

G.E.T. Outreach Works holds Black History Month grand finale

By Riley Murphy

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After a month of educational opportunities and community celebrations, Gathering, Evolving and Transforming (G.E.T.) Outreach Works held a Black History Month grand finale through their C.E.E.P. initiative.

This initiative provides educational awareness during Black History Month, serving Shelburne and surrounding communities, such as Caledon, through cultural awareness programming and special events ? just like their recent event held at North Peel Community Church on February 28.

The celebration was focused on ?the creativity, resilience, and brilliance woven throughout Black history and culture.?

This community event focused on connectivity and fostered a true space for learning.

?We always finish off with a grant finale here in the Caledon community, where we provide opportunities for the community at large to come in and share in the theme that we're expressing. This year was all about Black community and innovation,? says Andrea Kelly-Brown, G.E.T. Outreach Works Vice President.

Each year, G.E.T. Outreach Works holds activities and educational awareness during Black History Month, and this year, Kelly-Brown says that it was extremely unique and allowed them to express their theme in many different ways.

Partnering with North Peel Community Church was a full-circle moment, as the church is where the organization was born.

?We saw the need and wanted to do something for the community,? explains Kelly-Brown.

She adds their programs are a way to bring everybody together to learn and enjoy each other's community.

?To know that we can come together as one, no matter who you are, no matter what culture, and just live and enjoy and be as one is 100% what we do,? says Kelly-Brown.

At the event that day, there were four keynote speakers, each highlighting the Black community in different ways.

From spoken word to live hair demonstrations, each speaker brought something new to the day.

?A lot of times, for me growing up, if we were talking about Black history, we were constantly working with individuals from our neighbouring country, which is the United States, and we've been really working hard to highlight individuals within our community, the unsung heroes,? says Kelly-Brown, explaining the speakers of the day.

?We looked for individuals that could talk about our theme in a way that would highlight who they are, what they've been doing in the community for a long time, and also celebrate with us to bring it here.?

The first keynote speaker of the day was Natalie Smith, a medical doctor, entrepreneur, and storyteller, who performed a spoken word piece, titled ?What Does it Mean to Be Black??

A segment of her spoken word held the following phrases, ?Though we experience discrimination, the law suppressed us as a nation, as previous owners withheld jobs, loans, property, and education, but despite segregation, despite defamation, despite disgust and

hatred, we kept on elevating. Why? Because Black was not designed for breaking.?

Concluding her spoken word, Smith led the crowd in repeating after her, 'It's not impossible. Because I am possible,' telling those sitting in the church that day that 'everything that you are, everything you are called to be, every sphere of influence that you were created to impact, every passion and every desire, every talent that you possess is possible.'

The next presentation came from Shimmara Gordon and Jevonese Williams, who presented 'The Influence of Black Hair in Our History.'

The two explained through their presentation how Black hair is a deep historical marker of identity, status, and heritage rooted in African tradition.

'Historically, it has been used as a tool of resilience and oppression. Slaves were forced to shave their hair, being dehumanized, while natural styles like the afro later emerged as a symbol of political power and pride,' said Gordon.

Explaining that hair is a large part of identity, historically specific patterns and styles like cornrow or bantu knots identified a person's tribe, family background, or geographic origins.

'Nowadays, we still use hair to express ourselves, but hair is another form of communication between people and can be used as many different styles of art forms,' continued Gordon.

'Black hair is more than style. It is history, it is identity, and it is pride. We went from laws that tried to silence us to movements that celebrated our natural beauty. Its legacy reminds us that something as simple as hair can hold powerful stories on resilience and self-expression, and as we move forward, let's remember that growth starts with awareness and action.'

The two continued presenting on different hair textures, braiding techniques, patterns, and more, and even provided a live demonstration of proper hair care techniques for 4C hair.

The next speaker that afternoon was Anita Alabi, who led a discussion on the Black community and family.

Alabi is a registered social worker, and through therapy with her clients, she specializes in areas of anti-Black racism, anti-oppressive, cognitive behavioural therapy, intergenerational trauma and more.

'The Black family is adaptive, it's resilient, and it's sacred, so when we speak about humans, we speak about humans from our lens, an afro-centric lens that centers Black history, culture, spirituality, and community systems. Trauma for Black people is not just personal, it's historic and systemic, it's also intergenerational, and so too is our resilience,' said Alabi.

In her discussion, Alabi stressed the importance of healing, community, and what these concepts mean to different people.

'When people talk about community, that's where our healing happens. Storytelling is therapy. Identity is healing,' said Alabi.

The final speaker was Dr. Beverly Blair, who presented not just on the Black Community and the Church, but more specifically, the historic church hat.

'The tradition of wearing church hats dates back to early Christianity, where women were encouraged to cover their heads during worship as a sign of modesty and reverence,' explained Blair. 'This practice was particularly significant in the African-American community, where hats became a powerful symbol of identity and pride, especially during the era of slavery and beyond.'

Blair remarked she remembers a time when she would set out to buy her own church hat and get the matching shoes and purse as well.

She continued, explaining that as the Black middle class emerged in the early 20th century, church hats became status symbols.

Reflecting economic and social advancement, church hats became more elaborate, crafted from various materials that were adorned with intricate designs, feathers, and ribbons.

?It's more than just a mere fashion accessory. It's deeply rooted in our culture, our spiritual fabric, our community, and represents a rich history of resilience, creativity, and identity,? said Blair.

After the keynotes concluded, the rest of the day was spent in celebration.

Attendees could be seen sharing a meal together or speaking with one of the keynote speakers at their booths.

The walls of North Peel Community Church were decorated with the achievements and history of the Black Community, encouraging learning once more.

?We didn't just celebrate Black history today. We celebrated our community today,? said Kelly-Brown, reflecting on the event.