



For Immediate Release  
August 9, 2018

**New system navigators to assist and support African Canadian families engaged with Children's Aid Societies across the province will soon be in place**

**TORONTO** – For the first time in history, the Ontario child welfare sector will have Community Engagement Workers, dedicated to providing support to African Canadian families as they attempt to navigate the child welfare system. It is anticipated that both positions will be in place by September 2018.

This means that members of the African Canadian community will be able to call on Community Engagement Workers who will have extensive knowledge of the child welfare system, when they are experiencing barriers, systemic or anti-black racism or are trying to navigate the child welfare system. A need for this service was clearly articulated in Phase I of the One Vision One Voice project.

Two positions will be hired on a full time 8-month contract. The roles will be based in Toronto at the Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies (OACAS), but the Community Engagement Workers will support African Canadian families across the province, upon request.

The hiring of these positions is just one initiative included in a contract between the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services and the community-led One Vision One Voice (OVOV) project, which is run through OACAS and is working to address the overrepresentation of African Canadians in the child welfare system.

There are currently no existing spaces to receive, document and address the concerns with our system that families may have. Part of the responsibility built in to these two positions, will be the tracking and documenting of engagement with the African Canadian community.

These newly created roles follow on from another historic initiative, Canada's first ever Symposium for Black youth in care, Power Up! which was held in Toronto on July 10-11, 2018 and brought together 130 Black youth in care from across the province for the first time ever.

In recognition of the necessity to provide culturally and racially appropriate services, as outlined in the OVOV [Race Equity Practices](#), the Community Engagement Worker positions will work in partnership with existing community agencies providing services to the African Canadian Community, through the utilization of a new Black Service Directory for child welfare.

This directory, which will be compiled and put together by the OVOV team in partnership with the African Canadian community and will include African Canadian service providers from across the province, will be an online resource that the Community Engagement Workers, CASs across the province and the African Canadian community, can use to access and find racially and culturally appropriate services. The directory will be available in the fall.

For a full description of the OVOV Child Welfare Community Engagement Role, please see [here](#).

“The creation of these two roles means that for the first time the African Canadian community has somewhere to turn when they experience differential treatment or anti-Black racism in the system. If they’ve been referred to CAS on a ‘trite’ report, which happens all too often, they now have someone who understands systemic and anti-Black racism available to help them navigate the system.”

**Julian Hasford, Chair, African Canadian Provincial Advisory Council, OACAS**

“This is a game changer for the African Canadian community. The existence of someone who the community can contact to attend meetings with them, give advice and provide support, will change the experience of the system for many families. We are excited to get these positions filled and continue to work in partnership with all organizations providing service to the African Canadian community, so that we can change the child welfare system to better serve African Canadians.”

**Kike Ojo, Project Lead, OACAS, One Vision One Voice Project**

For more information visit: [www.oacas.org/onevisiononevoice](http://www.oacas.org/onevisiononevoice)

#### **About the One Vision One Voice Project**

Aligned with A Better Way Forward: Ontario’s 3-Year Anti-Racism Strategic Plan, OACAS through One Vision One Voice, and in partnership with the Ministry of Children and Youth Services and the African Canadian community, has taken a leadership role in working to combat the overrepresentation, address the disproportionalities and eliminate the disparities experienced by African Canadians engaged with child welfare agencies.

#### **About the Ontario Association of Children’s Aid Societies**

For over 100 years, OACAS has been enhancing and promoting the welfare and well-being of children, youth and families in Ontario. OACAS works to create a highly effective system of services for children which has the confidence of Ontario families and communities.

For more media inquiries, contact Kearie Daniel, Communications and Community Engagement Specialist at [kdaniel@oacas.org](mailto:kdaniel@oacas.org), or (416) 987-3684