

Peel group calls for GTA African-Canadian children's aid society

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A black community group in Peel recommends mandatory collection and sharing of race-based data on Ontario kids in care.



Jim Rankin / Toronto Star Order this photo

Nineteen-year-old Nancy, left, formerly a child in care, participates in The Village, a program for black youth in care run by the Peel Children's Aid Society.

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- The Ontario government should make it mandatory for all children's aid societies to collect and make public race-based data on kids in their care.

The recommendation — along with a call for an African-Canadian society to support Toronto-area black families — is included in a position paper by the Black Community Action Network (BCAN) of Peel. It will be released Wednesday morning at a Brampton conference of Peel community leaders and children's aid society officials.



“The collection and dissemination of that data is critical to be able to assess whether the kinds of services that we have available are effective, to hold some of these agencies accountable for the kinds of services they are delivering,” Dr. Julian Hasford, the paper’s author and a community psychologist, said in an interview.

“I don’t think that we’re going to be able to make informed and effective decisions with respect to system change without that information.”

The group also wants the Peel Children’s Aid Society to follow the lead of the Children’s Aid Society of Toronto and report publicly on the proportion of children in care — and the number of families involved with the society — who are black.

The Toronto society took the step earlier this year after the Toronto Star [revealed last December](#) that 41 per cent of children in care are black. The city’s under-18 black youth population, meanwhile, is 8.2 per cent.

Rav Bains, CEO of the Peel society, is scheduled to speak at Wednesday’s launch of the report.

The report, which examined what little is known about the over-representation of black children and society-involved families in Ontario, also recommends:

- The Peel society establish a committee aimed at reducing the over-representation of black children in care and the number of black families involved with the society.
- Identifying an agency that can serve, by the end of 2016, as an “initial point of contact or referral” for black children and families identified as at “risk of child welfare involvement.”
- The Peel society, Peel police, Peel District School Board, Region of Peel government and service agencies adopt an “anti-oppression/anti-racism” approach that includes an “explicit anti-black-racism lens” for responding to racial disparities.
- More investment at all levels of government in programs that support vulnerable families of all backgrounds.

The report also says the new African-Canadian agency “should adopt an Afrocentric approach and focus on supporting strong and healthy families, rather than removing children from the home.”

“It’s important that we create settings that are culturally responsive,” Hasford told the Star, “and it’s very clear that a lot of families that have been involved in the child welfare system, including a lot of racialized staff who also work within the system, feel that those kinds of settings aren’t necessarily sensitive to the community’s needs.

“Having said that, we recognize that mainstream staff within mainstream agencies do a lot of hard work. There are families that have benefitted from those services.”

The report highlights an existing program at Peel children’s aid, called [The Village](#), which connects black youth in care and those who have recently left care with black mentor workers, as an example of much-needed and successful intervention programs — and calls for more like it.

That program involved Kike Ojo, the Peel society’s diversity and anti-oppression manager, who is now on leave and working with the Ontario Association of Children’s Aid Societies to develop a provincial guidebook for societies to follow when dealing with black children and families.

Sophia Brown Ramsay, BCAN’s program manager, acknowledged there is frustration in the community

with the lack of movement in the child protection system but said that the paper and recommendations are not about assigning blame.

The Star found poverty and issues of neglect were driving factors for all children who come into care. With black families, racial bias and cultural misunderstanding on the part society workers and those doing the referring — schools and police being two of the largest — are also part of equation, say advocates and black leaders.

42% The proportion of children in the care of the Children's Aid Society of Toronto in 2013 who were black or have one parent who is black.

8% The proportion of people under 18 in Toronto who are black.

47% The proportion of black children in the care of the Toronto society with parents born in Caribbean countries.

20% The proportion of black children in the care of the Toronto society with parents born in Africa.

45% The proportion of black children who spent more than 12 months in the care of the Toronto society in the 2008 fiscal year.

20% The proportion of white children who spent more than 12 months in the Toronto society's care.