Listening to Stories of Structural Racism

A sneak peak at the Initiative on Structural Racism & Poverty convened by the Anti-Poverty Network of NJ

Poverty Summit 2015
Serena Rice, APN Executive Director
In March of 2015, APN convened a group of partners to work together to address the problems of structural racism & poverty in New Jersey.

Premise: persistent poverty is inseparably linked to structural racism - we can’t address one without the other.

Goals:
- Document the problem
- Develop concrete, actionable recommendations
- Build a movement to bring change.
What do we mean by Structural Racism?

Structural Racism means that the playing field is not equal for everyone. Many *things* in our society benefit the historically dominant group (whites), and disadvantage non-white groups. While individuals can succeed, trends as a whole show the result of this disadvantage.

These trends don’t just happen. They result from *structures and institutions* that can be hard to see, because it is just how society works. These things include *history* that has set the stage for more recent developments, *stereotypes and assumptions*, inherited *wealth*, social *policies*, *media* images, and *interpersonal* factors (the way we see each other)
To really understand, we need to hear from impacted people.
• Workforce policies, low-wages, & lack of access to opportunity.

“They hire people by the season, that works for young kids but when you’re older and have a family to feed that doesn’t work. You have six months of work, then unemployment runs out. It can be a lot of burden on anyone. I went many a years without benefits.”

Trenton, NJ
Children & Youth

• Inequalities in educational quality and services for disadvantaged & at-risk children and youth.

“When (H.S.) seniors are planning trips to different universities. Within Camden high schools they were being taken to a ‘bank university’, but it was basically a bank training center. They were basically being taken places where they could start off having a job as a customer service rep. In the mean time other schools are planning trips to actual universities like Temple, La Salle…”

Camden, NJ
Housing, Community Development, & Environmental Justice

- Unaffordability, concentrated poverty, and poor conditions

“Finding affordable housing where families feel safe is hard. They’re building new apartments out of these factories for $1250 a month for a one bedroom apartment. They say that’s affordable, but affordable for who? If you look at the income within the city of Paterson a family cannot afford $1250 for a one bedroom apartment and you have more than 2 or 3 kids…”

Paterson, NJ
Health, Mental Health & Nutrition

• Problems with access, inadequate services, and poor options for healthy choices

“The first of the month the meat is four times the price that it would be at the middle or the end of the month. When at the end of the month, you know, I don’t have any food stamps, in the middle of the month I barely have food stamps, so not you put the sale on and it’s $4… but you go into a suburban neighborhood it’s the same price all month or there’s discounts at the beginning of the month…”

Newark, NJ
Distrust and sense that correctional system can only do harm

“It makes you hesitate before you call the police because you don’t want to be arrested. And you don’t want the wrong people arrested and you don’t want people to end up dead. People are going to hesitate to have any interaction with the police whether they are right or wrong because you are afraid.”

Paterson, NJ
Legal Protections & Political Access

- Discrimination in inconsistent policies, as well as lack of access to legal protections & political power.

- “I currently work with domestic violence victims throughout the city mainly in the courthouse and what I see, there’s absolutely no assistance. If I don’t go with them they have to find a family member to translate for them. The only time they get a translator is when they go before a judge and usually the judge will see them last or put them on certain days because cases take longer when you have an interpreter.”

Camden, NJ
“There’s a lot of things we see on a daily basis, that we’ve been seeing for so long that we think that’s the way it’s supposed to be…some people may not call that racism, but when it’s relegated to a certain part of the community or the state you can clearly construe that as being racism.”

Newark, NJ