

Becoming Anti-Racist as a Backbone Organization and a Service Centre

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Introduction

Foundry is a network of Integrated Youth Service centres located in British Columbia, Canada. The network has 11 open centres, with 12 more in active development. Foundry centres develop within community and engage local partners, youth, and families/caregivers. A designated community lead agency, either a non-profit organization or health authority, leads centre establishment and operations at the local level. The backbone organization, Foundry Central Office (FCO), provides leadership in research, evaluation, policy, and standards and works with centres in many areas to offer support. In 2020, as the Black Lives Matter movement re-emerged, youth across our network rallied for change. FCO pulled together a co-led working group including youth and selected representatives from lead agency leadership across the network. This collective working group initiated the process of co-creating an intentional anti-racist organizational assessment tool with external consultants. The assessment acts as an intervention and catalyst for change that expands anti-racist practice beyond the usual processes of quantifying representation and/or providing education and training.

Objectives

To create safe and trusting relationships in a working group to enable honest conversations to address racism in the workplace in Canada, including partnering with lead agency representatives from the beginning of the initiative to structure our relationship and expectations with an external consultant. To work with young people to drive the conversations and changes needed to name and respond to the racism and discrimination experienced by Indigenous, Black, People of Colour (IBPOC) staff and service users. To co-design an anti-racism assessment tool for the process of creating sustained changes to policy and practice at FCO and a Foundry centre.

Approach/Methods

The co-designed anti-racism organizational assessment included two parts: an anonymous survey tool (95% response rate) and racially caucused and role-based discussions facilitated by the external consultant (16 sessions with n=90). For each organization the tool (intervention) was adapted for multiple audiences (youth, staff, leaders). The external consultant spent multiple months building relationships with the working group, prior to engaging in data collection and storytelling.

Results/Policy Implications

Meaningful engagement and responsiveness to youth across our network led us to commit to change in organizations and services, faster than service providers and systems can on their own. The need for continued engagement with youth and family with diverse experience is critical to care that evolves to meet the needs of

youth. The results from the assessment were shared through a composite narrative description of the barriers faced by IBPOC staff and youth as employees and clients, using storytelling as a framework for recommendations.

Conclusion

Relationship and trust are necessary for anti-racism change, as well as humility as we continue our learning journey. Anti-racism work is intentional and requires dedicated funds, resources and time, as well as leadership support, while also embedding the responsibility for change across organizational roles. There are differences in how a centre that provides integrated youth services in a local community engages in anti-racism work, compared to a backbone organization, yet there are multiple similarities, particularly in leadership ownership and dedication to change.

