

## **SPCYR Annual Report for 10/4/20    Report of Activities in the Past year**

The SPCYR has been in existence since April 2007 and we incorporated in March 2015. We embarked on a Strategic Planning Process in April 2015 that identified key strategic areas of focus for SPCYR: Access and Equity, Education, Housing, Immigration and Settlement, Poverty (Inequality – Inadequate Incomes – Precarious Work) Given the tension that always exists for smaller grassroots organizations like ours, that don't have core funding, between doing the work and seeking funding for the work, we made the decision in the past four years that we would focus on raising awareness and building capacity to address social issues that impacted residents of the region. **My report summarizes our activities of the past year 2019-2020.**

### **Capacity Building and Organizing: Old and New Partnerships**

**York Region Food Network:** As always, we want to express our gratitude for our partners at York Region Food Network who provide us w/ space for our meetings, assist w/our events, and are always on hand w/healthy nourishment. When we're not in a pandemic that is. We have collaborated with them this past year on a number of initiatives including the Just Recovery Initiative as well as sharing 2 summer work students and a BSW student placement from York University from September 2020-January 2021.

**Labour Community Services:** (a partnership between Toronto and YR District Labour Council and United Way) continues to provide us with support in the form of Sharon Simpson's time and expertise for approximately 10 hours per month. We appreciate Sharon's expertise and experience so much that she has also joined our board which we are forever grateful for.

#### **York Region Labour Network:**

SPCYR was invited by the York Region Labour Network to participate in their monthly meetings for the past year and this has proven to be a very worthwhile and strategic partnership. The Network provides a space for union allies and progressives to collaborate together on public education/awareness and advocacy such as the No Cuts to Public Education Campaign which was a heightened focus in this past year as education unions were engaged in labor negotiations with the province.

Since the spring, the murder of George Floyd in the US brought with it heightened awareness to the violence and discrimination against Black communities not only in the US but also here in Canada. Resulting from this, labour allies have been working on a variety of projects to address anti-Black Racism including meeting regularly with leaders from community organizations such as the Markham African Caribbean Canadian Association (MACCA), the Vaughan African Canadian Association (VACA), the Newmarket African Caribbean Canadian Association (NACCA), the York Region Alliance of African Caribbean Canadians (YRAACC) and Parents of Black Children (POBC) to learn and take their lead on what needs to be done to seriously address anti-Black Racism in York Region, at the institutional and community levels. These important alliances have also led to other opportunities for SPCYR to be

involved in anti-Black Racism efforts and projects to support Indigenous and racialized groups as they seek decent work and careers in the trades.

#### **Labor Education Centre - (A Project of the Toronto and York Region District Labor Council)**

Recently SPCYR was approached by staff with the Labor Education Centre (LEC) to discuss embarking together on two initiatives. One project was to work with the Black Community to promote the Trades as a viable career path for their young people as we work towards securing funding for a Pre-Apprentice Trades Program in the southern part of York Region. While we look for funding sources for this project, we are now planning to apply for funding through the Metcalf Foundation to begin to set up a York Region Community Benefits Network. The LEC was involved in the development of the Toronto Community Benefits Network (CBN) and worked with the grassroots leaders and organizations right from the start to ensure that the needs of the community and its members were at the forefront of the development of the network and the work it would embark on. So far, we have been meeting with YRAACC, the YR Alliance of African and Caribbean Canadians, and are going to partner with them on funding proposals for both initiatives, along with the Labor Education Centre and other community organizations in the region.

#### **Youth Homeless Prevention Collective Impact Project of York Region**

This collaborative project is approaching the end of its second year of a three year funded timeline. As a collective impact project, the objective is to work collaboratively with all organizations and systems that impact youth and have an opportunity to work upstream to put in place supports and opportunities to prevent homelessness, not just respond to it when it happens. Approximately 40 organizations across York Region including the big 3 are involved in this initiative: York Region District School Board, York Region Children's Aid Society and the York Region Police. More recently we have also had representation from the York Region Catholic District School Board. The project is hosted by 360 Kids Inc. of York Region. We are working from a Theory of Change Model that was created by the collaborative. SPCYR board members, Edy Cruz-Fuentes and Josie Rose have been involved since the inception of the project, working with the Youth Council ensuring that their voices are central to the work and driving the discussion and decisions. SPCYR participates on the larger coalition table which meets monthly and other subcommittees of the project, including the Education SC and what will soon be a new SC looking at increasing housing options for youth. SPCYR has been involved in this UPSTREAM planning and thinking on youth homelessness since 2010 when United Way and York University hosted a year-long series of knowledge mobilization events geared towards bringing agencies in York Region together to prevent youth homelessness. It has been a long journey and I think we are seeing some important outcomes as a result of a 10 year partnership with 360 Kids and others.

#### **York Region Communities for Public Education:**

The York Region Communities for Public Education was founded in 2019 in response to the funding cuts to education being proposed by the provincial government. To date, they have maintained their momentum, providing education and awareness on the importance of a Safe Return to School during COVID and have used their platform to present to the YRDSB about the experiences of Black Students in

the system. Much work needs to be done and we will continue to support this network and the youth and parents that are taking a lead role.

### **Affordable Housing Coalition of York Region**

By this time in the report, I'm really starting to realize what a busy year we have had. Last fall Lori Yaccato brought to our attention that SPCYR could be doing much more to address and take a leadership role on affordable housing in the region. So she planned a first Forum in January 2019 which over 50 people attended on a cold night in Aurora at the public library. We had one more in person meeting in February at the United Church in Newmarket and from COVID onwards, we've been meeting online. We developed our Mission Statement, Plan of Action and Terms of Reference which were adopted by the group at our April meeting. Currently we have about 50 individuals/organizations on our mailing list of which 12-18 attend our bi-monthly meetings as a larger group. We have 3 subgroups that meet more regularly and drive the work: 1.) The Advocacy and Public Awareness SC; 2.) The Models of Homes SC; and a closely affiliated network focused exclusively on the issue of homelessness in Newmarket 2.) The CCHNM or Concerned Citizens for the Homeless in Newmarket.

All of these groups have been very active. The Advocacy and Homes SCs have been focused on identifying champions for affordable housing in the region at staff and political levels and we've been cultivating good relationships with those that have similar and progressive goals re: affordable housing development. We've recently produced 2 reports that were shared with Region Staff upon their invitation to do so: A Report with Recommendations on adopting a Right to Housing Framework in York Region and the HOMES Report that presents and evaluates specific alternative housing models/options to be considered in the region. The report takes the approach that home ownership or lease to own models are a good way for lower and moderate income earners to build equity. These reports can be made available upon request.

While there are lots of people to thank for their tremendous contributions to the development of the Affordable Housing Coalition (AHCYR) this past year, the first shout out must go to Lori for her tremendous passion and persistence in getting this work on the radar of people across the region and making sure that SPCYR was involved and in fact taking a lead on facilitating the work and the formation of the coalition. Also the HOME report was an incredible accomplishment for which Jordan Mariampali who served as our summer work program student and Cesar Cessan must take all the credit. It is an impressive piece of work that the region staff have informed us they will be sharing with YR Council and other municipalities. Thanks to you both.

Please make sure to follow the AHCYR @R2HYorkRegion on twitter at and also endorse the Right 2 Housing Campaign at [Endorsement of the Right 2 Housing in York Region](#)

## **Education and Awareness:**

### **Affordable Housing Events:**

SPCYR has always prioritized education and awareness about social and economic issues, in particular those impacting marginalized communities. With our new focus on Affordable Housing this past year, we have had a number of opportunities to educate the broader community on the importance of a Right to Housing Framework to guide decision making at the local level of governments, as well as the concerns about new legislation that threatens the already precarious housing security of an increasing number of tenants across York Region. We have been featured in a number of op-eds and articles these past few months re: these issues which has helped to heighten awareness of SPCYR and our work.

We also co-hosted 2 Virtual events with the Aurora Public Library in October. 1.) Screening of the documentary PUSH by Leilani Farha that highlights the global crisis of the financialization of housing followed by a Q and A. and 2.) Panel on the Right to Housing and what can be done locally to increase the availability of affordable housing in the Region. Both events were very well attended online and the most well attended public events that Aurora library had hosted to date.

We have also co-hosted well-attended Lunch and Learn online events with the Community Legal Clinic of York Region on Tenant Rights and what new provincial legislation means to them.

### **ABR Advocacy and Awareness letter writing campaign to Municipal and Regional Counsellors/mayors:**

SPCYR, in partnership with the Labour Council and the Urban Alliance on Race Relations, (whose ED is a former chair of SPCYR, Neethan Shan), have collaborated on a letter writing and outreach campaign to the 9 municipalities of York Region since the spring, inviting them to let us know what actions and commitments they have made to Anti-Black Racism, Equity and Inclusion. We received several responses and invitations from some counsellors to meet and discuss this work in more depth. Our efforts have supported the call for Action of the Black organizations and leaders in the Region and has resulted in some meetings already taking place and others being planned. At this point we are following up with a survey for all municipalities and the Region of York including a call for them to share what they are doing so that we can promote and bring awareness to this critical work as we head towards Human Rights Day on December 10<sup>th</sup>.

### **Hidden Stories of York Region Podcast**

In August of 2019 the Hidden Stories Team received funding from United Way through the School of Cities Community Builders' Fellowship with the University of Toronto. This was the first year of the Fellowship and we were thrilled to have been chosen and funded for the podcast initiative. Two former SPCYR Board members and myself, co-created the podcast series, developed and aired them in June 2020 with the help of Stephen Hurley from Voice Ed Radio. SPCYR served as the trustee for the funds. The purpose of the podcast was to interrupt the single narrative of York Region by introducing audiences to stories of individuals and organizations that might not always get air time. We want to explore York Region, the people here, the barriers, challenges and also the success stories so that we

can better understand the depth and diversity of its people as well as the systemic issues that get in the way of collaboration, innovation and well-being. You can follow our story on twitter @hiddendstoriesYR Watch for more podcast episodes to begin again in 2021.

## **Encouraging CIVIC Involvement and Participation in Policy Analysis**

### **Ontario for All Campaign:**

We have been participating in the Ontario for All Campaign, funded by United Way for the past 2 years and are heading into our 3<sup>rd</sup> and final year. Sean Meager has been coordinating these efforts in Toronto, Peel and York Region. Prior to COVID we had hosted a number of meetings with the EDs of Non-For-Profits in York Region as well as events for front-line staff and residents. The purpose of the campaign was to raise awareness of the role that NFPs and their clients can have in shaping public policy across Ontario, through awareness and advocacy efforts. Sean is speaking to us this evening about the campaign and some of the outcomes that we have collectively fought for like pushing the province back from the brink of re-defining “Disability” when used in the context of Ontario Disability Benefits, which ultimately would have made it much more difficult for Ontarians who rely or need it, to be eligible. More recently, and I’ll speak to this next, SPCYR, YRFN and ON4ALL have combined forces on the Just Recovery work we’ve been engaged in which in essence is focused on re-shaping public policy to make it more responsive to the needs of the most vulnerable populations.

### **Reimagining a Just Recovery from COVID in York Region: Our COVID Response in Partnership with YRFN and Ontario for All**

SPCYR and YRFN have been participating in the COVID Cluster Response Tables co-hosted by the Region of York and United Way since Spring 2020. We noticed that while there was great planning and collaborating going on through these tables, that the missing element was a discussion about how do we go forward in a way that was more just and equitable, not just a return to the status quo, that never worked for many marginalized individuals and communities. Also it has been no surprise that the most vulnerable groups: the poor, women, racialized communities, the elderly and physically disabled, have been impacted most severely by the pandemic and we would need to intentionally put in place policies, supports and measures to redress these inequities and harms.

We proposed a Virtual Townhall on Priority Areas that would require new policies: Decent Work, Income Security, Affordable Housing, Food Security and the Non-Profit Sector. Our first gathering was so well attended with over 90 registrants that it became immediately obvious that hosting individual sessions on each topic area was necessary. Five sessions later, 6 in total, we had over 139 unique individuals from non-profit-organizations, local and regional government and concerned citizens across the region participate throughout. Roughly 40 organizations were included in that number. Based on the discussions we developed a report and recommendations that have become the basis for outreach and meetings with MPs across York Region. To date we have met with 4 MPs, others are planned and in the next phase, we will be holding virtual meetings with MPPs. I want to say a bit shout out to Jenna Kelly

who is doing her BSW Student Placement with SPCYR and YRFN, from York University who has done a lions' share of the work to organize our outreach efforts and planning for these key meetings with MPs. Also Lynne Koss with YRFN who has shared this role with Jenna. We could not do any of this work without both of you.

### **Social Media: Website, Twitter and Facebook**

I am probably most pleased to announce that SPCYR has had its website up and running for the past 6 months now and we have SPCYR board member, Rebecca Pacheco to thank for that. Rebecca has worked tirelessly with the designer to achieve what has up to now, been completely out of our reach for us as a volunteer board. We have always known how critical it is to have a website for the purpose of education, awareness, community mobilization and credibility and we have now arrived at that juncture. Rebecca maintains, updates our website and our SPCYR Facebook page as well.

Our Twitter Followers have grown to a little under 200 and we can do much better so everyone who is not already following, we implore you to go on and follow us at @SPCYorkRegion

### **The Bigger Picture: Social Planning Network of Ontario (SPNO)**

#### **Student Well-Being Network**

The SPNO Student Well-Being Network funding came to an end in August 2019. The Knowledge Network for Student Well-Being (KNSWB) knowledge mobilization project focused on equity and inclusion of low-income students and families in school systems across the province. Webinars, workshops and Research products that we developed in those 3 years can be found on the SPNO website at under the Research, Resources and Presentation tabs: <https://studentwellbeing.spno.ca/> Even though our funding ended in August last year we proceeded to host in collaboration with the York University Faculty of Education, a 2 day Equity Training conference with Leading Equity Expert Paul Gorski in November 2019. The conference was attended by 80 participants. We had plans to host a Train the Trainer Event in May 2020 and that was cancelled due to COVID with no new dates chosen as yet.

### **Other SPNO Highlights**

#### **Housing Sub-Committee**

Our Housing SC brings together the expertise and best practices of SPCs that have been working on various housing related projects over a number of years. We have each been holding webinars and virtual events across the province to increase awareness and advocacy efforts. We have also been seeking funding and research opportunities to address the financialization of housing as the root cause of the global housing crisis.

## **Research Opportunities for SPC's across Ontario**

In partnership with York University's Knowledge Mobilization Unit, SPCYR and other SPNO member organizations have been having regular meetings with the Ontario Research Network since Spring of 2020, to identify projects and mutual areas of interest that could leverage funding for research on the ground. Topics of interest that have been identified include: Identifying Barriers to increasing the availability of Affordable Housing across Ontario municipalities, Factors to focus on in achieving a Just Recovery from COVID 19, SPC's role in Achieving Sustainable Development Goals and the role of SPCs in fostering Civic Engagement of Youth.

I also want to end by saying a big thank-you to our tireless group of volunteer board members. Our AGM planning team of Lisa Wolfman, Pat Taylor and Kristine Carbis due the behind the scenes work that make this look easy even though it's far from that. They also perform our secretarial, financial and membership roles which are integral to the success of SPCYR. Thank you to Dennis, my co-chair for his work throughout this year and facilitating our first ever virtual AGM in SPCYR history. And to the others who I have already mentioned in body of the report, for your ground-breaking work on various projects, committees and coalitions that continue to keep the focus on social, economic, gender and racial justice at the forefront of everything we strive for. And finally, a truly heartfelt welcome to Jessa McLean and Jordan Mariampali, our 2 newest board members. We can't wait to include you in our current work and to collaborate together on future initiatives.

**If I have missed anything please accept my apologies and let me know so that I can make the changes.**

*Yvonne Kelly*, Co-Chair SPCYR