

# NEW ALLIANCE TAKES AIM AT RACISM IN COMMUNITY

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A group of local residents have come together to tackle racial inequality issues in Halton Hills.

Called the Halton Hills Alliance for Social Change, the movement has quickly attracted hundreds of citizens interested in addressing matters that impact the Black, Indigenous and People of Colour (BIPOC) community.

"Some events unfolded in the United States that brought us all together," explained alliance acting president Bonita Uzoruo. "We recognize there's also a need in Halton Hills for anti-racism education. But we (BIPOC) haven't been given a platform to speak from locally. We want to

amplify our voices and be heard and seen and recognized in the community."

The alliance is planning its first event for this Sunday (June 14) — a peaceful march in solidarity with national and international Black Lives Matter demonstrations, and to also take a stand against anti-Black and systemic racism facing the BIPOC community of Halton Hills.

"One of the comments I've heard is, 'I haven't seen racism in Georgetown.' But just because you don't see racism, that doesn't mean it doesn't exist," said Josh Nelson, one of the alliance's founding members. "There's covert and overt types of racism that exist in society, and I think they're very prevalent."

Both Uzoruo and Nelson say they've experienced ra-

cial incidents in Halton Hills. Shortly after moving to Georgetown a decade ago, Uzoruo said a swastika was carved into her fence — an act the community responded to by coming together and painting over it with a mural of peace.

She said her 12-year-old son has also been called the N-word in school.

"That's not his first incident in town," she noted.

Meanwhile, Nelson said he was put in an uncomfortable position at a Georgetown family restaurant near his home when a man approached him and struck up a conversation full of discriminatory, prejudicial language. After trying to verbally de-escalate the situation, Nelson said the man continued with statements like, "You're what's wrong with Canada."

"I was put in a position where I had to get up and walk away," he said. "Then he followed me as I was trying to de-escalate by walking away. I had to leave the building because I was so



Graham Paine/Torstar

Rallies supporting the Black Lives Matter movement are being held throughout Halton, like this one in Milton.

angry."

The Halton Hills Alliance for Social Change is led by the local BIPOC community and aims to bring together people of all ethnicities, including white people of all backgrounds interested in supporting the group's mission.

"We are actively seeking more people from the BIPOC community to join the

group," said alliance admin team member Melissa Krause. "One of our goals is to educate Halton Hills on the presence of racism and the history of oppression. There's a lack of education here on these issues."

Krause said the group is facing challenges in recruiting BIPOC, with many seeming fearful to come forward due to racial

issues in the community.

She pointed to a recent social media post by one of the alliance members about the march that drew prejudicial commentary.

"People feel it's safe in Halton Hills to throw racial slurs around, and it's not OK," she said.

Uzoruo said the alliance will create a safe space that she feels doesn't currently exist in Halton Hills.

"There are many people of colour in town that haven't had that safe space. It's been a long time coming," she said. "We want to represent their voices, especially those that have never been given a chance or silenced through systemic racism."

The Halton Hills Solidarity March will start at Mold-Masters SportsPlex at 2 p.m. on Sunday. Participants must wear a mask that covers their nose and mouth, and maintain social distancing. For further details, visit the Halton Hills Alliance for Social Change page on Facebook.

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