

Dufferin County Canadian Black Association seeing support

Written By Sam Odrowski

The demand for racial justice and equality strengthened greatly in 2020, leading to the creation of many pro-Black and anti-racist groups advocating for positive change.

A local group formed following the murder of George Floyd last May called Dufferin County Canadian Black Association (DCCBA) and it has been working to provide a collective voice to the region's Black community.

At a meeting last Monday (Jan. 11), Orangeville Council voted to partner with DCCBA, list the organization on its website, and fly a pan-African flag for Black History Month in February, pending its flagpole availability, which has already been done by Shelburne and Dufferin County, previously.

'We're asking that the Town of Orangeville also takes part in recognizing the significant contributions of Black individuals in the Town and just to highlight, the Town of Orangeville specifically has at least five identified black owned or operated businesses,' noted Alethia O'Hara-Stephenson, DCCBA founder.

'That is a significant achievement for a population of 28,000 and a black population of 500 in change based on the 2016 census [data from Statistics Canada],'

DCCBA officially launched in June of last year, following many discussions with community members and stakeholders about the growing population of Black people in the County, and the need to provide a voice, advocacy, and support.

This is being accomplished by providing a safe space to Black individuals, offering support services, community outreach, and scholarship opportunities.

O'Hara-Stephenson said the association is committed to being a true community partner, working with other established agencies to bring value to Dufferin County.

'The mandate of the association is essentially to provide leadership for the continued development and enhancement of the Black community through civic engagement, education, programs and services and advocating for equity and wellbeing for the Black community in Dufferin County,' she noted.

'We're to be a central hub for resources, tools and programs that are unique to the needs of the Black Community.'

All of the DCCBA's programs, events, and activities are inclusive for all, meaning anyone can participate.

Some of the association's successes to date include partnering with a multitude of organizations, such as the Upper Grand District School Board, Town of Shelburne, Dufferin County, Museum of Dufferin, FLATO Developments, Benjamin Law, Shelburne Public Library and Dufferin Spotlight.

On Jan. 5 a free personal branding session workshop was held by DCCBA online and roughly 30 people participated. According to O'Hara-Stephenson it was a huge success.

'The feedback has been extremely positive and so that's something we're quite proud of, to be able to achieve as our first official event.'

Events scheduled for the future include an online session on financial literacy, real estate investing, coding and tutoring.

In partnership with the Museum of Dufferin, DCCBA's working on this year's Black History Month event, which includes a virtual flag raising ceremony on Feb. 1 and an online panel discussion on Feb. 20.

Through the association's partnerships, it's able to offer post secondary scholarships ranging from \$500 to \$2,500. Anyone interested in applying can do so up until May 17 at: <https://dufferincountycba.org/scholarship>.

It's important to note that, especially from a black youth perspective, based on the 2016 Stats Canada report, many black youth, especially black males, want to pursue higher education, but one of the impeding factors is cost, O'Hara-Stephenson explained.

So one of the reasons why we put a strong focus on scholarship is to be able to provide opportunities where more black youth can participate.

According to Statistics Canada, 94 per cent of Black youth aged 15 to 25 said they would like to get a bachelor degree or higher, but only 60 per cent thought they were capable. With the Black population in Dufferin County making up 32 per cent of all visible minorities, O'Hara-Stephenson says its critical that the community helps to address their education needs.

Another area of importance for DCCBA is providing a central hub to help people find jobs and volunteering opportunities.

We have a job portal and so far we've had a number of individuals in the community, Black individuals, who have been able to access job opportunities through our job portal. simply because we now have that central repository, where we're collecting information from various sources and making them accessible, said O'Hara-Stephenson.

Council was supportive of O'Hara-Stephenson's presentation and agreed to list the DCCBA as a resource on the Town of Orangeville website, which helps the organization get information out to the community while promoting diversity and inclusion.

Council also registered as a partner on the DCCBA's Registration page to show its support and share information regarding the Town of Orangeville.

Going forward, O'Hara-Stephenson says the association's plans are to continue with events and activities that can be done online or without meeting physically, due to COVID-19.

That's why we focused on the scholarships, because that's something that we can execute on without having to have a physical presence, she explained.

Longer term, DCCBA hopes to provide further opportunities for developing youth and helping them build entrepreneurial skills through mentorship and training.

As well, they hope to continue to support black owned businesses with their operations.