



URBAN UPDATE

Urban Alliance on Race Relations Newsletter

Volume 19
Summer/Fall Issue
July 2009

YEAR IN REVIEW, CURRENTS, AND FUTURE VISIONS

UARR Program Highlights

Greetings,

It's hard to believe that another year has gone by and that it's already summer! This year has been a busy one for us characterized by our continued commitment to anti-racism, education activism, labour organizing, anti-poverty coalition building, and exciting youth organizing initiatives.

Our work at UARR is all the more important in our city and world today as we face soaring unemployment rates, stresses on social services, environmental instability, as well as political social violence. Issues that effect racialized people in alarmingly unproportional ways.

Take time to read through this Issue and reflect on how the work we are doing at UARR mirrors the work you have done throughout your life and what you plan to continue doing to create the change you envision for this city and world.

-Youth Organizing-

Freedom Youth Collective (FYC): UARR has continued its work with the FYC, a Trillium Foundation and City of Toronto funded for youth, by youth initiative that provides skills based workshops and trainings in media, equity, and anti-oppression for youth throughout the city. The initiative aims to provide the skills, and platform for youth to critically



New UARR Website to launch this summer

analyze and tackle a wide range of topics, including gender-based violence, racism, poverty, homophobia, education, policing and housing as well as the negative stereotypes and the under-representation of marginalized people in the mainstream media.

One of our most successful actions was the mobilizing we did in collaboration with young Muslim women and allies from the Violence Against Women sector. It was a response to the offensive release of *Toronto Life's* December 2008 issue, focusing on the life and murder of 16-year old Aqsa Parvez. This resulted in widespread media coverage (that reached as far as Spain) that challenged islamophobia, and the media's distorted coverage of gender in our city.

The initiative includes a website where youth will be able to upload their music, art and writing and talk about what's going on in their lives and communities. Watch for the launch of www.freedomyouth.ca this summer.

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Making Noise: is a project funded by the Ontario Women's Directorate that addressed the relative invisibility and/or negative portrayals of young women in media and the lack of young racialized women creating and controlling their own media. See article *We Are Making Noise!!!* for more info.

-Education Activism-

UARR has continued to support education activism in the city including, public activism against budgetary cuts at TDSB, funding for ESL, and fighting for the community use of schools. This past year, we supported equity initiatives at the TDSB with participation in equity leadership camps and various speaking engagements at various schools.

Further, we also collaborated with the Colour of Poverty Campaign for Public Education, and the Organization of Parents of Black Children.

-Police Accountability-

UARR remains active in working to keep our police services accountable. As a result of the Ombudsman's report of the Special Investigations Unit, we will continue to monitor the work of the SIU as well as the newly created Office of the Independent Police Review, with continued participation on the Saving Lives Implementation Group at the Toronto Police Services Board.

-Coalition Building-

Lastly, the UARR has continued to support the movement for quality, secure and stable employment and fight against poverty in Ontario. We also continue our support of various campaigns including, the 25 in 5 network for poverty reduction, Colour of Poverty and the Good Jobs for All Coalition. We celebrate the victory for Temp Workers in this province through the amendment of the Employment Standards Act and were happy to mobilize with the Workers Action Centre in support of temp worker rights.

Thanks and have a great summer!
Michelle Cho, Project Coordinator



WE'RE MAKING NOISE!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

By Farrah Khan

Young women of colour are picking up the mic, camera and computer. We are supporting one another to speak our truths about what is happening in our communities and our lives through multi-media creation.

FYC and Making Noise ASK :

- ☐ Why do we see the same kinds of images of women specifically women of colour in the media all the time?
- ☐ How do we create stories that accurately represent our communities, our families, ourselves?
- ☐ How do we have real conversations, interventions and challenges on gender-based violence that is based on community accountability and anti-oppression?

Out of the conversations came the idea for Making Noise! a project that uses popular education, pop culture and media creation to build a summer initiative that addresses gendered based violence –that we often face daily - in a fierce, media savvy ways.

There are two main components to Making Noise!
The first are the Media Workshops aimed at addressing specific topics and creating media pieces around certain issues. In late May, young women and media practitioners from across Toronto came together to talk about the issue of gender based violence -specifically street-harrass

ment - and create multi-media works and campaigns that address these issues. Another Workshop session is scheduled for September.

The second component of Making Noise are two summer Media Camps in which 30 young women of colour will learn media literacy skills as well as how to make their own media (video & podcasts). The media pieces created will act as vehicles to discuss, gender based violence, crucial issues including xenophobia, faith based persecution, self-esteem, sexual health, young motherhood, poverty and racism.

Please contact the UARR for more information on these FREE workshops and camps. The following article was written by a recent participant.

SEX-U-AL HA-RASS-MENT.

WHAT IT MEANS; WHAT IT MEANS TO WHOM?

By Kiana Eastmond

See, I thought it was when my boss makes reference to my body parts, or if a teacher implies I might get a 50 instead of a 49.3, if I was to do him a 'favour'. Most of it seemed really fictional to me. I had never had a boss or teacher do such a thing and couldn't understand why one would? I carry myself well. I don't do anything to attract the unwanted attention. And if I am doing something, then obviously it wouldn't be harassment, it would be mission accomplished. Right?

I was invited to the Sexual Harassment Media Camp. I R.S.V.P'd and was looking forward to being surrounded by brilliant people who were passionate to make change. I did not, however, go to learn anything about sexual harassment. I thought I knew all there was to know. I thought.

"I wasn't wearing a bra, and these two boys boldly said, "Look at those melons." I was shocked. My

initial reaction was that's just boys being boys. Why would something as innocent as that be sexual harassment? And then, just like that, the learning began.

Throughout the day, my own ideas of what sexual harassment had been all these years were challenged. Through hearing the many testaments of the woman around the room, and the well constructed charts and information the facilitators provided, sexual harassment wasn't fictional at all, but a daily experience for women everywhere. Like a hyperlink in my mind, moments, memories and experiences were being linked to this definition. I had been a victim of sexual harassment -- too many times to count, and also a harasser quite a few times myself. Why didn't I know this? An advocate for change, socially conscious, and I respect women. I should've known this. Well a lot of people don't know, not even Google as I tried to search for a definition online.

Through brainstorming, discussions and creative avenues, we found ways to tackle the issue and support its victims. It was amazing to see how quickly we created a catchy Podcast PSA and theatrical piece. It left me believing that we all can do something. No matter how small, in accumulation it makes a huge difference.

Going home that day, I felt like the media camp did exactly what it was supposed to, it had educated me, and left me feeling the need to educate others. It had evoked me to want to create and support change around this issue. It was more than the amazing job the facilitators did; it was the vibe in the room. We were all in sync with wanting to do something that individually was bigger than all of us, but together we had a fighting chance.

Sexual Harassment...I know what it means now.

Toronto City Hall Needs an Equity Face-lift

By Ajamu Nangwaya

The slogan "*taxation without representation is tyranny*" was a catalyst in mobilizing the political sentiments of the White settlers in Colonial America against British imperial rule. They rejected the notion of virtual representation in the British Parliament in which they had neither voice nor vote. The women and racialized residents of Toronto could justifiably declare themselves to be in a position of enduring taxation without substantive representation at city hall.

The racial and gender composition of the leadership at Toronto's City Hall is a damning indictment of the lack of progress that has been made on the removal of systemic electoral barriers at the municipal level of government. Currently, over 93 per cent of the councillors are White with a whopping 77 per cent being men and this reality is taking place in a city with 47 and over 50 per cent racialized and women residents, respectively. A very telling indication of the exclusion of racialized and aboriginal women at the heart of the city's governance system is the fact that 100 per cent of the women councillors are White.

With respect to race and municipal power politics, racialized and Aboriginal women are the faces staring at us from the bottom of the well of political exclusion. Therefore, when commentators flag the invisibility of women and racialized elected and appointed leaders in our political system, we need to breakdown and intersect the statistics by race, gender and other relevant categories such as disability, aboriginal status, sexual identity and age.

This approach would give us a better indication of the insidiousness of exclusion in our political system, and would inform the solutions that we design.

In terms of political solutions to the challenge of racial and gender exclusion, it may be time for us to bring a proportional representation (PR) electoral system as well as introduce political party politics to city hall.

A PR electoral system would immediately boost the number of racialized and women councillors, because of the pressure that would be exerted on parties to cast their nets widely within the electorate. A few more percentages of the popular vote would determine whether a party ends up as a part of the governing coalition or the extent of its influence in the policy-making process.

The current initiative in Toronto to pressure or influence the political directorate to allow residents with permanent residency status to vote in municipal elections may help increase the number of women and racialized councillors. With 50 per cent of the city's population identifying their place of birth as being outside of Canada, and 100,000 newcomers calling it home on an annual basis, the citizenship requirement is a systemic barrier to the election of racialized councillors.

There are material implications of the underrepresentation of racialized peoples and women from the halls of power at city hall. It is quite likely that employment equity would have become a strategic priority if both groups were equitably represented among the councillors. Further, a council less dominated by representatives who are white would have put in place



mandatory requirements to make sure that contractors who will be working on the upcoming \$9 billion transportation infrastructure projects have employment equity plans. These contractors would be required to hire racialized, disabled, women, aboriginal and young workers based on their labour market availability in the relevant skilled trades' job classifications.

We have long passed the time for speeches, resolutions, diversity statements and mottoes extolling

RETOOLING SCHOOLING

By Norm Beach and Tam Goossen

During this recession, will we sell public assets at fire-sale prices? Or mothball them for years to come? And what if those assets are schools nestled deep within communities in need of services?

As the Toronto District School Board, in a perfect storm of demographic shifts and funding shortfalls, considers putting dozens of under-enrolled schools on the chopping block, it's time for some extra-curricular thinking.

Currently, 92 schools have enrolments below 60 per cent and following an Accommodation Review Process now underway, some of them will be shut down during the next school year. But there's more at stake here than some kids walking further to class. For starters, the city's Official Plan calls for increased population growth in the core, so we may need some of these schools in the future. In fact, many of their facilities could be used now to kick-start economic recovery in our neighbourhoods.

In Kensington and Chinatown, we can see both the roots of the problem and some possible solutions.

equity. Only substantive action accompanied by time-lines and firm targets for the inclusion of the invisible faces at City Hall will do. Otherwise, the city of Toronto's motto **Diversity Our Strength** will continue to ring hollow, and may inspire accusation of unadulterated hypocrisy for not living up to its ideal in the realm of political representation.

Ajamu Nangwaya is a doctoral candidate at the University of Toronto and is the 3rd Vice-President of CUPE Ontario.

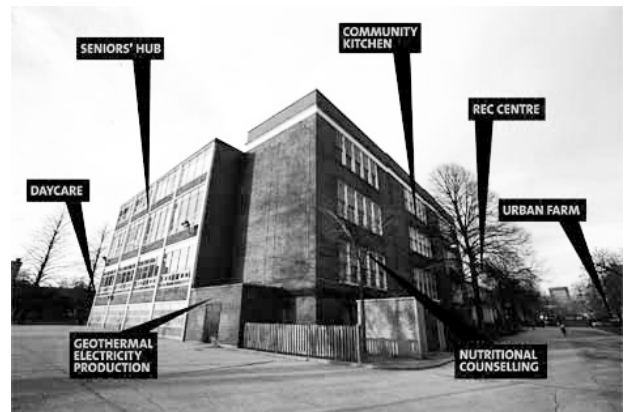


Photo: Cheol Joon Baek

Forty years ago, schools were overflowing with children from immigrant families. The community was consulted to help design a new one. In an explosion of civic engagement, parents advocated new initiatives throughout the city, including heritage language and black cultural programs.

Many newcomer families have since moved to the suburbs, many homes in this area have become rental units for post-secondary students, and Kensington Community School is below capacity. But under its forlornly quiet playground, a powerful giant is asleep. There's another under the nearby Ryerson Community School yard, where Ward 10 trustee Chris Bolton hopes to see heating and cooling pipes installed.

When partnerships are finalized, the project could generate geothermal electricity for the

school, Toronto Western Hospital, Alexandra Park Housing and Scadding Court Community Centre.

In fact, a new provincially funded program to make 1,000 schools more energy-efficient could turn many under-enrolled schools into sources of clean alternative power sold back to the grid, generating revenue to help keep them afloat.

But that's not all. Using these schools as community hubs would help people of all ages become healthier, happier, better educated and better employed. Schoolyards have space not only for generating power under the ground, but for allotment gardens above, too, providing food and recreation.

Schools are ideal for childcare, parenting centres, indoor recreation, seniors' activities, nutrition centres with equipped kitchens, drug-free after-school activity centres for teens, community education and Adult ESL classes. Charitable and service organizations could make excellent use of school space to benefit the community. But here local needs run into a roadblock: provincial rules on school use.

If a school were half-full of children and the rest of the building occupied by neighbourhood services, Ontario's funding formula would still classify it as below capacity and it would be at risk of closure.

Although Ontario funds many of the valuable programs listed above, it doesn't include them in calculating whether a school is being used at capacity. Even an ESL classroom for parents is considered an "unused" school space. And unless so-called "under-capacity" schools are closed, the formula decrees a new school can't be built in a suburban part of Toronto teeming with children.

It's time we updated our education funding so it fully recognizes the value of early childhood education, parenting centres, recreation and lifelong

The UARR Invites you to the 3rd ANNUAL GOLF DAY



SUNDAY JULY 5, 2009

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Proceeds from this event will benefit UARR's youth programs

A \$50.00 Tax Receipt will be issued

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kirkmark@rogers.com

MEMBERS OF THE COMMUNITY ARE WELCOME!

learning. It is precisely at this time of crisis that we must strengthen communities, not sell off assets that can be used to better our quality of life in bad times. Toronto's "surplus" schools crisis is an opportunity for us to reimagine our city.

Norm Beach is a Toronto District School Board LINC instructor; Tam Goossen is a former Toronto public school trustee.

Reprinted from Now magazine, April 30, 09

Migrant Workers

By Chris Ramsaroop

Migrant Workers put food on our table, they take care of the young, the elderly and the sick, they serve us food, and build our homes, yet despite their contributions to our society, these women and men live and work under precarious conditions. Migrant workers are employed under Canada's temporary foreign workers program (TFW) an employer driven program which ties migrant workers to their employer thus denying them the ability to move freely to seek work. Fear of deportation which is almost certain if a worker loses their employment exerts further pressure on workers to not speak out about bad working and living conditions or other forms of abuses that may arise while in Canada. According to statistics from Citizenship and Immigration Canada's there were over 251,000 temporary foreign workers in Canada (Over 91,000 in Ontario).

My involvement with *Justicia for Migrant Workers (J4MW)* a collective of community, labour and student activists involved in advocating for rights for the thousands of Canada's migrant agricultural workers has given me the chance to see the often deplorable conditions that exist for farm workers in Canada. Over the past decade, J4MW has recorded numerous human rights violations experienced by migrant farm workers including: exposure to chemicals and pesticides, deplorable housing conditions,

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paying into Canada's EI and CPP system while being denied benefits, two tiered healthcare, pay discrimination, no overtime or holiday pay, deportations and the denial of permanent residency status to Canada.

Media coverage has exposed some of the conditions that temporary foreign workers endure. Recently the Toronto Star exposé into the conditions that live in caregivers face provided a glimpse into the lives of one aspect of the temporary foreign workers category.

Buoyed by the desire to refocus the debate on issues faced by temporary foreign workers, migrant workers and community organization are mobilizing to shift the debate to addressing the everyday experiences faced by live in caregivers, seasonal agricultural workers and the thousands of other temporary foreign workers in Canada. Organizations such as the Workers Action Centre, Caregivers Action Centre, Justicia for Migrant Workers, Migrante, No One Is Illegal and dozens of community and labour organizations have rallied around the following demands.

No fees for work: Migrant workers face a variety of fees from recruitment agencies and employers for work placement. Some face fees of \$10,000 just to come here to work for low wages. The lack of regulation of this practice opens the door to fraud where some pay fees for work that does not even exist. Prohibit direct or indirect fees charged to workers (paid here or abroad) for any services related to placement. Employers and agencies must be held jointly liable for any prohibited fees charged to a worker.

Equal Access to Basic Entitlements: Migrant workers contribute to the revenue of various levels of governments through the income and consumption taxes that they pay. They should have the same access to basic entitlements that other workers have (e.g. health care, Employment Insurance, Old Age Security and Canada Pension Plan, workers' compensation when sick or injured on the job, social assistance and education).

Update the Employment Standards Act (ESA) to provide real protection for Migrant Workers: Even though a migrant worker can be owed \$10,000 to \$20,000 in unpaid wages and overtime, the FTWP creates huge barriers to enforcing their employment rights. Employers become confident that they can violate the law and repatriate a worker before their rights are enforced. The ESA must be updated too so that workers can access basic employment rights.

Stop Deportation of Workers: Migrant workers who become sick or are injured on the job are often deported by Citizenship and Immigration Canada before they can obtain health care or workers' compensation entitlements. Some employers repatriate workers that try to enforce their employment rights or just when the employer wants to lay them off. There should be no unilateral government or employer deportations or repatriations of workers.

Immediate Status for Temporary Foreign Workers: All workers under the TFWP must be allowed to be given residency upon landing. Also, workers must not be tied to one employer or required to live-in their employer's home. These requirements contravene basic human rights and create conditions for exploitation.

One of the central observations that we in Justicia have also made, is the absence of the discussion of racism and anti-racism strategies that are needed to address the systemic barriers that racialized migrant workers face in Canada. The absence of this discussion minimalizes the realities faced by workers through their everyday experiences in the workplace and the role that structural and systemic racism play in perpetuating a system of indentureship, which denies basic human rights to all temporary foreign workers in Canada.

The UARR acknowledges the generous support by:

Canadian Auto Workers	CUPE 4400
Ontario Trillium Foundation	CUPE Local 3902
Falconer Charney	CUPE Local One
Labour Community Services	City of Toronto
Ontario Women's Directorate	
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