

Continued dialogue on Black History Month, inclusivity initiatives needed after first 'Fyah Side Chat'

Dialogue on inclusivity in the lead up to February's Black History Month and beyond will continue after an initial planning discussion hosted recently by the Aurora Black Community (ABC) Association.

On September 29, community members and organizations, such as the Aurora Public Library, Aurora Film Circuit, and the Aurora Black Caucus gathered at the Aurora Public Library for a 'Fyah Side Chat' intended to be a brainstorming session on what next year's Black History Month commemorations might look like.

While the discussions at the end of last month were fruitful, it was clear there is much work to do ahead of February of 2024 to ensure commemorations are not only as inclusive as possible, but lay the groundwork for ongoing celebrations of Black excellence in our community.

'I think it takes a little while for people to get comfortable with sharing,' said ABC Founder Phiona Durrant following the first session. 'Once you get comfortable and realize it's okay to talk, it was amazing. I think that people are just excited and glad to be a part of Aurora Black History, [and] see where we come from. It was a small dent we put into the work, but [the group was] very enthusiastic about making it better every year and also getting more engaged where there is no pause.'

'We have already set dates to make sure we have this done three times a year and it keeps the flow going, it stays top of mind for people, and it keeps fresh ideas coming in and also making what we do in February even easier and more successful.'

As future meetings take shape, Durrant said the community needs to be 'really intentional about working together' and make sure all groups are included. One area the group agreed they would like to see is an increased spotlight on Black sporting excellence within Aurora, as well as inviting more people to the table to talk about some tough issues.

'Some of the things the media don't want to talk about and the people don't want to hear about it, and sometimes even I am in denial about it, but it is just the truth,' says Durrant. 'Something that (Traditional Anishinaabe Grandmother) Kim Wheatley said at the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation [the following evening that stuck with me is] the truth is the truth ? even though it might hurt or it might be uncomfortable, it is still the truth.'

'We just really want us to be more intentional in working together. That was something that was brought up by one of the Councillors who asked the question about [how] to make sure that communication is reaching the diverse community and the growing population. Right now, we're in a good place. We're setting up a meeting in the next couple of days to fine-tune and we're working with some people and hope we have some good news by the end of this month to really narrow in on the things we need to do once we know who is going to be there.'

'You don't have all the answers and you don't know where people's minds are at, but I just want people to get beyond the colour and come and learn, educate and work together' and nobody is asking, 'Am I able to come?' One person said, 'I shouldn't be at this Fyah Side Chat because I'm white. I should just be sitting back and listening.' But that doesn't mean you don't show up, because when you're showing up for community, you're showing up to learn, you're showing up to ask questions. Showing up how can you be a part of the work that you're doing. If we can get anything out [it is] to tell people it is to get in touch with us, get involved, participate, and be a part of the genuine change we're asking for ? and not just rallying when we have things like a solidarity march. It's easy for people to show up for that, but once those have died down you don't see the people who are there to really do the work. We see them, we value them, we appreciate them. We're not doing this in silos and we just have to work together and make it happen.'

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