July 9, 2020

To: Toronto Police Services Board, Town Hall

From: Nadira Sheralam, nsheralam@gmail.com

I am very grateful to live in Toronto, where I feel safe and confident that I will get help should I call for help. I’ve had no encounters with police and have only seen them around in positive roles in the community.

I am a member of a racialized, minoritized group and I have experienced racial discrimination at work and in the community. I also have a family member who lives with mental illness. I therefore have the following suggestions for the Town Hall hosted by Toronto Police Services Board:

1. Train all police to be comfortable with mental illness and the mentally ill. The Schizophrenia Society of Ontario (SSO) has excellent resources, some of them online, and can help you. Learn what ‘hearing voices’ feels like. Meet and spend time with people living with schizophrenia, many of them work, volunteer, and live active lives. Ask them, “What’s going on when you experience an episode of mental illness? What do you need? What do you want from me when I come to help you?” As you may already know, they are frightened, and want to get help.
2. All police should get lots of social exposure to all the diverse racial and cultural communities in the city where they work. From the Police Chief to the trainee, plan to spend time socially in the homes of families from different racial groups – get community organizations, church, mosque, temple to arrange social invitations for an evening or an afternoon (they will be eager to help, and people will happily invite you). You will learn so much and become comfortable with them so when a difficult encounter happens in a tense situation, it’s easier to clue in quickly, confidently assess what’s going on, and make informed decisions.

The world is changing dramatically and in Canadian cities our real threats are not each other but the destruction of the earth’s environment and creatures. The sooner we get to know, and accept and respect, each other as different races and cultures with a common humanity, the better chances white people, Indigenous people, Black and brown people, and of all races, will have to live together safely and sustainably.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide you with my feedback. This year I learned that corporations welcome user feedback (I complained about dry skin lotion, about salad stale before the Best By date) to improve the product, remove defects, or contaminated produce. I hope my feedback helps the police be more community-centered and save lives.

Peace and blessings