

Black History Month celebrations will conclude with grants to help community members achieve dreams



When you come to this country with very little money in your pocket, the cost of bus fare could be the one thing between you and getting the job of your dreams.

This is an issue that has been recognized by the Aurora Black Community (ABC) Association and will be addressed as Black History Month draws to a close with the launch of the 'I Believe' grant.

Two grants will be awarded to community members during a special virtual closing ceremony this Saturday, February 26, at 5 p.m. an evening which will also see the ABC hand out awards for allyship within Aurora and York Region.

The I Believe grant, which is still accepting nominations and applications through Friday, is intended to help 'people of colour to have some seed money to help actualize a dream they have been working on to help them get their own vocation or income,' says Rebekah Murdoch, Vice President of the ABC.

'Quite often you come here with not much else, especially if you're a refugee and had to leave all that behind,' she says. 'Just a little teeny bit of money can get you a bus ticket to go to that perfect job that could change your life. It doesn't have to be a lot to facilitate change.'

But sometimes it does require allyships, and that too will be recognized with a series of awards on Saturday. This allyship could be anything from recognizing a business for promoting ABC's activities, to volunteering hours, to any other actions that have shown support.

'We want to stop the word 'sponsor' from always meaning money,' says Ms. Murdoch. 'Sometimes you can give a lot of time, effort or passion to a project, specifically a group that has not normally been showcased as much in everyday life in Aurora. When the first Black Lives Matter event happened in Aurora two summers ago, we had a meeting with the Mayor, Councillor Kim, and they were all in agreement on what if we had a way to make multiculturalism a selling feature of doing business in Aurora? Some towns are known for this or that, and it is why businesses invest in their town. There has not been a multiculturalism mandate put out by the Province for municipal planning, so just to think of it on another level, we were working with the Mayor even back then on how we can make this so it is not just random people volunteering and it is a more formal initiative. Somebody from the Town could even win this award who have gone above and beyond trying to support the Aurora Black Community and people of colour in their

own community. It could be a person, a business, or a political figurehead.?

Since she joined the ABC, Ms. Murdoch says a key thing she has learned about allyship is you have to go in with your heart and not have to worry about what is considered the 'right' thing to do necessarily in your own cultural community [and] speak up for the unspoken.?

'Allyship can show up in so many different ways,' she says. 'It could be sharing messages on Facebook so it could be more subtle or more assertive. The good thing is social media has created this way that you can very easily become an ally without it stressing you out or taking you away from your everyday life.'

By the time the ABC's Black History Month programs wrap up at the end of this month and there will be more activities and initiatives to come throughout 2022 Ms. Murdoch says the Association hopes what they have offered so far, as well as the stories of the grant and award recipients, will serve to inspire the community but, first, community members need to get their nominations in by Friday, February 25.

'It is to inspire other people and cultures of colour to do similar programs within their own businesses or their own associations,' she says. 'Imagine if every culture gave a hand-up instead of a hand-out with their own culture? You're starting to see this whole snowball effect of people succeeding in other areas that didn't get help succeeding before.'

'No good deed goes unnoticed. Everything is like a domino. When you do one thing and you make it public, it is actually very good because it gets people out of their shell and they realize how simple it is. A lot of people feel hopelessness. I know when the Black Lives Matter movement started, I, as a White person, felt completely hopeless seeing what was happening and knowing that some of that stuff even happens in my own community. Knowing now that there is no such thing as hopelessness any action could facilitate change small or large and have a ripple effect.'

For more on the Aurora Black Community, the upcoming grants and awards program, and how to nominate yourself or others, visit aurorablackcommunity.com.

By Brock Weir
Editor Local Journalism Initiative Reporter