



**POSITION PAPER ON
DIVERSITY AND
ANTI-OPPRESSIVE PRACTICE**

AT

**THE CHILDREN'S AID SOCIETY
OF BRANT**

**Distributed to all Staff, Summer 2008
Presented to the Board of Directors, Fall 2008
To be reviewed on an annual basis.**

Position Paper on Diversity and Anti-Oppressive Practice

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What is Anti-Oppressive Practice?

As social workers, and those working in and for a Social Work Agency, we all have a responsibility to treat others with dignity, respect and equality. We carry the responsibility to challenge discriminative actions, behaviours, language, policies and procedures. We have a responsibility to act accordingly so that our actions do not directly or indirectly impede on a person or family's inherent right to practice their values and beliefs. It is our responsibility to encourage the continuation of such individualized family practices. Each person's experience is individual to that person. Each family's values and beliefs are individual to that family. It is our responsibility to honor such practices and values, and to ensure that they are being respected and valued while ensuring that children are safe.

For the context of this proposal, Anti-Oppressive Practice will be defined as the following:

...to indicate an explicit evaluative position that constructs social divisions (especially 'race', class, gender, disability, sexual orientations and age) as matters of broad social structure, at the same time as being personal and organizational issues. It looks at the use and abuse of power not only in relations to individual or organizational behaviour, which may be overtly, covertly or indirectly racist, classist, sexist, and so on, but also in relation to broader social structures for example, the health, educational, political and economic, media and cultural systems and their routine provisions of services and rewards for powerful groups at local as well as national and international levels. These factors impinge on people's life stories in unique ways that have to be understood in their social-historical complex.

Within this definition, you are able to identify the use and abuse of power and control within relationships on personal, family, community, organizational, political and structural levels. These levels are interconnected, shaping one's reality and experiences; albeit positive or negative. Challenging such inequities is the motivating factor of Anti-Oppressive Practice. Challenging one's thoughts, ideas, language and actions towards such marginalized groups so that every person's values, beliefs and practices are being honored and respected accordingly.

Attached within, you will find a proposal which was completed by the Diversity & Anti-Oppressive Practice Committee. It is our intention to challenge some of these inequities and practices so that every family receiving service is being treated with dignity and respect.

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Introduction

The Children's Aid Society of Brant is committed to working with families in order to ensure safe and nurturing environments for children. In doing so, it has been highlighted that in order to provide respectful, anti-oppressive and collaborative service to families, the Agency needs to address the systems of power that are inherent in the Child Welfare System. This Agency services a disproportionate number of families who are marginalized based on their class, race, mental health, etc. This disproportionate representation behooves us to advocate for social justice and change in order to bring forth the voices from the margins to help even the playing field for every child so that there is equal access and opportunity to live and grow in families and communities where each person is valued and treated with dignity and respect.

The Diversity and Anti-Oppressive Practice (AOP) Committee at CAS Brant was created in October 2008 at the request of the Executive Director, Andrew Koster. This Committee consists of a cross-section of employees (21 members) who volunteered to be part of this initiative.

This Committee meets on a bi-weekly basis to discuss variable issues. An Education and Training Subcommittee which meets every alternative week, has evolved from the larger committee. The purpose of this subcommittee is to bring forward opportunities for learning to the larger committee as well as to create, disseminate and analyze an Agency-wide survey and to create this proposal.

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Purpose:

The aim of this proposal to the Board of Directors is to recommend changes which would enhance the culture of Brant CAS as an inclusive and Anti-Oppressive Agency where workers and families are treated “in a manner that respects cultural, religious and regional differences” (the Service Philosophy Manual pg. 6). The expected outcome of this initiative is to have the Children’s Aid Society of Brant be reflected as an Agency where all families, community partners, staff and foster parents feel that they are respected, valued and heard.

This proposal will address and make recommendations on six particular facets of the Agency and service delivery. These recommendations will focus on practice and policy measures and will pertain to all staff, foster-parents and other groups either providing or receiving service from the Children’s Aid Society of Brant. Each recommendation is broken down into four different sub-sections: (i) definition, (ii) action needed, (iii) recommendations and (iv) outcome. The material contained in this proposal is a result of feedback from Agency staff through an Agency-wide survey and the Diversity/AOP Committee.

The Key issues which will be addressed are:

1. Cultural Competence
2. Communication
3. Sharing Power
4. Kinship services
5. Information sharing
6. Orientation

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THE CHILDREN'S AID SOCIETY OF BRANT

Vision Statement

- All children will be safe, supported, encouraged and nurtured in order to achieve their potential
- All children will have their inherent right to be children protected
- All children will be valued members of a family and community
- Each family will be valued as the primary source of safety, stability and nurturing
- Each family will promote a sense of belonging and cultural identity for its members
- Families will demonstrate a value system that affirms respect, dignity, self-reliance and commitment to responsible parenting and citizenship
- Families will have sufficient resources and opportunities to realize their potential as hopeful and responsible citizens
- The community will promote economic and social well-being of its members, enabling them to live in harmony
- The community will be respectful and responsive to the environment and to the needs and rights of all its members

Purpose Statement

- We will work with the families and the community to safeguard a permanent, nurturing family for all children at risk of abuse, neglect or abandonment
- We will recognize and use the strengths of families in all assessments, decision-making and actions
- We share with the community the responsibility for protecting children and strengthening families
- We will work in collaboration with the community to achieve this purpose

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THE DIVERSITY AND AOP COMMITTEE

Mandate

The mandate of the Diversity and Anti-Oppression (AOP) Committee is:

- To reflect the Agency's Code of Ethics and social work values
- To promote an environment and culture in which staff and clients are treated with mutual respect and equality
- To pay attention to the needs of clients and to advocate to help change structures that oppress families based on issues such as class (poverty), race, mental health, ability, sexual orientation, gender, culture, etc.
- To eradicate discrimination in our practice/daily interactions and challenge it in the practice of ourselves and others and the institutional structures in which we operate
- To encourage, support and bring to the centre the knowledge and perspectives of those who have been marginalized, and incorporate these perspectives into practice
- To develop and recommend changes to policy within the Agency regarding anti-oppressive practice
- To create an environment where people are free to share their thoughts and ideas

Vision Statement

The Diversity and Anti-Oppression Committee will work to address systemic barriers for those who are marginalized within and outside this Agency in order to build communities of caring and respect.

At the core of this value system is the belief that all persons have a right to be treated with dignity, respect and compassion.

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Issue #1: CULTURAL COMPETENCE

1. What is Cultural Competence?
 - Assessing Agency cultural competence vs. team delegation
 - Individual vs. team cultural competence skill areas
 - Defining professional standards

2. Understanding Culture and Cultural Differences
 - Culture vs. race in the definition of differences
 - Dimensions of culture - language, nature, environment, human relations, work, human nature, values, history, etc

3. Aboriginal Peoples in Canada
 - Mental Health Issues
 - Models of Racial Identity Development
 - Assimilation and Acculturation
 - Immigration and Acculturation
 - Acculturation and Community Breakdown
 - Psychological Trauma
 - Drug and Alcohol Use
 - Cultural Meaning of Recovery

Definition of Culture and Cultural Competence

Culture

Culture refers to how people understand, interpret and give meaning to their environment. Culture has been defined as the set of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features of society or a social group, and that it encompasses, in addition to art and literature, lifestyles, ways of living together, value systems, traditions and beliefs.

Cultural Competence

Cultural competence refers to an ability to interact effectively with people of different cultures. Cultural competence is comprised of four components:

- (a) Awareness of one's own cultural worldview
- (b) Attitude towards cultural differences
- (c) Knowledge of different cultural practices and worldviews
- (d) Cross-cultural skills

Developing cultural competence results in an ability to understand communicate with and effectively interact with people across cultures.

Cultural competence is becoming increasingly necessary for work, home, and community social lives. Awareness of culture is not to be limited to race, as all groups share a culture.

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Consider the following definitions for cultural competence:

A set of congruent behaviors, attitudes and policies that come together as a system, Agency, or among professionals and enable that system, Agency or those professionals to work effectively in cross-cultural situations.

- Cultural competence requires that organizations have a defined set of values and principles, and demonstrate behaviors, attitudes, policies, and structures that enable them to work effectively cross-culturally.
- Cultural competence is defined simply as the level of knowledge-based skills required to provide effective clinical care to patients from a particular ethnic or racial group.
- Cultural competence is a developmental process that evolves over an extended period. Both individuals and organizations are at various levels of awareness, knowledge and skills along the cultural competence continuum.

Can you even measure something like cultural competence? In an attempt to offer solutions for developing cultural competence, Diversity Training University International (DTUI) isolated four cognitive components:

- (a) Awareness
- (b) Attitude
- (c) Knowledge
- (d) Skills

Awareness

Awareness is consciousness of one's personal reactions to people who are different. A police officer who recognizes that he profiles people who look like they are from Mexico as "illegal aliens" has cultural awareness of his reactions to this group of people.

Attitude

Paul Pedersen's multicultural competence model emphasized three components: awareness, knowledge and skills. DTUI added the attitude component in order to emphasize the difference between training that increases awareness of cultural bias and beliefs and that gets participants to carefully examine their beliefs and values about cultural differences.

Knowledge

Social science research indicates that our values and beliefs about equality may be inconsistent with our behaviors, and we ironically may be unaware of it. Social psychologist Patricia Devine and her colleagues, for example, showed in their research that many people who score low on a prejudice test tend to do things in cross cultural encounters that exemplify prejudice (e.g., using out-dated labels such as "illegal aliens", "colored", and "homosexual"). This makes the Knowledge component an important part of cultural competence development.

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Regardless of whether our attitude towards cultural differences matches our behaviors, we can all benefit by improving our cross-cultural effectiveness. One common goal of diversity professionals is to create inclusive systems that allow members to work at maximum productivity levels.

Skills

The Skills component focuses on practicing cultural competence to perfection. Communication is the fundamental tool by which people interact in organizations. This includes gestures and other non-verbal communication that tend to vary from culture to culture.

Notice that the set of four components of our cultural competence definition—awareness, attitude, knowledge, and skills—represents the key features of each of the popular definitions. The utility of the definition goes beyond the simple integration of previous definitions, however. It is the diagnostic and intervention development benefits that make the approach most appealing.

Action needed:

Training would be required for all staff for the purpose of increasing awareness regarding this particular issue. Cultural competence should become part of the Agency culture through ongoing assessment via clinical and peer supervision. There should be implementation of training to better serve the Aboriginal Community in addition to the various other growing cultural and ethnic communities. The Agency should also ensure that policies and procedures are inclusive and are representative of the diverse and cultural groups we serve. Additionally the Agency's foster care system and foster parents should begin to reflect and embrace the culturally diverse community that Brant serves.

Recommendations:

- The Diversity and AOP committee recommends that the Agency conduct 2-3 day training on issues around diversity and anti-oppression. This will include an extensive component on cultural competence. Please refer to page 18 for elaboration regarding training needs.
- That the Agency liaises with Immigrant and Settlement Services to provide ongoing support and education to staff around the diverse groups within our community.
- That the Agency pursues and builds a collaborative relationship with established cultural groups within our community.
- That the Agency through these relationships is able to recruit foster parents that reflect the diversity of the Brant community.
- That the Agency environment begins to reflect through toys, pictures and books the diverse community the Agency serves, including the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transsexual, Queer (LGBTQ) community.
- That LGBTQ resources are made available for kids and families who need them.

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Additional recommendations from the survey

- i. Conference or group presentation about diversity/cultural issues
- ii. Share articles
- iii. Site on intranet
- iv. Group participation exercises
- v. Mandatory in-house training around Aboriginal culture and practices for all workers
- vi. Potluck over lunch and presentation
- vii. Easy access to information on issues of culture, race, creed etc...including tools to help foster and respect peoples of all different backgrounds, culture, race, creed, etc.

Expected Outcomes:

An Agency (inclusive of all staff, board members and foster parents) that is culturally sensitive and culturally aware. This knowledge and awareness should result in our families being provided with more appropriate services. Staff will also have an increase in connections within the community so that workers can better serve our families and children. This will also help to enhance a foster care system which will ensure that children in care are maintaining or are able to remain connected to their diverse cultures.

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Issue # 2: COMMUNICATION

It is imperative that the language used within the Agency is reflective of Anti-Oppressive Practice. Written and verbal communication should be inclusive of all groups within the Agency and community. This includes, but is not limited to, policies, procedures, and referral forms. The Agency-wide survey identified communication as an issue, with recommendations of overall improvement throughout the Agency, to ensure that all staff is being treated fairly and equitable. It was identified that the Agency needed to improve service delivery to clients and collaterals by staff having an increased awareness of how different facets of the Agency support families.

Action Needed:

Quarterly Agency AOP Newsletter to address AOP within the Agency and highlight the positive effect(s) it has on clients and families. Staff would be encouraged to share articles, exercises etc to go into the newsletter. A small subcommittee from the Diversity/AOP Committee could be in charge of this newsletter. In addition, clinical and peer supervision would offer opportunities to discuss tenants of AOP as well as to reinforce the importance of AOP on service delivery. Lastly, make visible reminders and reinforce the Agency's mandate and the policies and procedures which are already in place that highlight AOP.

Recommendations:

- Distribute the AOP Newsletter quarterly
- Visual cues that the Agency is inclusive and anti-oppressive. For example, posters that include marginalized groups such as LGBTQ groups, racial groups, disability groups, etc.
- Review of the current Policy and Procedures at unit meetings. Each meeting could start with reviewing one policy/procedure
- Review accessibility of all sites for staff, clients and collaterals
- Review the current Agency logo and assess whether it is representative of the families served

Additional recommendations from the survey

- i. Ensuring that all voices are heard and consistency is followed within all levels
- ii. Create guidelines in dealing with anti-oppression in order that everyone is treated the same, no matter of gender or background. Set clear consequences when these are not followed

Expected Outcome:

This implementation will result in an inclusive environment which will not only increase staff morale, but will also have positive effects on the service delivered to clients and collaterals.

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Issue # 3: SHARING POWER

The Diversity and Anti-Oppressive Committee identifies a need to address how the Agency shares power between families and collaterals. This includes, but is not limited to, the involvement of our families in the decision making process. Sharing power will provide workers with the opportunity to consult with our families and assist them in the process of mobilizing their resources e.g. friends and family. These consultations should also occur through processes such as Accreditation and through the Advisory Board.

Action Needed:

In order to successfully achieve this, we need to ensure that our clients are more actively involved in the decision making process. We need to consistently apply the Society's strength based approach to our practice with families and collaterals in conjunction with the Signs of Safety. In addition to this, staff needs to be supported and encouraged through clinical and peer supervision, regarding individual decision making in order to ensure that family input is being received.

Recommendations:

- Ensure that every staff member and foster parent is provided with the book on the signs of safety
- Focus groups/Advisory Committee including clients and service providers to further assess and determine how the Society can "share power" with our marginalized groups
- Regular enforcement of the complaint procedures

Expected Outcome:

This will foster an Agency environment that is more inclusive and thereby more in tune with the community it serves. This will further allow the Society to "encourage, support and bring to the "centre" the knowledge and perspectives of those who have been marginalized, and incorporate these perspectives into practice," (AOP Mandate)

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Issue #4: KINSHIP SERVICES

Overall concerns as to whether Bill 210 is being properly and consistently interpreted by teams and units. This can be an intrusive process and consistency is needed to further determine suitability as to whether a file should be open under Kinship Service.

What happens if parents (s) are placing their child (ren) with a relative on their own initiative without CAS assistance, or we learn this has happened after the children have moved in with family? Is a Kin file opened up under this family name? If so, this practice removes the autonomy of families to make safe decisions for their children. This works contrary to the strength based approach that the ministry and some agencies are promoting.

Staff is finding a discrepancy in opinion from unit to unit. For example, if a child is going to reside with “Kin” for a few days or a week, does the same process apply? What happens if a family placement is only needed a month? What are the time deadlines about opening a “Kinship Service” home?

In addition, staff is finding that Kin homes require ongoing emotional and financial support from the Agency. Kin families express frustrations that the Society has expectations of them and will not provide much, or no financial help.

Action Needed:

The Agency needs to implement kinship service in a way that is supportive and consistent throughout the various teams and departments. Workers and managers (upper management and service managers) will require clarification regarding standards of Kin Service families in order to ensure consistent interpretation and application of this service across the Agency. In addition, the Agency will need to be proactive and represented in feedback to the Ministry with respect to lack of funding to kinship service arrangements, as there is a clear role for AOP to support this advocacy and need.

Recommendations:

- Agency training to review Bill 210 for a minimum of ½ day of training to discuss and review the aforementioned issues. Training would include presentations from community partners who are directly or indirectly involved in Kinship Service, this includes but is not limited to, Ontario Works.
- Review of financial availability to assist ‘kin homes’ with financial support. Consistency and financial standards need to be set in place, and used across the Agency. Some families have more money than others and may not require much or no financial help.
- Increase in sharing of information regarding available supports for kinship families on the intranet.
- The need for consistent Agency standards regarding the acceptance or recommendation of “kin homes”. For instance, there are families who rely on Ontario Works for an income. In reality, families in receipt of Ontario Works live at or below the poverty line. Do we exclude a loving family because they live at or below the

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poverty line? Are some Workers or Units using middle class standards as a benchmark for placing a child with “Kin”?

Expected Outcome:

The outcome of these recommendations will provide a more supportive and collaborative approach between the Society and community to ensure the safety and well-being of children. Having a supportive service to kinship service homes is a true example of “transparency.”

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Issue # 5: SHARING INFORMATION

Currently, there is a lack of consistent sharing of information regarding protocols, policies, programs and services between upper management, service managers, and front-line staff. As a result, front-line staff are not conducting service that is adhering to such designed practices, and there is limited direction from management to front line staff to ensure that such polices are being practice in accordance to the actual policy directives.

Action Needed:

All staff, including service managers, needs to be consistently and equally informed about current and modified programs, policies, procedures and services within this Agency, as well as protocol(s) for community partners.

Recommendations:

- Upper management, including service managers, to review with all their respective units the most commonly misused and underutilized programs and policies. This includes, but is not limited to, the Supervised Access Program. This program and policy, for the most part, has not been executed in accordance to the 2006 modified policy. As such, the current practice of the Supervised Access Program is not adhering to these modifications and front line staff is not aware of proper protocol for referral.
- For these programs that have been under or mis-utilized, it is recommended that representatives appear during unit/team meetings to discuss these misunderstood practices with the front line staff and service managers (i.e.) CDU, SAP, transportation.
- In order to ensure that sharing of information is taking place, there needs to be shared accountability between upper management, service managers, and front line staff. This will help to ensure that current and modified programs, policies, and protocols are being implemented as they were designed and intended. This may be accomplished by having service managers and front line staff signs a disclaimer initializing that this disclosure was completed.

Expected Outcome:

Both clients and collaterals are receiving consistent information and service from various workers and from various cases.

Front line staff will have an increase in accurate knowledge regarding the proper protocols, programs, and policies. This will assist workers in being able to make referrals according to the family needs and strengths.

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Issue # 6: ORIENTATION FOR NEW STAFF MEMBERS

The Diversity and Anti-Oppressive Committee would like to make recommendations around the need for an improved Orientation process for new employees of Brant CAS. Presently, information is not being clearly presented or easily accessible for new employees entering the Agency. Information regarding the Society's perspectives on strengths based approach and/or Anti-Oppressive practice is not reflected and can only be found if a new employee is "looking" for this information.

The current practice of self-guided orientation can be confusing and frustrating for a new employee as they are left on their own to dismantle an Agency full of vast and important information. New employees need to understand and learn the policies and procedures through guidance. New employees need to know the Society's perspective on Anti-Oppressive practice and how it will be upheld within this Agency.

Action Needed:

The Agency needs to ensure that all employees (full-time, part-time, contract) are properly oriented to Brant CAS regarding policies and procedures. New employees need to be aware of the Society's strength based approach to practice in conjunction with the Signs of Safety and the implication and implementation of this combined practice. New employees need to be made cognizant of the role that Anti-Oppressive practice has within the Agency. In order to ensure that this transfer of learning is being successfully achieved, new employees need to be supported and encouraged through clinical and peer supervision and in the individual decision making process.

Recommendations:

- Provide "Orientation Training" to help deliver important information regarding Brant CAS (Executive Director, Agency Services e.g. Information Services, Resource Units can also make introduction at this time, other Agency groups). This can be one full day or half day training offered at quarterly intervals.
- Establish a Committee to assist in the development of an Orientation Training
- Ensure that every new staff member and foster parent is provided with the book on the Signs of Safety.
- Managers need to support and ensure that this transfer of learning is taking place through Clinical and Peer Supervision.
- A Peer Mentorship Program needs to be established within the Agency so that experienced workers are able to assist new employees through their learning process. This program should have clear outlines and expectations for all involved parties.
- As part of the orientation package, new workers will sign off on policies outlining Agency expectations around not only harassment (which is currently in place) but also workplace bullying.

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Expected Outcome:

An Agency wherein new employees will have the information they need to successfully carry out their role so that new workers can effectively service our clients and feel a certain level of competence. In addition, this may also result in an Agency that is able to retain staff and reduce the high level of new staff members.

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ANNUAL WORKPLAN

It is important for the Agency that the Diversity and AOP Committee, over time, remains both transparent and accountable to the needs of the Agency. In order to achieve this, the Committee will present an independent workplan to the Agency on an annual basis. This being the first one it also includes an understanding of the core values and beliefs involved in diversity and anti-oppressive practice.

Annualized workplans will outline the direction for the upcoming year including specialized workshops, cultural events, conferences, and outreach events that will be identified by both the Committee and our staff. For example, the training proposal outlined in this Report is designed to produce generic understandings and insights for staff. Once this is completed, more specialized workshops can then be designed to create greater understanding of, and work with, specific client groups or colleagues. In addition, once the Clinical Approach to Supervision policy is instituted, some if not all staff will be able to identify areas for their growth and understanding as it pertains to Diversity/AOP. A renewed work plan developed by the Committee can help support these identified areas and help us move to an even more responsive level of service.

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EDUCATION AND TRAINING NEEDS

In light of the foregoing we, the Diversity Committee, propose that the Agency undergo training in the area of Diversity and Anti-Oppressive Practice to address the aforementioned issues in a structured forum. This training is suggested to be offered on a mandated basis (2-3 days minimal) to all staff (including but not limited to, part-time, full-time, contract, support, and management), collaterals, foster parents, and the Board of Directors.

In order for the aforementioned issues to be successfully executed, this proposed training will provide staff with the required skills and tools so that they can effectively work with our marginalized clients and work within Brant's growing diverse communities. It will help to bridge gaps within our community and our partners by acknowledging that change is needed, and that action is being taken within our Agency. This training will provide the Agency with the required skills so that those same representatives are behaving and adhering to the values and beliefs of the Children's Aid Society of Brant when they are with clients, collaterals and colleagues.

Research has been completed by the committee, and it has been identified and agreed that the training be conducted primarily by Dr. Gary Dumbrill and Dr. June Yee. Attached as Appendix "A" and Appendix "B" to this proposal are their respective Curriculum Vitae which will outline their expertise in this area and therefore their suitability to do this said training.

The committee is also recommending that Dr. Dumbrill and Dr. Yee be contracted for an extended period to act as consultants in establishing focus groups as well as "interest groups" within and around the Brant community. These interest groups will assist Brant CAS in determining areas of improvement within the Agency, and will help to facilitate a better working relationship with our community. This consultative period will afford the Agency the assistance it will need to have an increased skill level in building relationships within the community as well to continue to encourage and develop a community that embraces and is open to its growing diversity.

In order for the above mentioned terms to be successfully met, financial support is required.

With this being said, the Diversity and AOP Committee requests that you kindly consider this proposal, and the positive impact it will have on our clients, collaterals and our community. We understand that we are in a time of change, and in order to reflect some of the new changes brought forward from Bill210 and e-forms, we kindly request that you consider approval of our request so that we can better assist our families and children.

On behalf of the Diversity and AOP Committee, we would like to thank you for your time.