

An ongoing conversation

by SHERALYN ROMAN

Last week I asked what was on your mind and shared what was on mine. This week, I'm still talking about the deaths of George Floyd, Ahmaud Aubrey, Breonna Taylor and so many others like them. It must be an ongoing conversation because we just can't carry on in this way. It's untenable to think that Black lives can continue to be snuffed out for the sake of a bag of skittles or a jog through a neighbourhood. It's unthinkable that we are still reeling from the impact of a study on systemic racism in the public school board that serves Caledon, Brampton and Mississauga. So yes, I'm still talking about the continued unrest both south of the border and here at home. I'm still talking about it because someone has to. You have to. We all must take some action and shoulder some of the responsibility in order to create change. As our own Councillor Downey asked in a recent and moving video posted online: 'Who does it have to be for us to care?? Someone you know? Someone you love? It shouldn't matter who it is.

Start by having an ongoing conversation with your neighbours, your friends, co-workers, online or with your families. Don't let Mr. Floyd's death be just another rallying flashpoint for a week or two of 'meaningful' Instagram posts and conversely, don't allow the random act of a few looters to provide you with an excuse to avoid supporting the legitimate and much-needed protest efforts of so many. Now is the time for the hard work to begin, to have an ongoing conversation with yourself and with others about how together we can dismantle a system that has, for far too long, only serviced and benefited white people.

I am encouraged by some of the efforts I have seen locally. Along Highway #50 in Bolton an organized and peaceful group rallied, standing in solidarity, with signs showing support for the Black community. In Mayfield West a group has been formed to explore the concept of equity in Caledon. Also in Mayfield West, the OPP formally apologized to a family for removing signs the family had made showing support for Black Lives Matter. Further, the neighbourhood rallied behind them with many now posting their own Black Lives Matter signs on front lawns and porches. In Orangeville, a peaceful march is planned for Sunday while still obeying current social distancing restrictions and the same goes for both Brampton and Mississauga. In short, there are many conversations taking place and that's a good sign. Here is what else you can do:

- Continue to put pressure on local institutions and ask questions about what we, as a community, are doing to support our friends and neighbours.
- Have challenging conversations but do so armed with facts and knowledge. Know that mistakes will be made but it is from making mistakes that we learn. Not having a difficult conversation because you are 'afraid of saying the wrong thing?' prevents anything from being learned and without learning we can't move forward.
- Read. As I pointed out last week, read books on systemic racism, anti-Black racism and understanding colonialism and its impact on Indigenous peoples. Read to your children and make sure what you read and watch reflects a diversity of voices and perspectives.
- Write letters, attend rallies if you are comfortable, and if you are able to 'donate to causes that support Black initiatives like Black Lives Matter or the Black Legal Action Centre.
- Ensure you have a solid understanding of the concepts of equity and equality and know (particularly those of you advocating that 'All Lives Matter,?') that it is equity that's required of us. That is, building customized tools that identify and address inequity where it exists. There's a significant difference between the two and explaining it would take an entire column. (Maybe next week!)

Finally, once again I must also take this opportunity to remind readers who think racism doesn't exist here in Canada, or indeed here in Caledon, like it does south of the border, that we have only to look at the recent direction by Education Minister Stephen Lecce to the Peel District School Board. In it, he issued a final warning to the Board for implementing strategies to deal with systemic racism in its schools. He also expressed concern that the Board 'lacks capacity?' to deal with this ongoing issue, perhaps hinting at the severity of the challenge facing them. In reply Peter Joshua, the PDSB Director of Education together with Chair of the Board Brad

MacDonald have stated: ?Let there be no mistake, the leadership team at the Peel District School Board shares a commitment to bring about the changes needed to end the systemic anti-Black racism that exists in our schools, policies and workplaces.? They acknowledge a reason for scepticism as the ?Black community?..have been telling us for decades that anti-Black racism is part of their lived experiences.? The Board is firmly committed, in their words, to ?interrupt and disrupt? all forms of systemic discrimination. It appears as though here too, the conversation is starting. These are conversations that might be long overdue but it's important these conversations remain ongoing.