CHILDREN'S AID SOCIETY OF TORONTO

ANTI-OPPRESSION, ANTI-RACISM POLICY

Approved by the Board of Directors
November 9, 2006

The Children's Aid Society of Toronto (CAST) values the advancement of equality, diversity and human rights for clients, staff, care providers and volunteers. It recognizes and upholds the inherent dignity, worth, and rights of each individual and is committed to the pursuit of equality, freedom from adverse discrimination and harassment and the removal of all barriers to equal opportunity. We recognize and uphold the principle of equality of access to appropriate services which are sensitive to the needs of clients whatever their race, religion, colour, national origin, ethnic origin, ancestry, citizenship, age, sex, sexual orientation, place of origin, marital status, or ability. (Reference: CAST Code of Ethics,1989). In addition, the Society believes that each individual should be free from discrimination, harassment and barriers to equal opportunity related to their gender identity and social condition, including their economic status.

BACKGROUND

Last year, April 2005 to March 2006, the Children's Aid Society of Toronto (CAST) served 13,511 families and 30,891 children and youth, 27,565 of whom were served in their own home. 55% of families and 60% of the 3,326 children/youth served in foster or residential care self-identified themselves as members of a minority culture or race. Many are newcomers to Toronto. In 2001, 49% or almost 1 of every 2 persons in Toronto was born outside Canada making the City of Toronto home to people from 169 countries speaking more than 100 languages. It is estimated that by the year 2017, 51% of the population of Greater Toronto will not be from the traditional dominant culture.

Approximately 63% of the children and youth served by the Society live at or below the poverty line. Some children/youth live with a physical and or developmental disability while others identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transsexual, trans-gendered, gender-variant or inter-sexed. A disproportionate number of families served by the Society are single parent, women led - 51% compared to the national average of 25%.

The children, youth, families and communities served by CAST reflect the increasing diversity of the City of Toronto, aptly described as one of the most multicultural cities in the world. In addition, Society staff, foster parents and volunteers increasingly reflect the City's diversity.

Like most child welfare organizations the Society recognizes the need to develop and provide culturally appropriate child welfare practices and services to the children, youth, families and communities living in Toronto. Culturally appropriate refers to meeting the unique needs of each individual and/or family by responding equitably to that person's social, historical, cultural, ethnic, racial and religious location. Cultural appropriateness recognizes that the Society has a responsibility to work sensitively, respectfully and creatively with families from diverse cultures.

Many newcomer families and communities come to Toronto from countries where no formal child welfare system exists and where little to no information about Ontario child welfare legislation is provided to them as part of the pre-migration process. Therefore, it is not surprising that the Society has found itself confronted and challenged by newcomer communities who are unfamiliar with the legislated role of child welfare agencies to intervene with families to ensure the safety of children/youth. While this has created tension and occasionally conflict, newcomer, diverse communities and the Society share a common belief that every child/youth has a right to safety and security and to be free from abuse.

In its efforts to address the concerns articulated at both a family and community level, CAST has, over the past several years, engaged in a number of bridging diversity initiatives in partnership with a number of Toronto's communities. In 1995, for example, the Society approved a policy committing itself to making services safe and accessible to lesbian, gay and bisexual children/youth. Earlier, the Board had approved same sex fostering and adoption policies. The current Bridging Diversity Advisory Committee (BDC) is another example of a Society bridging diversity initiative, as are a number of other agency initiatives involving partnerships with diverse, newcomer communities.

Society staff and members of a number of Toronto's diverse, newcomer communities working together on the BDC were mandated to recommend an organizational change process to guide the Society in providing culturally appropriate child welfare services within the context of the Child & Family Services Act. A critical first step is the creation of a Board approved Anti-Oppression/Anti-Racism Policy that will frame the organizational change process at the governance, human resource and service levels of the agency. In taking this step, it should be recognized that CAST continues its tradition of developing forward thinking, leading-edge child welfare policy to reflect the ever-changing community it serves.

It is important to note that the policy has been deliberately and consciously titled anti-oppression/ anti-racism at the strong recommendation of the BDC members and subsequently supported by stakeholder consultation feedback, including the community stakeholders. Much discussion and debate took place within the BDC as to the title. It is critical that the title of the policy reflect the belief that the end goal of policy implementation is an organization and services that are free of all forms of oppression for all stakeholders and achieves equity. A deliberate decision was made to also include the term racism, which while included under the umbrella term oppression, was deemed to be of such a significant nature for the children, youth and families served by the society, as well as all agency stakeholders, that it required highlighting. It is believed that identifying racism in the title of the policy highlights the significant impact of racism on agency stakeholders and demands that it be addressed as a component of policy implementation.

POLICY DEVELOPMENT PROCESS

The process of developing this policy has been comprehensive and lengthy, involving frank and courageous discussions among members of the BDC and agency stakeholders. The BDC members have spent considerable time in self-reflection, self-education and setting out guiding principles. Part of the education process involved hearing about similar efforts in other related organizations such as the Family Service Association of Toronto, CCAS and the Centre for

Addictions and Mental Health, as well as presentations and discussions facilitated by BDC members.

Stakeholder Consultations took place from May to September, 2006 when a working draft of the policy was shared with the Board of Directors, the Board Advocacy-Policy Committee, the Senior Advisory Team, agency staff, foster parents, volunteers, youth in care, CUPE Local 2316 and the community at large. The BDC developed a Question Guide to help facilitate the feedback consultations that took place at staff team meetings, branch focus groups or through individual feedback to BDC members using phones, fax, e-mails, conversations with BDC members or other methods of their choice. The Board of Directors engaged in an in-camera consultation with an external facilitator prior to considering the policy for approval.

The proposed policy was welcomed and well received by all stakeholders, who commended the Society for developing an Anti-Oppression, Anti-Racism Policy. The community stakeholders were impressed that the policy speaks directly to the issues of power and privilege which they felt were not always addressed in similar policy statements. However, they, along with other stakeholders struggled to understand the Anti-Oppression, Anti-Racism Policy in the context of the Child & Family Services Act, which can be perceived and experienced by many families from diverse, newcomer communities to be in and of itself oppressive.

Common themes identified in the consultations included:

- The importance of strong organizational commitment and leadership on the part of the Board and senior management to implement the policy within specific timeframes and change impact measurements;

- The need for all stakeholders to create a "safe and respectful" environment that encourages, supports and sustains self-reflection, the appreciation of differences and diversity, and engagement in both the difficult conversations and the organizational changes that policy implementation will require;

- Organizational commitment of dedicated human and financial resources to provide the tools required for stakeholders to engage in the change process;

- The development of internal, organizational infrastructures to implement and sustain the change process. This may include: training; systems and governance analysis; coordination; communications; dedicated time and staffing resources; and evaluation resources;

- Measuring the impact of the organizational change process on a regular and on-going basis;

- Individual and organizational accountability for developing anti-oppressive, anti-racist child welfare policies and practices and for creating a work environment free from all forms of oppression and racism.

CONTEXT

Anti-oppression, in combating all facets of racism, classism, sexism, heterosexism, agism, disableism, etc, begins with the premise that there are inequities in power that pervade all social relations. These power imbalances are socially constructed or learned ideologies where a hierarchical relationship (implicitly or explicitly) benefits a dominant or privileged individual/group(s) and marginalizes others (Bell, 1997; Bishop, 1994, Hardiman & Jackson, 1997). Oppression occurs when a person is blocked from opportunities towards self development, excluded from full participation in society, denied rights that the dominant group takes for granted or is assigned a second class citizenship, not because of individual talent, merit or failure, but because of her/his membership in a particular group or category of people (Mullaly,2002).

Both the dominant group and those who are oppressed learn oppression through an unconscious, socialization process rather than through an active, conscious learning process. Therefore, deconstructing and 'unlearning' oppression is possible by engaging in a conscious and active process of challenging previously held personal and organizational values, beliefs, perceptions and attitudes. If one believes that oppression is learned, then anti-oppression can be viewed as a process of deconstructing and 'unlearning'.

We believe that, while Toronto's diversity has added cultural, social and economic benefits to our community, it has also resulted in the marginalization and oppression of groups who experience neither full access to nor participation in the life of the City and its institutions. Despite continuously demonstrating their resiliency and strength, many newcomer communities are experiencing disproportionately high rates of poverty, unemployment, under employment, reduced academic success, high rates of youth dropping out of school and increasing contact between youth and the criminal justice systems.

Oppressions such as racism, classism, sexism, heterosexism, agism, disableism etc., are interrelated and interlocked (Dei, 1996). That is to say, aspects of social differences such as race, gender, sexual orientation and class are unintelligible without considering them in relation to each other (Ng, 1993). Thus individuals and/or groups can simultaneously experience oppression from more than one source of their social location.

While not endorsing a hierarchy of oppression, practice tells us that an increasing number of children, youth and parents being served by the Society identify with a racial minority group. Race or skin colour seems to be a salient aspect of social difference when considering the experience of visible minority communities who experience disproportionate levels of unemployment, under-employment, poverty and academic underachievement. Racism is defined as "any distinction, exclusion, restriction or preference based on race, colour, descent or national or ethnic origin which has the purpose or effect of nullifying or impairing the recognition, enjoyment or exercise, on an equal footing, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural or any other filed of public life." (International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, 1965)

In a landmark study by Michael Ornstein, *"Ethno-Racial Groups in Toronto, 1971-2001: A Demographic and Socio-Economic Profile",* Institute for Social research, York University, January, 2006, he reports that non-European ethno- racial groups experience considerable

disadvantage in the labour market compared to European groups. "Accounting for the effects of age, education and immigration leaves a gap of about 20 percent in the income of men from European and non-European ethno-racial groups, with the members of the African groups somewhat worse off (about 25percent) and the South and Central Americans somewhat better off (about 17 percent)." More recent newcomers fare worse than those who have been in Canada longer. "Extreme poverty affects the Somali, Afghan and Ethiopian groups, over half of whose members are below the low income cut-off: and the rate of low income is between 40 and 50 percent for the "Other West Asian", Iraqi and Taiwanese groups. ……… Extreme economic disadvantage is highly racialized. All twenty of the poorest ethno-racial groups in Toronto are non-European. "

All facets of oppression are interrelated by common elements of power and control (Pharr, 1996) The dynamics of oppression share three pervasive components: 1) stereotypes, assumptions, theories and/or the dominant ideology; 2) bias, prejudice and /or the attitudes, positive or negative directed at the oppresses group(s); and 3) discrimination whether it is expressed individually, internal or on a societal, systemic or institutional level. Each form of social oppression is pervasive, feeds on and is sustained by the next.

The dynamics of oppression create a climate of silence and invisibility for marginalized groups. For example, marginalized people rarely have a representative voice or image in mainstream society. This results in stereotypical misrepresentations and encourages prejudicial attitudes. When these prejudices are acted out, discrimination occurs. Systemic discrimination occurs when individual acts of discrimination develop into widely accepted norm. "It must be acknowledged that while oppression may manifest itself as an overt, intentional, individualistic act, it is most likely to be covert, unintentional, and embedded in the culture and institutions of our society". (Mullaly, 2002)

Anti-oppressive practice recognizes that social identity and oppression is complex, takes many forms and has many intersecting relationships. Power and privilege are relative to one's location or position in society. Anti-oppression means allying with the marginalized individual or group and requires that all individuals, groups and institutions acknowledge the power and privilege that comes with their social location. Strategies for change require that we all share responsibility to address oppression.

Anti-oppressive practice involves working to eliminate oppression by addressing the power imbalance derived from membership in a dominant group and complicated by the power associated with the legislated mandate of child welfare. It is "an approach to social work practice which seeks to reduce, undermine or eliminate discrimination and oppression, specifically in terms of challenging sexism, racism, ageism, and abilism and other forms of discrimination encountered in social work." (Thompson, 1993) Practice is driven in service delivery systems by culturally preferred choices, not by interventions that are culturally blind or free. (Cross T. et al, 1989)

PRINCIPLES

While in keeping with the legal mandate of the Child & Family Services Act, Ministry Standards & Guidelines and other relevant legislative requirements and Society policies, CAS-Toronto is committed to anti-oppression in the following ways:

Access

Aims to ensure that all aspects of the agency, including its employ, physical space, services and governance are reachable, approachable, obtainable and permits entry.

Inclusiveness

Actively reaching out, in culturally appropriate and respectful ways, to include and welcome people from diverse communities to participate in the decision making processes of the organization as well as to promote fair access to information and services at CAST. It also involves including and welcoming individuals from diverse groups to provide input into agency policies and services.

Respect

Recognizing, valuing, and respecting different views, values, orientations, histories and cultures of diverse groups, while acknowledging the significance of child welfare legislation and the CAST mission statement, Code of Ethics and any other relevant agency policies.

Accountability

Aim to ensure that the Board of Directors, staff, foster and residential care providers and volunteers actively engage in implementing an anti-oppression-anti-racism policy. Further, that purchase of service providers be informed of and be expected to provide care and services that comply with the Society's Anti-Oppression-Anti-racism Policy and practices.

Advocacy

Continue to ensure that, both internally and externally, policies and services seek to eradicate systemic barriers to equity, equality, inclusiveness, access, and respect.

Equity

Aim to ensure fairness in the ways services and information are provided, to include communities in decision-making processes, sharing power and resources, and that recruitment and hiring practices at all levels of CAS-Toronto are reflective of the diversity of our society.

Equity is the standard by which to measure all related principles.

POLICY STATEMENT

Whereas the Children's Aid Society of Toronto believes that it is the right of all children, youth, families, communities, staff, care providers, volunteers and persons affiliated with the Society to be free from all forms of oppression and racism be it resolved that:

The Children's Aid Society of Toronto will, with diligence, take the steps required to review existing agency policies and practices, develop new ones, deliver services and create a work environment free from all forms of oppression, including racism.

BENEFITS AND CHALLENGES

Adopting this policy demonstrates the commitment of CAST to delivering anti-oppression/anti-racism child welfare practices. The policy will require an organizational change process that will have varying implications, some of which can be anticipated and others that can't. Some anticipated implications are:

- The implementation of this policy, while being consistent with Canadian laws, will result in services delivered to children, youth, families and care providers that values and respects their cultural, racial, ethnic and religious diversity, resulting in improved relationships of CAST within diverse, newcomer communities and the community at large.

- The policy is an official and formal way to acknowledge and encourage organizational change. The anti-oppression/anti-racism policy will require the agency to examine systemic barriers that inadvertently disadvantage access to services for clients, access to employment for internationally trained social workers, promotion opportunities for staff from diverse racial and cultural backgrounds, and access to opportunities for newcomer families to qualify as foster parents, adoptive parents and volunteers, including board membership.

- Adopting this Anti-Oppression/Anti-Racism Policy sets the agency on a course of organizational change that will require all involved to challenge both personal and organizational values and practices that may be experienced as oppressive and/or racist. Reflecting on how one's personal power and privilege, in combination with the inherent power associated with the child welfare mandate, impacts on our interactions with our clients and colleagues can be enlightening but also emotionally demanding and challenging. There is no easy way to accomplish this process, as it will require all stakeholders to engage in difficult conversations with each other, as well as ask the organization to review and revise current policies and practices.

- Creating an anti-oppressive/anti-racist organization furthers the creation of an equitable, respectful and positive work environment that values and benefits from the diversity of staff, foster parents, care providers and volunteers, including board members. This kind of work environment encourages people to want to be part of the organization and sustains them to remain part of it over the long term.

- Significant commitment and leadership will be required from the Board and senior management in guiding and supporting the implementation of the policy. Children, youth, parents and families will look to them to help the agency engage in a change process that will require staff, foster parents, care providers and volunteers to reflect on the power and privilege that comes from their location in society and to consciously challenge previously held values, beliefs, perceptions and attitudes of people different than themselves. The Board and senior managers will be expected to set the example and act as role models in this process.

- Policy implementation will require dedicated human and financial resources to support training and consultation, carry out systemic reviews, implement new procedures and practices and conduct on-going evaluation, subject to financial ability

- Data collection within the agency will need to be revised and improved in order for it to accurately reflect the clients being served. This may require a review of the purpose for which the data is being collected, how it will be used and its impact on service planning and delivery.

- The adoption of the policy will impact on the agency's community partners, requiring the development and implementation of a communication strategy to inform the community about the new policy as well as the implications of its implementation. It might also be realistic to anticipate that as the Society establishes a 'higher standard' of anti-oppressive/anti-racist child welfare practices for itself, expectations of other organizations and systems providing services and care for CAST involved children, youth and families may also be raised to a 'higher standard'. This may require CAST, subject to the Society's financial ability, to assist community service providers to meet new agency expectations.

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Disabeism/Ableism	*Ableism refers to consciously or unconsciously held beliefs that take expression in individual and/or institutional actions, policies, and practices that subordinates and views as inferior a person or group who suffers from physical, emotional, developmental, psychological, or psychiatric challenges.*
Ageism	*Ageism refers to consciously or unconsciously held beliefs that take expression in individual and/or institutional actions, policies, and practices that subordinates and views as inferior a person or group based upon age.*
Classism	*Classism refers to consciously or unconsciously held beliefs that take expression in individual, institutional, and economic systems that promote policies and practices that subordinates and views as inferior, a person or group who suffers from economic hardship.*
Discrimination	*Unequal treatment based on one or more of the prohibited grounds, except where conduct is permitted under the Ontario Human Rights Code. Discrimination can be intentional or unintentional, direct or indirect but the result is adverse on prohibited grounds.*
Diversity	*Refers to the wide ranging aspects of social differences including such areas as race, colour, sexual orientation, religion, gender, language, age, ability, place of origin, and culture.*
Equity	*A state of fairness or justice, in which individuals and groups are provided with services, information, and benefits in a way that promotes fair and just conditions.*
Harassment	*A course of vexatious comments or conduct based on a prohibited ground as defined in the Ontario Human Rights Code, that is known to be or should reasonably be known to be unwelcome.*
Heterosexism	*The systemic beliefs and practices that benefit heterosexuals. It is the most pervasive source of LGB discrimination, even if unintended and, is often based on the assumption of heterosexuality and that being heterosexual is normal or preferred.*
Inclusiveness	*The degree to which an agency actively seeks, welcomes and collaborates with diverse community partners.*
Power Sharing	*Having in common, between two or more individuals or groups,*

	the capacity to affect decision-making. Power sharing involves aiming to ensure that individuals or groups, particularly those from marginalized communities, have the capacity and resources to participate fully in effecting decision-making outcomes.
Racism	*Racism is defined as "any distinction, exclusion, restriction or preference based on race, colour, descent or national or ethnic origin which has the purpose or effect of nullifying or impairing the recognition, enjoyment or exercise, on an equal footing, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural or any other filed of public life." (International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, 1965).*
Sharing Resources	*Networking with community support groups to sharing in common services, programs, information, knowledge, funding and skills to promote the well being of children, youth, families and communities.*
Social Location	*How one is treated in society based on their position/location that includes the power and privilege associated with one's economic status, race, education, ethnicity, gender, age, sexual orientation, gender identity, disability, marital status, religion, national origin, legal status.*

Related Agency Policies:

- Code of Ethics
- Harassment & Discrimination Policy
- We Are Your Children Too: Accessible Child Welfare Services For Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Youth Policy
- Same Sex Adoption Policy
- Same Sex Fostering Policy.

This policy was developed by the Bridging Diversity Committee of the Children's Aid Society of Toronto.

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