



## **BERMUDA TRUTH & RECONCILIATION COMMUNITY CONVERSATIONS**

### **Changing the way we talk about race, justice, and inequality**

Though most Bermudians do not see each other as enemies, the disconnect is palpable. People speak of working together and the need for unity, however, the racial divide is widening, economic disparity between the races continues to grow, and social media is both educating and inflaming passions.

As individuals, we need to acknowledge and learn the true history of our past; honour and teach the stories of those who fought for freedom; raise awareness that a legacy of inequity continues to play out in our community; become conscious of the disconnect and misunderstandings that persists; and repair the damage and provide people with a way towards understanding and repairing the harm.

Citizens Uprooting Racism in Bermuda (CURB) first formed in 1998 and, following a brief hiatus, regrouped in 2005 and, by 2006, registered as a charity and began actively working in the community by offering workshops, forums, presentations and discussions. CURB members have worked for 15 years to sustain the conversations around racial justice issues, and there is no doubt that awareness is increasing in our community of the need to face racial justice issues and the legacies of the past.

CURB believed it was time to change the way we talked about race, justice and poverty, and confront our history of racial inequality. That, in addition to educational workshops, seminars, lectures and presentations around racial justice issues, there needs to be another way to build community. The real work towards conciliation must be a local one, for example larger 'national' events can be planned, but the best conversations occur with 10 – 20 people in a room building relationships, and forming a community through the lens of justice and equity. These conversations are in-depth and real; at times raw. By encouraging participants to speak uninterruptedly about their experiences, with openness, authenticity and trust, close relationships are built. Relationships are the building-blocks of community. There cannot be 'unity' without building community. There can be no systemic change without including relationship and trust building.

Telling one's story can be cathartic for those who have been traumatised; and listening to other people's stories can lead to greater empathy and understanding. It allows our humanity to come through and empathy displaces cynicism and distrust. When you put yourself in others' shoes, it is harder to think of them as "other." It was Henry Wadsworth Longfellow who said "My enemy is someone whose stories I don't know."

Small group conversations cannot stand alone. It must be taken from person-to-person; carried group-to-group; and ultimately groups create policy changes. It is hoped that a groundswell is formed among

various constituencies who demand equality, equity and justice and seek solutions to heal past and ongoing harms.

To that end in January 2017 CURB launched its Bermuda Truth & Reconciliation Community Conversations (TRCC).

The TRCC groups are facilitated by trained Restorative Practitioners using the training provided by the International Institute for Restorative Practices ([www.iirp.edu](http://www.iirp.edu)). The TRCC consists of up to 20 participants in each group, staying together for a series of 2.5-hour weekly conversations meeting for a period of 7 weeks, one evening each week.

CURB has designed scripts for the facilitators so that subject matters are introduced sequentially to take participants through a process of individual and community growth. Each session builds on the previous, guiding those who attend on how to talk about race in a supportive way, whilst also addressing the challenging issues in our lives and in the community.

During the weekly sessions, participants are encouraged to reflect upon what they have learned, and this reflection is supported by resources which can be read or watched at home to broaden understanding and knowledge.

We have seen these groups build community, learn and grow together, and find ways to create change within their own sphere of influence, and in the greater community. We have seen transformations take place and lasting friendships formed.

Most importantly, groups come up with creative ideas to bring about social change and greater racial justice and equity in our society, which are recorded by CURB and informs our National Plan for Race Relations in Bermuda.

Following the completion of the seven-weeks course, the TRCC Alumni are offered continued opportunities to get together to learn, support and encourage one another.

Participants can create the change that they want by becoming actively involved in finding ways to build a better Bermuda, one that our children will be proud to inherit.

If you are interested in being a change agent and becoming part of these community conversations, please email [admin@uprootingracism.org](mailto:admin@uprootingracism.org) or call 707 1496 and we will place you on our waiting list.