

Regional Diversity Roundtable

Diversity & Inclusion Charter

January 21, 2015

Good evening Ladies and Gentlemen. Let me begin by thanking the Regional Diversity Roundtable for inviting me to speak with you this evening. I also want to say thanks for providing this opportunity and for creating space to have a dialogue on diversity and inclusion in the Region.

My instructions from Amrita are to focus on the impact, sustainability and capacity building of implementing a D & I Charter. Amrita has presented to you the background and rationale for the Charter; she has also touched on our context in Peel Region which I believe most of you are familiar with.

I want to start by congratulating all of us for the innovation and foresight in the creation and launching of the D & I Charter, I believe the first of its kind in Canada. It is now 2 years later and we are ready to implement phase 2 of this process. What does this mean for our community? What does this mean to the average resident in Peel? Peel has a Diversity & Inclusion Charter, **So What?** Tonight I want to explore the **so what**, the next steps/implementation so to speak.

The task is enormous; just think about developing and implementing diversity initiatives in your own organizations/institutions; think about the layers, the complexities, competing priorities and challenges of implementation then scale that up to a Regional strategy for a million people no less. In essence the job at hand is: how do we encourage and mobilize the community at large to begin to

explore their own views/perceptions and opinions of their neighbours. How do we encourage the community to open up, share and live the intention of the diversity and inclusion charter? How do we engage the broader community to participate in large scale systemic change to ensure that all residents of Peel are included?

One might suggest that this should not be a huge leap given Peel's demographics, given the fact that the diverse minority population is now the majority throughout the Region but this is where it becomes real. We have a majority population with no power, a majority struggling to gain access to jobs and integration into a community, a majority with no real voice but wanting to be heard and no real feelings of belonging – on all levels this poses serious problems. Sadly, what this translates into is a huge segment of the total population in Peel who on a daily basis experience the highest levels of racism/discrimination, unemployment and underemployment; this equals the highest rates of poverty – let me share some stats with you:

13% poverty rate for Peel =169,000 people

33% of recent immigrants to Peel live in poverty

20% of racialized people live in poverty;

40% of seniors living alone and

17% of children under the age of 6 are living in poverty

16% average youth unemployment in Peel. The total youth unemployment rate in Toronto is over 20%, it's almost 25% for aboriginal youth and nearly 30% for Black youth

Which leads to vulnerability sometimes desperation, violence, mental health issues, addictions and in some extreme cases can lead to criminal behaviour. This culminates in a progressive erosion of spirit, soul and self. What I am sharing with you are not myths but real facts and reality for a significant proportion of our community. Pick up any research document published in the last ten years to verify my comments. As a matter of fact, over the weekend I came across a Toronto Star article on Racism in Canada published on May 14, 2009 amongst my papers. The title on the front page was: “The Darker Your Skin...the less you fit in” The article goes on to state that the study which interviewed 41,666 people in nine languages found that skin colour not religion or income was the biggest barrier to immigrants feeling they belong here”. I use this article to make the point that we tend to believe that racism is a minor problem in Canada and of little consequence – however the impact of racism is significant. Of even more significance is the resistance to investigate this issue.

It is now 2015 and the racial disparities in unemployment, education, health and incarceration are alarming. So again I ask the question, how does a diversity & inclusion charter facilitate and sustain a conversation on systemic change?

We’ve planted the tree but how do we get it to bear fruit?

What we have here is an opportunity to grow the tree on our terms; to be proactive and innovative on how to nurture the tree. We have the opportunity to prevent this Charter from becoming a pretty hanging on the wall. At this time more than ever as the writing is on the wall we need our municipal and regional governments to step up and lead for racial equity. We have 3 new Mayors in the Region and one new Regional Chair - this is a call to action to them. They must

pay attention to how racism and discrimination interact to create barriers to access and integration. I believe the stars maybe aligning as the City of Mississauga has put out a call for applications for the City's new Diversity and Inclusion Advisory Committee. I challenge the City of Brampton and the Town of Caledon to follow suit.

We need courageous and creative leaders working to dismantle these disparities to build a healthy and inclusive Peel. We as a community must hold our political leaders accountable; they must work with racialized communities, immigrant and newcomer communities to implement the Charter. We must also hold our local institutions (police, school boards, etc) accountable by exploring mechanisms to build better relationships. Relationships that are progressive and mutually beneficial. We do this by asking community leaders and decision makers to pay attention to how policies impact communities. Policies developed years ago when Peel's context was vastly different need to be reviewed through a lens of equity. I suggest that we ask organizations and institutions to implement an **equity impact analysis** at the beginning of any process to identify any existing disparities; this will bring to the forefront areas of exclusion and barriers to access. An equity impact analysis will ask the following questions: how does the current policy impact racialized, newcomer communities? How will the proposed policy affect the communities living within these inequities? And does the policy make the conditions worse or better? This process requires the engagement of leaders and the communities impacted. **Phase 2 of the diversity and inclusion charter requires broad cross-sector coordination for large scale social change.**

We can also learn from many of our corporate partners who have already implemented equity/diversity initiatives because dollars were being impacted. The community was changing, customers were now more diverse and were looking for a different or diverse customer experience. The business case for change was impacting market shares...it only made sense to change and adapt marketing and communication strategies. There is nothing like economics to stimulate change. Go to any of our local banks, grocery stores (international aisles, halal meats), car dealerships to see the change. One of the lessons we can learn from the private sector is that the approach to change has to be deliberate, intentional and targeted. Let me share the Kentucky Fried Chicken story as it was told to me 😊

My second suggestion is that the Region develop and implement a **Report Card on Equity**. The only concrete example I could find exists in Minnesota, where the community holds their local government accountable...the report card focuses on the different areas of disparity, for example one could look at the racial report card on the school board and see how the general student population was doing at the same time look at Black or American Indian students graduation and participation rates; in the Minnesota example you can look at individual schools. I think more information could be gleaned from them.

The point here is that this cannot be achieved by the RDR alone but must be a collective effort. **This is not merely a matter of encouraging more collaboration or public/private sector partnerships work of this magnitude requires a systematic approach to social impact that focuses on the relationships between organizations and the progress toward shared objectives.** What I am speaking

about is using a collective impact approach to implementing phase 2. John Kania and Mark Kramer suggest that successful collective impact initiatives typically have five conditions: a common agenda, shared measurement systems, mutually reinforcing activities, continuous communication and backbone support organizations. I believe that the Charter is the perfect initiative for a collective impact strategy. We have the conditions, I would even go so far as to say that there is a sense of urgency to get this work underway...increasing unemployment and poverty rates, gun activity in Malton and Brampton, a population that is projected to continue growing at a rate of approximately 25 -30 thousand per year, a social service safety net that is struggling with addressing the complex needs and challenges presented by clients, waiting lists for mental health services, growing violence against women all ingredients for destabilizing and polarizing a community. We can look to the east of us to see what is happening in Toronto or across the border at our American friends to see the results of not addressing issues of disparity and inequity.

I am not suggesting that having an inclusive community will eradicate all these issues but it is another lens to consider as we peel back the layers and not just examine the tip of the iceberg. **If a community has access to decent jobs, programs and services for their children and families we have a much healthier, happier community. If all residents in Peel feel as though they belong we have a better chance of building a healthier, safer community. We have a better chance of economic prosperity, civic engagement and innovation.**

We sustain this work by developing a massive communication strategy: a strategy that incorporates all sectors, a strategy that uses the jumbotron at Celebration

Square to consistently communicate **that one person not included is one person too many**. That schools, corporations and local government communicate and walk the talk of inclusivity; that policies at all levels are reconsidered and considered through an equity lens. That maybe grocery store receipts print messages of equity on the back, that residents, corporations, etc are celebrated for their contributions to this work...kind of like a People's Choice Awards. That our media "flip the script" and highlight the contributions of racialized and newcomer populations in Peel; so that maybe we can achieve what Pierre Trudeau started when he opened the doors to immigration and multiculturalism in the 60s. Peel is collaborative, innovative and caring, and according to Dr. Kwame McKenzie at a recent PNSG gathering Peel is positioned to make this happen. So lets get going, knowing that this is a ten year commitment at a minimum but that the future of our community/youth depends on this.

Thank you.

I would like to suggest that we develop a Report Card on Equity for the Region.