



# Peel CAS celebrates Black History Month

February is Black History Month and at Peel CAS we work together with our partners in the community to provide the best service we can to the diverse children, youth and families we work with. “We are committed to equity, inclusion, diversity and anti-oppression at Peel CAS,” says Rav Bains, CEO, Peel CAS.

The following articles highlight four of our board members who volunteer their time and talents to the agency and the families we work with. In addition, we had the opportunity to speak with Kike Ojo, from the Ontario Association for Children’s Aid Societies and project manager for One Vision One Voice – a framework to support child welfare agencies to provide better services to African Canadian children, youth and families and to eliminate disproportionalities and disparities in regard to African Canadian families served. “We have a strong foundation in these areas and welcome the framework which will help us to build on our work in diversity and anti-oppression.”

Royale Godfrey



Royale is one of Peel CAS’s youth board members. As a former youth in care, Royale brings a unique perspective and valuable insights to the board. She is involved in the Peel CAS youth council which meets monthly and she is able to bring this valuable feedback directly to the board. “I was in care from a young age,” says Royale. “I am able to help bring a different perspective of what works and what doesn’t, and in turn it is my hope that my feedback can help make a positive impact on youth who are currently in care.”

Royale believes that people have the power to control their own destiny. “I believe paying careful attention to what is happening around you, and making positive “tweaks” to what may not be working, will help ensure a successful future.” She also has a message for other youth involved with CAS. “Everyone has challenges. Don’t let what happened to you define who you are or who you’re going to be. Youth in care have resources such as a worker or caregiver that can help you make a life plan. Figure out what you really love to do and then do the necessary research and network with the right individuals who can help you achieve your goals.” For Royale her goal was to work in the field of Human Resources. She studied hard and with the right motivation around her, graduated from York University and is now working in her field.

Solomon Owoo



Solomon learned the value of giving back from his uncle who invested a lot of time and effort in supporting and helping others. As a chartered accountant and auditor, Solomon joined the Peel CAS board of directors as a volunteer with the finance committee. He has also served as treasurer and for the past two years has been in the role of vice-president. “A former member encouraged me to join the board,” says Solomon. “As a member of a minority community we can either sit back and complain or be a part of the solution. I chose to be part of the decision making process that can drive change.”

One of the most important things Solomon has learned is that there is a big knowledge gap between what the community knows about Peel Children’s Aid and what actually happens at the agency. “There is a lot of good work done at CAS that extends beyond child protection,” says Solomon. “I feel it is important to lend my voice to help others better understand the work of the agency and its commitment to improving the lives of children, youth and families it works with. There are challenges with every human organization but being part of the decision making process is a way to address some of the challenges and drive change.”

Juliet Jackson



Juliet Jackson has worked at the Region of Peel for 24 years. During her career with the Region she has had various roles, all with a focus on service to others.

Finding ways to help families is what attracted Juliet to Peel CAS. “An incident happened in my own family where my niece and nephew were taken into care of CAS,” says Juliet. “I was impressed with the process and how family members were engaged. It really opened my eyes to view CAS in a different way. In many racialized communities, we see CAS as the enemy. This experience enabled me to see them instead as a partner.” So when an opportunity came along to be a member of the Peel CAS board of directors, Juliet jumped at the chance. “Helping families and individuals to thrive and be self sufficient is my passion and being on the board is another way that I feel I can make a difference.”

In her role as director of the newly created Office of Culture and Inclusion at the Region of Peel she will now be able to influence change at a corporate level. “I’m excited about this new role and the opportunity to be an ambassador for an organizational culture that anchors diversity and inclusion within the Region.”

Kojo Odoom



Raised in Ghana, Kojo came to Canada in his teens. “When I came here I lived in the Jane and Finch area. Similar to my experience in Ghana, I saw signs of poverty and I was concerned with the challenges that came with lower income areas especially as it relates to youth,” says Kojo. “I decided I would do what I could to support the community.”

Kojo attended York University where he studied information technology and accounting and now works at TD Bank.

“One of the ways I gave back to my community was to go to the high schools and talk to students about accounting,” says Kojo. “I felt that youth were not always aware of the opportunities that were out there for them. I want youth to know that they have a voice and there are people they can turn to for guidance.”

After previously volunteering on the board of directors for the Black Creek Community Health Centre, he felt joining the board at Peel CAS would help him continue his commitment to youth and families. “I want to help out and help youth to have a voice,” says Kojo. He joined the board in 2015 and feels that community building is a two way street; “I learn about the youth and their families and I hope that my work is making a difference in the community too.”

## One Vision One Voice

One Vision One Voice is a project funded by the Ontario Ministry of Children and Youth Services to develop, and now implement, a framework to support child welfare agencies to provide better services to African Canadian children, youth and families and to eliminate disproportionalities and disparities in regard to African Canadian families served.

The research report and framework, which outlines tangible recommendations to help CAS’s better serve these families, was released in September 2016. The framework provides practical steps – called Race Equity Practices – to address racial disproportionality and disparities in the system and ultimately create a child welfare system better able to serve a diverse community.

The One Vision One Voice project was led by Kike Ojo, who spent over 8 years working as the senior manager of Diversity and Anti-Oppression

at Peel CAS before joining the Ontario Association of Children’s Aid Societies (OACAS). Kike shares some important insights into how agencies can use this framework to improve services for African Canadian families.

“I started my work at Peel CAS but the overrepresentation of Black children and youth in care was never just a region specific issue,” says Kike. “My work at Peel led to my secondment at the OACAS where I am able to provide leadership on this initiative, and affect change at a provincial level.”

Collecting race based data is highlighted as an integral part of moving the work forward. “It is important for CAS staff working with families to be aware of the families’ identities. Workers should engage with the families they serve and really understand who they are. They also need to be sure to document this important data as well.”



Kike also stresses the important role managers’ play in this work. “Conversations about race and how a family is intersecting with various

social service sectors such as schools, health providers and others in addition to CAS, are crucial. To help families create better outcomes for themselves we need to take into consideration how their race informs their experiences.”

Other ways to move this work forward include providing anti-black racism training for staff and caregivers. Kike also highlights the role that referral organizations have. “This framework was also written with other sectors in mind. Sharing this information with other social service sectors will help create a common language for how we work with, and understand families we provide service to.”



For more information, contact Peel CAS at 905.363.6131 or visit [www.peelcas.org](http://www.peelcas.org)