

May 30, 2017

Shekeli Mayor Brown and London City Council,

I recently had the honour and pleasure of participating in an initiative by the City to look into the issue of Diversity and Inclusion of people who have been overlooked or dismissed due to their status as a visible minority or person with a disability or just plain old being different. I have watched and listened time and time again to the people in this City get offended and irritated any time the issue of racism or discrimination is brought up because there is the belief that those issues are not present in London. Well people, ignoring it doesn't mean it's not happening. During the past few months, I have volunteered my time and energy towards the CDIS initiative and believe that during that time a lot of people also devoted many hours to looking into ideas on how to make positive changes within the city of London. I was actually surprised by the turnout to the first meeting as there were about 200 people in attendance and thought that maybe something good will come from these sessions. People from all walks of life were present and I heard a lot of good ideas to try and address concerns of the lack of diversity and inclusion. There was a feeling of enthusiasm and hope in the room every time we met and again I was looking forward to being part of the change that I know this city needs and deserves. The sessions that were held garnered a lot of good ideas and there was the hope that some of these ideas can and will be implemented in the future. I know that this initiative is going to carry on its work in the immediate future, but my hope is that it can continue further than the next few months. I was present at the Community and Protective Services meeting on March 23 and I listened to the presentation by the co-chairs and was again hopeful for the future. But as I listened to comments most notably from Councillor Usher about how the City had started a similar initiative in 1997 and again a few years later, made me think about what was really going to happen to this work that we have done over the last few months. Is this going to be just another attempt at appeasing the minorities of this city? Is the work of this committee going to be seriously looked at and given the proper attention that it deserves? Disillusionment began to creep into me and I started to feel that although the Councillors present support and stand behind the work that we have done, again what is really going to happen. At the 3rd and final meeting of the CDIS, we were given more time to look at the issues and pinpoint some immediate topics to address. Naturally, I was part of the First Nations group and we did discuss and suggest some actions that could be implemented in the very near future. Our discussion centred on the need for education and more discussion about how the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Report of 2015 on Residential Schools can be utilized. The evening was again well attended but not as well as the previous meetings and it was good to see Mayor Brown open the session once again with greetings from the City. Near the end of the meeting, the facilitators posed a question "Where do you see this initiative 1 year from now?" With confidence, I stood up and stated to the room, "Exactly where we are today", I was immediately taken to task about my response and was told that I had offended another participant for making that statement. I believe others may

have felt likewise about my comment but only one person stood up and said anything about it. I made that statement based on my experience over the years of seeing these types of initiatives come and go but then Councillor Usher made it even more evident with his statement. I have spent the majority of my adult life promoting and fighting for the recognition of the work done by the First Nation citizens of the City of London through my volunteer work with the N'Amerind Friendship Centre. I have lived and worked in this city occasionally for over 30 years and have been witness to or a victim of numerous instances where we have been judged solely on the fact that our skin happens to be darker than the majority of the population. I believe that a lot of what we are dealing with stems from a lack of understanding and learned behaviours through different sources like all forms of media, the internet and a general dislike for anyone with different heritage. Intergenerational racism is something that is very evident because we tend to be taught these ways as a child, by those around us so we grow up believing what we have been shown or what we have heard. I have also come to the conclusion that some people don't like change or don't believe that they need to change their way of interacting with others. I may become disillusioned at times but I will not give up, because the work I do and the changes I try and make are for the benefit of future generations which is what are taught as First Nations people, that what we do today affects those who will come 7 generations from now. I would like to thank you for your time and wish you well in your future endeavors on behalf of the City of London.

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