



Defining Diversity

Diversity is commonly understood in terms of dimensions that include but are not limited to race, age, place of origin, religion, ancestry, Aboriginal status, skin colour, citizenship, sex, gender identity, sexual orientation, ethnic origin, disability/ability, marital, parental or family status, same-sex partnership status, creed, language, educational background, literacy level, geographic location, income level, cultural tradition and work experience. (Source: Ontario Healthy Communities).

Have a comment, question or story idea?

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Faith, Disability and Inclusion—A Frank Conversation

Faith and disability are important parts of our human diversity, yet their intersection is rarely discussed in our media and culture. This motivated us to host an interfaith panel on disability and inclusion in faith communities. Held in the Council Chamber of the North York Civic Centre on December 9, a day before International Human Rights Day, the event drew a diverse and highly engaged audience from various communities and sectors.

The panel discussed how disability is viewed in the Holy Scriptures, and how physical and attitudinal barriers in places of worship prevent people with disabilities from fully participating in faith services. “The greatest barriers can be attitudinal,” said event moderator Michael Enright in his opening statement. Enright is the host of CBC’s popular Sunday morning radio show, *The Sunday Edition*.

On panel were: **Cat Criger**, Aboriginal Elder and Traditional Teacher from the First Nations People; **Kevin Downer**, Executive Pastor at the Metropolitan Community Church of Toronto; **Meenu Sikand**, Accessibility Planning Specialist and South Asian Disability Rights Advocate; **Noah Cheses**, Orthodox Rabbi at Shaarei Shomayim Orthodox Congregation; and **Rabia Khedr**, Executive Director of the Canadian Association of Muslims with Disabilities. The conversation started with an Aboriginal greeting and acknowledgement of the land led by Criger. The panel brought up examples of exclusion such as denying wheelchair



From left to right: Back row: Cat Criger, Michael Enright, Kevin Downer, Noah Cheses. Front row: Rabia Khedr, Meenu Sikand

users access to a mosque or Sikh temple where shoes must be removed, lack of ramps and accessible signage inside worship spaces, or discouraging children with special needs from participating in worship activities. These forms of exclusion are more representations of mainstream social attitudes and cultural interpretation than expression of the faith, according to the panelists. “The scripture itself is inclusive, it does not single people out based on disabilities,” said Khedr about the Qur’an. All faiths represented on the panel shared a high regard for human life as the embodiment of the divine, and the values of social justice and equality. From this perspective, inclusion of people with disabilities is a natural extension of practicing the faith according to its core teachings. The panel also demonstrated that there has been considerable progress made to promote inclusion.

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Religious, Cultural and Human Rights Observances

- Jan 1** ♦ New Year’s Day
- Jan 6** ♦ Epiphany, Christian celebration of the manifestation of Jesus
- Jan 7** ♦ Eastern Orthodox Christmas
- Jan 17** ♦ World Religion Day, Bahá’í celebration
- Jan 18** ♦ The birthday of civil rights activist Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.
- Jan 27** ♦ International Holocaust Memorial Day
- February** ♦ Black History Month
- Feb 10** ♦ Ash Wednesday, first day of Western Christian Lent
- Feb 14** ♦ Valentine’s Day
- Feb 15** ♦ Nirvana Day, Buddhist celebration
- March 8** ♦ International Women’s Day
- March 17** ♦ St. Patrick’s Day
- March 20** ♦ Palm Sunday Day
- March 21** ♦ Nowruz, New Year celebration in the Zoroastrian, Persian and Iranian communities
- March 21** ♦ International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination
- March 23** ♦ Holi, Hindu festival of lights
- March 24** ♦ Purim , Jewish “Feast of Lots”
- March 25** ♦ Good Friday (Holy Friday in Eastern Christianity)

Rabbi Cheses spoke about forming an inclusion committee and constructing a ramp inside his synagogue so that people using walkers or mobility devices could access the *bimah*, a table from which the Torah is read. “Architecture is like theology set in stone,” he said. “There’s been a change in our theology.” Rev. Downer shared about working with his congregation to bring in speakers and include disability in their planning of worship activities, focusing on the ways in which people can contribute rather than on their limitations.

Panelists agreed that education and religious leaders modeling and championing inclusion are key to real

change. Rev. Downer cautioned that inclusion shouldn’t be limited to an intellectual conversation. We need to create more opportunities for interaction between people and story-sharing to help us move “from the head to the heart,” he said. When asked what role the government can play, panelists noted funding and policy as ways to support the work on the ground.

The event was part our Bridging Diversity work funded by the Ontario Trillium Foundation. The panel was recorded and will be available on multiple platforms, including www.connectABILITY.ca, sometime in January; a link will be shared as soon as it’s available.

Approaching Differences with Cultural Humility

By Ilaneet Goren, Diversity Specialist

Most people are familiar with the term *cultural competence*, but what about cultural humility?

While cultural competence focuses on acquiring knowledge about minority cultures to know how to serve them better, cultural humility emphasizes respectful openness toward what we view as ‘different’ and encourages self-awareness, reflection and lifelong learning. Because it allows space for process and collaboration, it fits well within community-based settings.

Working from a culturally humble perspective means collaborating with the individual to understand what aspects of their cultural identity are most important to them, what they mean, and how they fit into reaching the individual’s goals. There is no superiority toward a person’s culture or life experience, which is also consistent with anti-oppressive practice. Another advantage of cultural humility is that it incorporates other dimensions of human

diversity when understanding culture, and, in so doing, allows us to discuss issues around disability, race, gender, sexual orientation, and economic status as major influencers of people’s experience of culture. For example, a recent report by TVO (www.ow.ly/Wbgjl) revealed that South Asian families caring for children and adults with intellectual disabilities face unique challenges, both within their cultural communities and within the Canadian mainstream service system.

Cultural humility is becoming a preferred approach to working across diversity, supported by research. According to a 2013 study, clients in therapeutic relationships reported doing better when their therapists used a cultural humility approach (Hook et al.). This may be because cultural humility has also been associated with better client-worker relationships, which in turn promotes better outcomes in services.

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Peer group for LGBTQ people with an intellectual disability over the age of 18. Meets every second Monday of the month at the 519 Church St. Community Centre 6 - 8 pm
Call to register: 416-222-1153 ext. 138

Faith and Culture Inclusion Resources

Canadian Association of Muslims with Disabilities
 1-866-897-8668
camd.ca

Faith and Culture Inclusion Network for families and agencies in the developmental sector
 416-526-4522
faithcultureinclusion.org

Reena, developmental services within framework of Jewish culture and values
 905-889-6484
reena.org

South Asian Autism Awareness Centre
 416-824-8847
saaac.org

United Church Intercultural Ministries
 1-800-268-3781 ext.4187
www.united-church.ca/

As our understanding of equity and diversity deepens, so does the need to integrate the latest research and 'promising practices.' In November and December, we conducted two workshops on cultural humility and unconscious bias with DSO-TR (Developmental Services Ontario Toronto Region) Assessors and Navigators. These were part of the 2-year project by the Developmental Services Toronto (dsto) and Community Living Toronto to improve access to services for families from diverse ethnocultural backgrounds.

So how can cultural humility be applied to supporting people with intellectual disabilities and their families and support networks?

➡ Remember that no culture is homogenous; there is great diversity within every cultural group, and every person will experience their culture differently based on other aspects of their identity including gender, sexual orientation, disability, history of migration, economic status and access to resources.

➡ Notice when unconscious bias is happening within you and around you. Practice catching it as it happens without judgement and with full awareness, so that the unconscious auto-pilot thoughts and habits (e.g. generalizations based on stereotypes) can be changed.

➡ Become comfortable with asking questions respectfully with the intention of clarifying and learning about a particular cultural practice. In his new book *Deep*

Diversity: Overcoming Us vs. Them, author and educator Shakil Choudhury gives an example of a city clerk asking a customer she perceived to be of a Muslim faith if it was ok for her to shake hands with him, rather than making an assumption. The customer appreciated being asked directly, recognizing that the clerk asked out of respect and a genuine desire to provide good and culturally-appropriate customer service.

As service providers in a diverse society, our goal is to develop an effective equity and inclusion awareness and analysis -- a lens -- that we can apply in any environment and scenario to help ensure everyone feels respected, included, and is able to achieve their best possible outcomes. But we can't use a cookie-cutter approach to address individual needs, or put people into oversimplified cultural boxes. With its focus on person-directed process, cultural humility is an effective way of working across diversity within the developmental sector.

Suggested resources:

Video | 30 minute documentary on Cultural Humility www.multiculturalmentalhealth.ca/cultural-humility/

Book | *Deep Diversity: Overcoming Us vs. Them* by Shakil Choudhury

Article | Hook et al. (2013). Cultural Humility: Measuring Openness to Culturally Diverse Clients. *Journal of Counselling Psychology*, 60(3), 353-366. Retrieve from: <https://portfolio.du.edu/downloadItem/295766>

Want more resources?

#BridgingDiversity Bulletin is an e-mail newsletter with resources, community news and events relating to diversity, equity and inclusion. To subscribe click on the link: www.eepurl.com/bbKW4b or contact ilaneet.goren@cltoronto.ca