

COMBATING ANTI-BLACK & ANTI-INDIGENOUS RACISM: SCLS' STATEMENT & ACTION PLAN

October 19, 2020

Scarborough Community Legal Services (SCLS) has been reflecting on how best to be part of the fight against anti-Black and anti-Indigenous racism in our community and beyond. We make this statement after careful consideration of our own internal values and how we can do better as allies and as a site for access to justice for racialized communities. As we write this statement, despite the awareness gained and the conversations had by many over the last several months, we find ourselves amidst the same headlines about violence against Black and Indigenous communities.

SCLS recognizes that racialized communities, and particularly Black and Indigenous communities, live with the daily reality of marginalization and state-based violence. We all must play a part in making change. Standing as allies in this struggle, SCLS recognizes that the fight begins from within. We are committed to listening to and serving our Black and Indigenous community members beyond this statement of support. Accordingly, we have brought together members of our staff and Board of Directors to develop a meaningful action plan to address anti-Black and anti-Indigenous racism. This will include actions within in our own organization and in our broader community. While our action plan will continue to grow, at this time we have committed to the following immediate and long-term action items.

Within the next three months, SCLS will:

1. Work to implement race-based data collection at SCLS, including creating a framework and clear statement of intent for the collection and use of this data;
2. Conduct an all-staff meeting to discuss the issues of anti-Black and anti-Indigenous racism in relation to our work, as well as to have an open, honest, and safe discussion of staff members' own lived experiences of racism and discrimination;
3. Ensure our staff and Board receive training to further educate ourselves on how to better combat anti-Black and anti-Indigenous racism in our work;
4. Conduct outreach to organisations that serve the Black and Indigenous communities in Scarborough, including developing more public legal education activities specifically designed for members of these communities; and
5. Begin reviewing our policies in an effort to apply an anti-racism and anti-discrimination lens to all our current policies.

Within the next twelve months, SCLS will:

1. Complete our policy review and make any amendments necessary to ensure all policies reflect an anti-racism and anti-discrimination lens;
2. Conduct training to improve our work with Indigenous clients, Black clients, and other community groups as we determine necessary;
3. Engage in staff training regarding trauma informed practice, with a focus on how trauma related to racism and discrimination can impact our clients;
4. Review whether our current areas of practice are meeting the needs of Black and Indigenous clients in Scarborough, and determine if we can better meet the needs of these communities;
5. Review our hiring and retention practices to determine if the diversity of our staff reflects the community we serve; and
6. Build mechanisms to hold ourselves accountable, including sharing our progress with the community through our annual report and AGM.

We know that Black and Indigenous people in Scarborough are under protected and over policed. We remain committed to supporting our many racialized clients who live with the reality of systemic discrimination and state violence every day. We acknowledge the cruelty inherent in the prevailing cultural, socio-economic, and political systems of our country. We stand in solidarity with all those who have suffered, and still suffer, the rage, anguish, and pain caused by these oppressive systems. The time for change is upon us, and we wholeheartedly support the demands made by the Black Legal Action Centre in their Statement on Policing and Anti-Black Racism dated June 25, 2020 (<https://www.blacklegalactioncentre.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/BLAC-Statement-on-Policing-and-Anti-Black-Racism-June-25-2020.pdf>).

Finally, we make this statement not just to our communities and the public, but also to our fellow legal clinic colleagues. We must recognize that the legal clinic system is not immune to anti-Black and anti-Indigenous racism. As organizations seeking to promote equity, it is imperative that legal clinics recognize the inherent racism and biases that exist in our system. We need to ensure that clinic staffing and leadership reflects the diversity of the communities that we serve. We need to foster environments for racialized legal clinic staff and clients to feel safe when addressing their own lived experiences of racism. We must recognize the role we play in a legal system that can often be another site of oppression for Black, Indigenous, and racialized communities. We must also do our part in educating ourselves on racism, and acknowledging the burden that often is placed on Black and Indigenous communities to educate others.

We will continue to take concrete steps toward holding ourselves accountable and engaging meaningfully in this fight. We remain committed to our vision of a community where all people can access justice, have equality of opportunity, and live free from discrimination and poverty. We welcome feedback from the community at all times.