

To The ArQuives Board of Directors:

Dennis Findlay, President
Dr. Elspeth Brown, Vice-President
Paul Leatherdale, Secretary
David DesLauriers, Treasurer
Ana Rita Morais, Director
Justin Hughes-Jones, Director
Kabir Ravindra, Director
Marcos A. Persaud, Director

June 4th, 2020

We are writing to express our concerns about The ArQuives' lack of transparency, communication issues, and the recent solidarity statement for Black Lives Matter. We want to bring these issues to your attention as we believe they are symptoms of whiteness and racism within the organization that are conflicting with the Mission of The ArQuives; specifically in question are priorities two and three of the Strategic Plan for 2018-2022. We write this letter in order to open a dialogue and request accountability and equality.

On Sunday, May 31st, Volunteer A, Communications Volunteer, and a Lesbian woman of colour sent Raegan, Executive Director an email requesting information as to whether a statement on current racial injustices would be posted. Volunteers specifically requested to know the stance of The ArQuives on Anti-Black racism, as a woman of colour. Volunteer B, Communications Volunteer and a white man, also joined in this request. They feel that they did not receive a proper nor timely response. Raegan had initially stated "The board won't likely issue a statement as they have not done this previously," and suggested using the posts for the *Out North* book promotions and 1990's buttons in lieu of a statement. Further, she could not provide a clear nor immediate response to the question on a stance regarding racism. It is not appropriate that a woman of colour, along with other concerned volunteers, need to repeatedly request a stance on the issue of race as it pertains to the Ontario Human Rights Code. We explicitly would like to note that we are requesting a stance on current and specific issues regarding Anti-Black racism and whether The ArQuives specifically values Black lives. We feel as though the hesitation to provide a stance, of any nature, was inappropriate and insensitive. In the following days, more volunteers have come forward with similar concerns, including volunteer C, volunteer D, volunteer E, and volunteer F.

Following an email by Volunteer D, Dennis Findlay sent Volunteer D an email that there would be a statement released that day and, later on, sent a copy of said statement. It was posted shortly after. Raegan, however, stated it would be posted the following day. There was a miscommunication on the timing. We had hoped that the Board and staff would seek feedback

from volunteers, particularly the Communications volunteers, about the statement before posting it without consultation.

We feel that there was a rush to publish a stance for the sake of optics rather than genuine care of Black lives. The statement lacked focus on Black lives and importantly, Black Queer and Trans lives—especially in the context of police brutality and state violence. As a community that has a long history of discrimination, harassment, and police violence, we feel the statement lacks substance, recognition of the contributions of Black Queer and Trans people, and action items as to how the ArQuives supports or will support the Black community moving forward.

We remained concerned about whether Raegan brought Volunteer A and Volunteer B's initial concerns to the Board, as she had stated. Dennis Findlay's positive and swift response to Volunteer D contrasted with the unclear hesitant responses to Volunteer A and Volunteer B's emails and this is cause for concern. It is unclear why Volunteer D was explicitly one of the first to receive the statement when Raegan supposedly brought Volunteer A and Volunteer B's concerns to the Board.

Further, we feel this is all part of a pattern of racial microaggressions towards volunteers of colour, e.g. leaving them off of email threads or choosing to tap a white volunteer for something rather than a volunteer of colour. This pattern has become more apparent with recent staff departures. We would like to request clarity and accountability regarding these issues.

We also wish to voice our concerns on how Social Media has been handled. There has been a lack of communication and transparency between the staff, volunteers, and the Community Engagement Committee. One example is the most recent Social Media posting that mentioned Lemona Johnson and her involvement in the anti-racist and Black Power movement in Toronto. We are concerned that the photograph chosen and the framing of the description are white-centred. We are also concerned that there is an effort to post something about the upcoming *Out North* book, but nothing prepared in solidarity for Black lives. In addition, photographs of police violence and brutality from Toronto's Queer history might not be the best choice right now, since a majority of them depict predominantly white gay men. Further, these images are sensitive content for BIPOC and Queer folk who may experience trauma in seeing police brutality, especially in this current climate, and thus should be posted with more care and consideration. Communications volunteers wish to be consulted on these matters.

As volunteers, we have dedicated our time, labour, knowledge, and skills to The ArQuives. We deserve to know what kind of organization we are supporting and contributing to.

We are asking for the following:

- A formally articulated and published stance on what The ArQuives will strive to be that is publicly available, with respect to inclusion in both the Queer and volunteer communities and their intersections.
- That the Board adopt a policy that explicitly articulates an Anti-Racist stance.

- A third-party Anti-Racist training for all Board members, staff, and volunteers.
- Action items on what The ArQuives will do to support the Black community, especially the LGBTQ2+ Black community.
- How to support BIPOC volunteers and staff, regarding inclusion, equality, and their voiced concerns on the issues of Race.
- Reiterate that the onus should not be on unpaid volunteers to contact the Board on issues when the Executive Director is meant to represent the Board.
- Creation of policies and systems that will streamline communication(s) between volunteers to staff then to the Board of Directors.
- Complete transparency regarding the solidarity statement requests brought forward and the process that was taken to address the initial concerns.

We hope that there can be a time to address these issues.

Respectfully,

[signed by 7 volunteers]