent investigating families.
- The child welfare system doesn't acknowledge culturally responsive methods of care.
- The community has no knowledge on how CAS operates.
- CAS is feared because they have the power to break up and displace families.
- Staff from community support agencies felt like they had to fight with child welfare to keep kids in the care of their parents or families.
- Many kids and families fall through the cracks of CAS
- Children taken into care end up in worse situations than the initial environments that they were in
- Kids taken into care don't come back to their families/ communities. "to many kids are placed in white, rural communities".
- "Muslim kids are being placed into foreign environments with little understanding of their culture or religion".
- There is a noticeable stigma associated with those children involved in CAS "its like having a criminal record".
- There are too many gatekeepers in CAS to stop relevant progressive change for the African community.
- Child welfare projects negatively on clients.
- CAS has a lack of understanding other models and strengths within the Black community.
- Child welfare, TDSB and the Police are oppressive systems that magnify oppression.
- There is a lack of transparency with regards to CAS operations.

## **What could be done to improve child welfare services?**

- Once a child is apprehended, the case needs to be referred to one of the community organizations that can support families through the process using a cultural lens.
- Once CAS identifies concerns that may lead to apprehension community resources and agencies need to be identified, contacted and brought to the table or brought in to provide support.
- Disadvantage families need to be supported more when engaged with CAS.
- Preventative parenting programs need to be available to support parents instead of "re-active" interventions programs for parents already involved with CAS.
- Partnering programs need to come from culturally reflective organizations for more holistic care.
- CAS should hire individuals that reflect racialized communities AND are genuine in their intents to build strong communities.
- Child welfare needs to building meaningful relationships with the families and their communities.
- Hiring youth workers to provide support to Crown Wards
- Disclosure of racialized / youth statistics on interventions and service implementation.
- Establish a black youth advisory and a black organizational advisory (perhaps combined) that meets on a quarterly basis and reviews service delivery to determine best practices, areas for concern and also to develop culturally responsive services and special events to engage the community.
- Build community youth workers into every file of a young person - "this allows children/youth to connect with community organizations and become more familiar with additional resources within their local neighborhoods and within the GTA".
- Child welfare services need to commit to an on-going dialog with the community.
- Create evaluation forms for parents, youth and community members to evaluate their experience with CAS and to determine concerns and best practices moving forward.
- Family Group Conferencing / team meetings - to better prepare families for the process.
- Provide families with guidance and clear goals for parents.
- Commit to doing things outside the box to make change that is meaningful.
- Create a complaint process that families can (call) use and feel safe.

## **What aspects of CAS services you would like to understand more?**

- How will this process of increased communication with community members and organizations unfold?
- The Reporting process for highlighting the positives of service delivery and support to community that is currently occurring?
- What happens to families when there is a discrepancy in the documented information?
- What can parents being called to court expect, how can they best prepare for court?
- The child welfare mandate.
- Who are the community assets that child welfare uses?
- How are Crown Wards prepared to leave care?
- How much effort is put into engaging fathers when children are apprehended from their mothers?
- What resources are available to help parents navigate child welfare?
- How are Ant-Oppressive/Anti-Racism policies enforced?
- Who holds child welfare accountable?
- What is the length of time individuals are flagged in the child welfare system?
- Who does case reviews? “The length of time some children are in care before being returned to their families is unacceptable”
- What kind of risk assessment is done when placing children in care in homes?
- How are complaints against workers handled? “Workers seem very protected”
- “What does child welfare value as a good staff because community feels many staff are insensitive”.