



# URBAN UPDATE

Urban Alliance on Race Relations Newsletter

Volume 21  
Spring/Summer Issue  
June 2011

## CONTENTS

- \* Message from the President
- \* Gender Violence and Community Accountability Project
- \* Awards Dinner
- \* Who's Afraid of the Afri-centric?
- \* Mayoral Debate
- \* Community Responds to "Too Asian"
- \* Make Your Mark

## MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

Greetings on behalf of the Urban Alliance On Race Relations (UARR). 2010 was certainly an eventful year. Along side hundreds of its close friends and allies, the UARR celebrated 35 years of service to the community. On September 30th the UARR hosted its biannual Celebration and Awards Dinner. Nigel Barriffe, Manavi Handa, Farrah Khan and Che Kothari received awards for inspired leadership and engagement in Toronto's diverse communities.

Supported by dedicated staff, volunteers and board members the organization had significant accomplishments in 2010. With funding from the Status of Women Canada and the Ontario Trillium Foundation, the Gender Violence Community Accountability Media Project (GV Camp) got on the way. Funded for 3 year the project aims to provide young people with tools on how to critique stereotypical portrayals in the media while developing skills in creating alternative and new media.

The GV Camp is a tremendous undertaking that has been made possible through the support of partner organizations that include, The Metropolitan Action Committee on Violence Against Women and Children (METRAC), Native Youth Sexual Health Network, Aqsa Zine and The People Project. Frontline Partners with Youth Network (FPYN) has also contributed to work of the GV Camp. These organizations have shown a remarkable level of support for the proj-



GV Camp workshop with YWCA Scarborough

ect. The work they have done, in developing gender violence workshops and training for youth workers, incorporated a significant amount of in-kind support for the program. For this the UARR extends a heart felt thank you.

Working with its partners in Equity Toronto the UARR co-hosted a mayoral dialogue with candidates. The event proved successful with over 200 people in attendance. Our work to support an inclusive approach to education in the Toronto District School Board (TDSB) included workshop presentations at the TDSB December 2010 conference, deputations at key TDSB meetings and participation in reviewing the book 'The Sheppard's Granddaughter'. On a broader community level the organization continued to act as a resource to the Office of the Independent Police Review Director and the Special Investigations Unit.

Demands for panel and public presentation unfolded at a steady pace. In its own right the UARR and partners hosted a series of race

matters forums in recognition of the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination and International Human Rights day.

2011 is already shaping up to be a time of watchfulness as we prepare, with pro bono help, to seek stand-

ing in two cases, one before the Court of Appeal for Ontario and the other the Supreme Court of Canada. We look forward to 2011 with a sense of hope and pride in the work that we do.

In Solidarity,  
Sharon Simpson

---

## Making Noise! GV CAMP Update

The Urban Alliance on Race Relations' (UARR) Gender Violence and Community Accountability Media Project (GV CAMP) has entered its second year. Made possible by grants from the Status of Women Canada, and Ontario Trillium Foundation, the initiative focuses on youth Gender Violence in Toronto by training them in media literacy and production.

The project's focus on gender violence, media literacy and production was in part informed by Julian Falconer's 2008 report *The Road to Health* which shed light on unaddressed issues of sexual harassment in some public schools in Toronto; as well as the Toronto Life's article on Aqsa Parvez and the Urban Alliance's involvement in a press conference organized by young Muslim women to address the issue of mainstream media's representation of racialized women.

The intent of the program is to build youth leadership and storytelling skills so they can address instances of gender violence in their communities and use new media to tell their stories. The UARR is also working in partnership with a number of organizations to deliver Youth Worker Trainings to individuals working with youth.

To date the project has successfully conducted 42 workshops with young women across the city. Partnering with organizations such as the YWCA, Scadding Court Community Centre, Thorncliffe Neighbourhood Office, Flemington Health Centre, For Youth Initiative, the Centre for Women and Trans People at the University of Toronto, and Mujer has allowed the project to reach female youth participants from all across the city. Poetry, stories, and articles produced by participants are featured in the current *Be Scene Magazine's* issue on gender. A one week summer camp is being planned for July to engage youth from all across Toronto. Our



work with young men will begin in the fall with workshops that focus on masculinity issues and the unique ways that gender violence affects men in our society.

Our Youth Worker Trainings are done in partnership with METRAC, The People Project, AqsaZine, and Native Youth Sexual Health Network. Trainings began this month and will repeat in the fall and in the following year. Our goal is to train over 80 youth workers, who are currently supporting youth who have to sometimes wait almost eight months to receive free counseling following an incident of violence or some other type of traumatic event.

Videos, articles, photography, poetry and other media is currently on our [makingnoisemedia.com](http://makingnoisemedia.com) website. There you will find media created in our Making Noise Media Camps and workshops over the last three years, community resources, and more information about the project. Community Screenings, interactive multi-media events, and even a mini-film and media festival in the final year are in the works. Stay tuned and spread the word.

For more information on the GV CAMP please visit [www.makingnoisemedia.com](http://www.makingnoisemedia.com).

- Ashley McFarlane, Project Coordinator



## 35th Anniversary of UARR - A Full House!

On September 30th, 2010, UARR celebrated with 250 attendees, both long-standing supporters and younger activists, coming together to commemorate the origins of the organization and the landmarks along the way on issues of injustice, discrimination and racism.

Event highlights included a keynote by Marvyn Novick, Ryerson Professor Emeritus, who talked about how the Urban Alliance was struck by a group of concerned citizens who came together in 1975 to address blatant racism faced by newcomers.

Our talented emcee was community activist Angela Robertson, who shared her own story of how UARR shaped her perceptions of the City and her place in it. The evening was also a platform to celebrate UARR award winners - these are change-maker community activists in our midst, who share an anti-racism and anti-oppression vision, contributing their incredible work and energy to making Toronto a more harmonious and equitable place to live, work and play. They are: Manavi Handa, Nigel Barriffe, Farrah Khan and Che Kothari. To read about their significant contributions, please go to [www.urbanalliance.ca](http://www.urbanalliance.ca).



A sincere thank you to all our attendees, members, staff and sponsors for supporting this event. The evening's proceeds go to UARR's work on anti-racism and other equity issues that are important to all of us.

*Margaret Hageman and Winnie Ng Falkenstein, 35th Anniversary Dinner Co-chairs.*



## Who's Afraid of the Africentric?

By Gary Pieters

Is creating a so-called Africentric secondary school to improve education chances for African Canadian students a step forward or a step back? Based on my personal experience, I believe it can be an important step forward.

In 2005 I saw first-hand how students benefited from a summer-long pilot project designed to stimulate and engage students who were performing below the provincial standard.

The Africentric Summer Institute provided culturally relevant staff, resources and teaching strategies. For example, in one math class, the richly woven West African "Kente cloth" was used to identify algebraic patterns.

As the summer school principal, I interacted with the students and witnessed its positive impact. Students told me they liked school better and were eager to come to class, were more interested in learning about their cultural roots and excited to share what they learned with others.

Staff, parents and the community also were enthusiastic and engaged. With all the activities and events, the school looked like a community centre: parent engagement workshops, a parent information evening, a parent breakfast, a bi-weekly newsletter to the community, professional development workshops for staff, a community potluck luncheon and a closing celebration for the community.

Plus there was real academic progress. Students in the D-minus to C-plus range improved by one level, while students in the B-minus to A range maintained their levels of achievement in literacy and numeracy.

The debate on Africentric education has flared again in light of the proposal to create an Africentric alternative school at Oakwood Collegiate. Defenders of the traditional system can indeed point to students of African descent who do very well and demonstrate high levels of academic achieve-



*Source: Tara Walton, Toronto Star*

ment. But we cannot ignore high-school dropout rates among African Canadian students of about 40 per cent or be indifferent to the systemic barriers that impede their progress.

As far back as 1992, Stephen Lewis's report to the premier on racism in Ontario mentioned the lack of a culturally relevant and responsive curriculum, along with limited numbers of African Canadian mentors and role models, as barriers to student success:

"Everywhere the refrain of the Toronto students, however starkly amended by different schools and different locations, was essentially the same refrain of all students. Where are the courses in black history? Where are the visible minority teachers? Why are there so few role models? Why do guidance counsellors know so little of different cultural backgrounds? Why are racist incidents and epithets tolerated?"

Nineteen years after the Lewis report, the education sector's biggest challenge remains the development of inclusive curriculum and practices that foster high levels of academic achievement while reducing the racial achievement/opportunity gap for blacks and other racialized student populations.

Africentric education has been put forth as one of many culturally relevant practices to address new ways of engaging African Canadian students. This approach has, however, been criticized as being tantamount to segregation.



This is far from the truth. Segregation involved the suppression of people based on race. The Africentric schools approach provides an opportunity to create an inclusive learning environment for all students.

The high level of academic achievement among students in Africentric learning environments has already demonstrated the effectiveness of culturally relevant and responsive teaching and learning practices.

In September 2009, Toronto's first full-day regular Africentric alternative school was implemented as a K-5 school. In the 2009-10 academic year, 81 per cent of Grade 3 students performed at or above the provincial average in mathematics, compared with 71 per cent for the TDSB at large, according to the Education Quality and Accountability Office. Similarly, 81 per cent scored at or above the TDSB average in writing and 69 per cent scored above the TDSB average in reading.

Given our society's emphasis on academic excellence and the concurrent need to reduce the racial achievement gap in academic performance,

## Mayoral Debate Building a Fair Toronto for All

By Kelly Pritchard

On September 14th the Equity Toronto Alliance and the Good Jobs for All Coalition co-sponsored a mayoral debate and community consultation on the theme of Building a Fair Toronto for All.

The theme of the debate was meant to draw attention to the fact that although more than 50% of Torontonians are born outside Canada, making it the most diverse city in the world, Toronto's civic leaders and programs do not reflect the multiracial, multicultural, and multifaith face of the city.

Despite the competitive edge that Toronto's diversity offers, government policy is missing the fund-

the implementation of new and successful practices for educating African Canadian students is an urgent priority.

An approach to education that acknowledges the role of culture and community and their relationship to the subject matter covered in schools has proven to be an effective strategy.

The curriculum and organization of our schools have to become more responsive to students of all diversities in order to improve public confidence in the publicly funded education system and its ability to serve all students and communities. That's why the Africentric model discussed at Oakwood should not be seen as a retrograde step back to segregation but a forward-looking development for our vibrant multicultural society.

*Gary Pieters, a former member of the Star's Community Editorial Board, is a vice-principal in the Toronto District School Board and a member of DiverseCity Voices.*



mental ingredients of inclusion, opportunity, access and equity required to foster a dynamic and innovative city.

The audience heard from three community organizations that are working to build a fairer and

more equitable city. The Toronto Women's City Alliance, Colour of Poverty, and Centre for Community Learning and Development each had thoughtful, considered advice to offer Toronto's political leaders, ranging from the creation of a Women's Equality Office to address gender discrimination, to collecting data to track racial profiling by the police, to greater support for capacity building among grassroots community organizations. All of them spoke to the importance of better integrating Toronto's marginalized groups into the social fabric of the community through extending city services to all members of the community on a more equitable basis.

The audience participated vigorously in the discussion, further illuminating the themes of the evening. There were calls for the greater engagement of racialized communities in the election process; more child-care services for working mothers; reduced user fees for public services; restoration of publicly-owned infrastructure in low income areas; safer, more affordable, and expanded public housing; and the provision of mental health services for at-risk communities. The diversity of voices heard during the debate made it evident that there are not just one or two Torontos but multiple Torontos.

The five mayoral candidates were asked to weigh in with their thoughts on the topics. The moderator, John Tory, asked each of the candidates three pre-selected questions: 1) What have you done and what will you do, as mayor, to promote fair and equitable life chances for all city residents and better living and working conditions in Toronto; 2) What will you do to protect our public services from cuts and outsourcing; and 3) How are you going to engage racialized groups and other historically disadvantaged groups in your environmental leadership efforts in the city? These questions were followed up by a question and answer period with the audience.

Each of the candidates shed light on how they would address issues of equity and inclusion in the city. Rocco Achampong had one of the more ambitious ideas of the evening, namely, the creation of a threshold residency requirement for city hiring. George Smitherman discussed his plans to revitalize disadvantaged neighbourhoods through a greater emphasis on education, recreation, and employment opportunities for youth. Another hallmark of George's platform was the creation of a fair wage policy for the provision of supplementary public services and clean technology. Sarah Thomson indicated her support for a city grant program to promote equal opportunity in the private sector. She also unveiled her plan to address the affordable housing deficit through the creation of more mixed income neighbourhoods. Joe Pantalone stated his opposition to selling city assets and contracting out city services, and vowed to move more green jobs to the inner suburbs where poverty is the greatest. He received a resounding endorsement from the audience for his proposal to change the voting laws to give all residents of Toronto the right to vote. Rocco Rossi was the second candidate to endorse a fair wage policy. He also promised to harness city purchasing power to give priority communities a fairer shot at government contracts, and to create a five-person Board of Control to represent priority communities on the TTC.

The format of the evening allowed for a provocative discussion and a lively exchange of ideas. Each of the candidates engaged enthusiastically with the audience, providing much food for thought. The event enriched the participants' knowledge of what it means to live in a fair and equitable city, centering attention on a vital issue for the next cadre of city leaders.

*Kelly Prtichard is a volunteer at the UARR.*

## Community Groups respond to Maclean's "Too Asian"? article

by Victor Wong

On November 10, 2010, a Maclean's magazine article appeared online with the provocative title: 'Too Asian' Some frosh don't want to study at an "Asian" university. There was also another article in the Toronto Star entitled: Asian students being forced into university: Maclean's. The Chinese Canadian National Council (CCNC) and the CCNC Toronto Chapter (CCNCTO) held a news conference that very afternoon to condemn the numerous negative stereotypes about Asians and and implicitly non-Asians in both articles. The community response was also very critical of both Maclean's and the Toronto Star.

Over the next few days and weeks, both news organizations made some adjustments to their articles. The Star even published an article the next day about our criticisms and a prominent op/ed by the Star's public editor where the paper acknowledged that original article fell below its standard.

CCNC, CCNCTO, students' organizations and community organizations mobilized and urged Maclean's to acknowledge that the article is offensive and full of stereotypes and to apologize.

Representatives of CCNC and CCNCTO met with senior Maclean's staff on two occasions but were unable to come to a mutually agreeable resolution. To be fair, the editors did make some conciliatory gestures: publishing a follow-up editorial stating that the magazine did not intend to offend, publishing a selection of critical letters to the editor, stating in an OMNITV interview that the article "did offend people and it's regrettable that it offended people", removing the offensive title "Too Asian"? and replacing it with "The enrolment controversy" in its online edition, and placing a Chinese-language translation of their follow-up editorial in three Chinese-language dailies.

While acknowledging these conciliatory gestures as being positive, CCNC takes the position that they were inadequate in addressing our concerns.

The Maclean's article had clearly touched a nerve. There are hundreds of news and critical op/ed articles written about the "Too Asian"? article. Many of them have been posted on Facebook sites ([http://www.facebook.com/home.php?sk=group\\_17451491255973](http://www.facebook.com/home.php?sk=group_17451491255973))

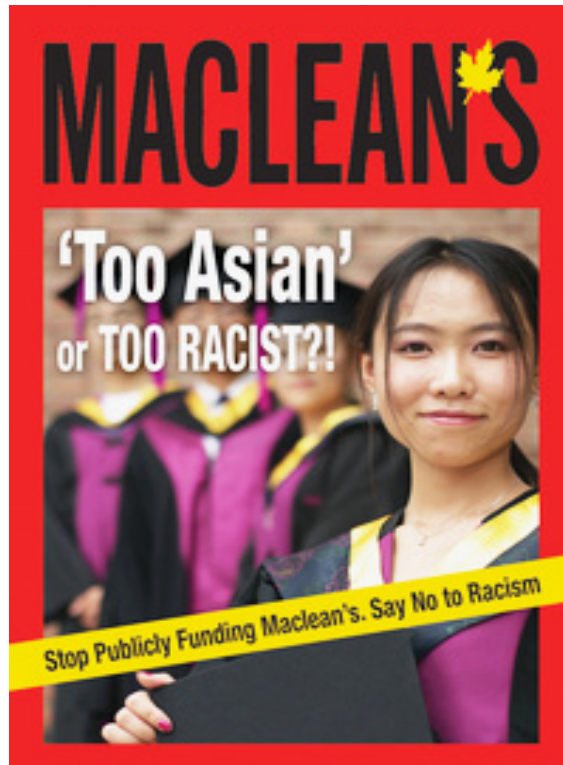
CCNC compiled commentary from individuals who were interviewed or photographed in the "Too Asian"? article – some claiming that their comments were taken out of context by the writers. Five Canadian municipalities – Victoria, Vancouver, Toronto, Markham and Richmond Hill eventually passed motions critical of Maclean's.

MP Olivia Chow moved a motion in the House of Commons and Senator Vivienne Poy expressed her concerns to the federal Government over the \$1.5 million grant to Maclean's from the Canada Periodicals Fund. The program criteria states that magazines that publish offensive content (defined

as material that is denigrating to an identifiable group) may not be eligible.

CCNC, CCNCTO, students' organizations and community organizations organized a vibrant community-based and online discussion about issues of race, identity, participation, community history and political leadership. The challenge is to remain vigilant and also proactive in influencing the media at large to write about the real-lived experiences of our communities.

*Victor Wong is the Executive Director of the Chinese Canadian National Council.*



*Ryerson Student Union Talk Back Event Flyer*



## **"MAKE YOUR MARK" & "MAKE THEM PROUD"**

We have all wanted to leave a lasting memory of our selves – for our families, our friends and our colleagues. And the best way to do it is to make a donation to an organization like the UARR.

You could donate a small amount every month or a lump sum. You could also transfer stock or mutual funds. Or perhaps you want to donate a property for a permanent home for UARR.

Your donation could be made to mark a special occasion like a Birthday or a family event. It could be made to honour a loved one or a friend.

Think about it and then give us a call. We at UARR are here to help you make that special donation. We are a registered charity and will issue tax receipts to eligible donations. Contact our Administrative Assistant Yumei at (416) 703-6607 ext. 5 or by email at [yumei@urbanalliance.ca](mailto:yumei@urbanalliance.ca) to get more information.

### **The UARR acknowledges the generous support of:**

Status of Women Canada  
Ontario Trillium Foundation  
City of Toronto  
Canadian Auto Workers (CAW)  
Community First Developments Inc.  
CUPE 4400  
Elementary Teachers of Toronto  
Falconer Charney L.L.P.  
Grant & Bernhardt, Human Rights Lawyers  
HSBC  
IBEW Local 353  
Labour Community Services  
New College U of T  
NARCC  
OPSEU  
Royal Bank of Canada  
Scadding Court Community Centre  
Social Planning Toronto  
TD Bank Financial Group  
Toronto District School Board  
Toronto and York Labour Council  
UARR members and Individual donors.

## **URBAN UPDATE - JUNE 2011**

### **Membership up to date?**

Membership Categories (please check one)

_____ General	\$ 25
_____ Sustaining	\$ 50
_____ Benefactor	\$ 100
_____ Senior/Youth	\$ 10
_____ Lifetime Membership	\$1000
_____ Corporate	\$ 500

Are you a new member (\_\_\_) or  
is this a renewal (\_\_\_)?

Please send payment with this form to:

Urban Alliance on Race Relations  
302 Spadina Avenue, Suite 507  
Toronto, Ontario M5T 2E7

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Postal Code: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_

**Urban Alliance on Race Relations  
302 Spadina Avenue, Suite 507  
Toronto, Ontario M5T 2E7**

Phone: (416) 703-6607 Fax: (416) 703-4415  
email: [info@urbanalliance.ca](mailto:info@urbanalliance.ca)  
<http://www.urbanalliance.ca>

