

## **A Human Rights, Anti-Oppression Framework Sewsen Igbu, Child and Youth Worker**

Anti-Oppression framework in the Child and Youth Work program at George Brown College is defined as an outlook for understanding, identifying and working with oppression. Oppression is systematic mistreatment of individuals based on their membership in various groups that are disadvantaged by the institutionalized imbalance in social power in a particular society.

Anti-Oppression Framework is important for Child and Youth Workers because we work with diverse populations that are most at risk, marginalized and socially excluded. Children and youth who are socially de-valued have their access to societal resources limited. People are excluded because of the color of their skin, gender, sexual orientation, class, age, disability as well as other categories. Many of these oppressions are intersectional which produces complex forms of oppression.

Marginalized children's and youth voices are not heard or silenced, their identities are disputed or denied, their protests are ignored and overall excluded from useful participation in social life (Dei, G. & Rummens, J, 2015). Hence, social marginalization of children and youth has disastrous effects for them, their community as well as society. Therefore, it is critical that we, as Child and Youth Workers, incorporate an Anti-Oppression framework into our work.

There are three methods that we can employ to combat oppression and redress the power imbalance. First, we must challenge oppression and discriminatory practices, behaviors and languages for systemic changes that will create a genuinely equal society for each and every member in society. Secondly, we must practice personal responsibility by confronting ourselves; our own roles of privilege and oppression. We must reflect on how our practices and language affects other people and if we are adding to systems of oppression. Questions that can assist Child and Youth Workers to be conscious include:

- Are we speaking with authority and if so, why? Do we deserve that authority?
- Are we talking down to people? Are we making them feel safe?

- Are we making judgment assessments or decisions about children and youth based on our own beliefs or their needs?
- Are we actively listening to the needs of children and youth, their family and community members?

These reflective questions also connect to restorative practices and principles. Speaking with authority and talking down to refers to power dynamics while judgment and actively listening links to clients utilizing their own voices to develop agency.

Lastly, Child and Youth Workers can challenge oppression by empowering children and youth who are oppressed to critically address social injustice. Empowered children and youth have greater control over their lives and environment, acquire skills to better their lives and access to required resources. Most importantly, children and youth are involved participants in society.

The Anti-Oppression Framework pillar enhances restorative practices because it looks at the complex and intersectional categories that form individual's identities as well as involvement in the justice system as either victims and/or perpetrators. To truly address power imbalances and numerous forms of oppressions in society, we have to integrate concepts of classism, homophobia, heterosexism, sexism, racism, ableism and ageism because these categories have concrete and devastating effect on groups of people. Furthermore, without an anti-oppression framework, relationships within restorative practices are inequitable because lived experiences and realities are not fully recognized nor addressed.

Without an Anti-Oppression Framework to guide Restorative Justice, the outcome will not be substantial to change communities nor society. To make meaningful transformation, Restorative Justice must challenge oppression at every level.

**Reference:**

Dei, G. & Rummens, J. (2015). Including the Excluded: De-Marginalizing Immigrant/Refugee and Racialized Students. *Canadian Education Association (CEA)*. Retrieved from <http://www.cea-ace.ca/education-canada/article/including-excluded-de-marginalizing-immigrantrefugee-and-racialized-student>.