

Be outraged by racism, not terms

BY AYOUB ANSARI

WHILE completing my law school placement in Dryden, Ontario, I was brainstorming ways to break down racial barriers prevalent in our communities.

It was during the federal election where the lack of diversity within our political leadership at the time was stark, and the racist rhetoric seemed to be at an all-time high (for example, Stephen Harper's use of the term "old-stock Canadians" and the conversations around "barbaric cultural practices").

Anecdotally, I knew we were diversifying as a nation despite the regressive national conversation; however I needed numbers. I started researching and I found two intriguing statistics courtesy of Statistics Canada.

First, nearly 6.3-million people in Canada identified themselves as a member of a visible minority group. Second, the visible minority population has a median age of 33.4 compared to 40.1 for the population as a whole. Racialized people make up almost one-fifth of Canada's population. And we are younger.

There are also many more unsettling statistics about lower income, unemployment, and discrimination — sometimes as a result of conscious choices and other times, unconscious biases.

Thus, after completing my placement, this journey of facilitating a conversation around racism began formally in January 2016 with an inaugural meeting of the Racialized Young Professionals Network. This meeting was open to the public in Thunder Bay and was well attended.



ONE CITY,
MANY VOICES

We hosted monthly meetings in order to understand, identify and converse in a more nuanced way about the issues impacting racialized young professionals in our city and beyond.

Through consensus and a grassroots decision-making process, we decided to have a three-pronged approach in order to tackle racism-related problems in our community.

First, with the goal of working towards equity, we advocate for, model and work on creating systemic changes within institutions. Issues such as systemic-racism and unconscious-bias need to be acknowledged by our institutions and then challenged.

Second, we work on building community.

Third, we focus on the empowerment of racialized people. We hope to create opportunities that motivate, inspire and educate not only racialized people but also the broader public, on issues of racism and discrimination.

With those three pillars in mind, we are building a movement that is grounded and widely accepted among racialized members of Thunder Bay. Those committed to the fight against racism who are not racialized themselves — our allies — have been extremely supportive as

well and we continue to welcome them.

I do understand that the term "racialized" may be too strong for some. It does not give us the same warm and fuzzy feeling we get when we use terms such as: diversity, multiculturalism, or dare I say, words like "exotic."

However, being on the receiving-end of racism is not warm and fuzzy either. It is a lived reality for far too many in our society. So, if you are hell-bent on getting offended, I ask you do so for the right reason. In other words, one's moral outrage should be directed towards racism, instead of terms like "racialized" intended to unify those experiencing racism.

If you feel that racism is an issue affecting our communities, we invite you to join us in empowering historically and presently disadvantaged community members and advocating against systemic discrimination that exists within our institutions.

One such opportunity will take place Nov. 26. The Anti-Racism Directorate of Ontario will be hosting one of its nine public meetings in Thunder Bay on addressing systemic racism and eliminating barriers for Indigenous and racialized communities.

The Racialized Young Professionals Network will be giving its recommendations on this day, and we invite you to productively contribute to this important conversation too.

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