



In conversation with community advocate, Dina Epale

SEARCH

Please donate to Black Ottawa Scene

If you believe in the mission of *Black Ottawa Scene* as the only Black newspaper in the nation's capital, then please give just a little: \$10, \$20, \$50, or whatever you can give. Even better, consider making it a monthly donation. Your kind contribution will go a long way.

To make your donation, click on the "DONATION" button at the top of the page.



Dina Epale

Could you tell me about your childhood? Where were you born? Is there anything about your childhood that stands out for you? Helped form who you are today? Your parents, friends, school?

I was born in the coastal city of Victoria (now called Limbe) in the Southwest region of Cameroon in West Africa, to a Cameroonian father and Jamaican mother, hence my tagline, Cameroonian by birth, Jamaican by heritage, and Canadian by choice. However, I spent most of my formative years in Yaoundé, Cameroon's capital. From a very young age, my parents instilled in my siblings and me the value of education and treating everyone with respect. These are values I still uphold to date.

When did you come to Canada, what made you decide on Canada, Ottawa?

I landed at Mirabel international airport in Montréal on September 4th, 1993. Back then, Mirabel was only for international flights while Dorval (Pierre Elliott Trudeau) was for domestic ones.

My reason for choosing to move to Canada is a very long story. To be brief, my mother's cousin encouraged her to send me to live with them in Nova Scotia for at least my first year in university to facilitate my integration. After receiving admission into various universities across Canada including the University College of Cape Breton (now called Cape Breton University) in Sydney, Nova Scotia, choosing to go there to honour this invitation was an easy decision.

I completed my university education and worked in the Kingdom of Swaziland (eSwatini) in southern Africa for two years on a Government of Canada-funded project; my desire to pursue a career in the international field brought me to Ottawa. Nineteen years later, I continue to call Ottawa home.

What is your educational background?

I graduated with a Bachelor of Arts degree in Political Science from the University College of Cape Breton (now called Cape Breton University - CBU) in Sydney, Nova Scotia, and a Master of Arts degree in International Relations from McMaster University in Hamilton, Ontario.

Can you describe your full-time job?

I am the Senior Advocacy and Public Affairs Advisor with the Canadian Association of Professional Employees (CAPE) - Canada's third-largest federal public service sector union. My role is a conduit between our members,

Place your ad Here

{ YOUR AD }
HERE }

Email
editor@blackottawascene.com

KATIE GIBBS
OTTAWA CENTRE | OTTAWA-CENTRE

Libéral

Your Ottawa Centre Candidate, committed to building more equitable, sustainable, and inclusive community

Votre candidate pour Ottawa-Centre, engagé à bâtir un communauté plus équitable, durable et inclusive.

info@katiegibbs.ca @katiegibbs @KatieGibbsOttawa @katiengibbs

the association, and parliamentarians. I work closely with the National President to advance members' interests and advocate for legislative changes.

You have recently established a scholarship fund for Black students in memory of your parents and brother, the Epale Family Memorial Award. Can you give us the background to this and the eligibility requirements?

Like many people of African and Caribbean heritage, I grew up in a household that strongly believed that education was the key to success. As such, it was an expectation of my siblings and me to go as far as possible in our education to increase our chances of acquiring successful careers. I made it through my undergraduate studies as an international student in great part because of my family's financial and moral support. The loss of my father, mother, and brother at different points in my adult life made me think of ways to honour them for everything they did to support me and their contributions to a better world. Out of this idea was born the **Epale Family Memorial Award**.

The **Epale Family Memorial Award** is earmarked for international students from Africa and the Caribbean studying at Cape Breton University, in Sydney, Nova Scotia, where I did my undergraduate studies. It is in honour and memory of my parents; Simon J. Epale, Ph.D., and Mrs. Tessa E. Epale, as well as my brother, Mr. Priso H. Epale, who all shared a passion for education, and played integral roles in motivating others to pursue their dreams. It is also a proud tribute to my family's African and Caribbean heritage.

I am a deep believer in giving back. Through the **Epale Family Memorial Award**, I would like to pay it forward and provide financial support to an international student from either Africa or the Caribbean studying at Cape Breton University, in the amount of \$1,000 (at minimum) to offset student costs. The first award will be delivered in the fall of 2022, which also marks 25 years since I graduated from the university with my bachelor's degree. A new winner will be announced every year over the next five years and based on funds raised, the amount the winners will receive could be greater or the period extended. It is my fervent wish to see this initiative grow from the **Epale Family Memorial Award** to the Epale Family Memorial Scholarship down the road.

To be eligible for the **Epale Family Memorial Award** the applicant must be:*

1. A full-time international student from Africa or the Caribbean studying at Cape Breton University in Sydney, Nova Scotia.
2. Submit a one-page essay, which will include the applicant's academic achievement (80%+ average), leadership, and community engagement while at CBU.

*Calls for applications will begin in September 2022.

What motivated you to set this up? And how does one apply for this scholarship?

While studying at the University College of Cape Breton (now called Cape Breton University) as an international student, I was both humbled and honored to have received an award supporting my dream to attain a quality education. A bursary in the amount of \$250 was inspirational but also practical as a means of support. The funds came from a donor I had never met but believed in supporting students' dreams. This generosity has always stuck in my mind, and I always believed that someday someone was going to benefit from that experience.

You too can join me and other supporters who are committed to making a difference in the life of an international student from Africa or the Caribbean studying at Cape Breton University by contributing to this annual award.

Please **click here to help make a difference** and know that every dollar donated will directly support students who are working to accomplish a dream. Will you **give today**?

Do you subscribe to the view in some quarters that Black students face more barriers than other racial groups? If so, what are these barriers and how do we overcome them?

There are systemic barriers and biases (conscious and unconscious) that result in different treatments based on one's race. Although I have seen progress during my lifetime, differences in treatment due to skin colour still exist. I have had discussions with my son and daughter regarding some of their experiences, and I encourage them and their friends to be the change that they want to see by leveraging their education, awareness, and learning.

The Black Lives Movement (BLM) seems to have galvanized Black communities worldwide. Do you view the impact of BLM on Canada's Black community as a positive one?

The Black Lives Matter movement has galvanized people and communities in ways never seen before, and it has brought much-needed attention to the issues. I don't think I would have envisioned a time in my life where



Certified Make-up Artist



Polls

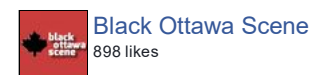
Do you support the campaign to provide the same benefits to Black and other international students fleeing the war in Ukraine as Ukrainian-born refugees

- Yes
- No

VOTE

View Results

Find us on Facebook



Like Page

Share

issues such as race, systemic discrimination, anti-Black racism, unconscious biases etc. are talked about so widely. In fact, not only being talked about but some efforts are being made to find solutions. I only hope that we are not just riding the wave and that long-lasting changes are here. That is inevitable.

There are more than 30 Black community groups in the Ottawa region. Do you see them as effective in advocating on behalf of the Black community?

Not necessarily, part of the challenge is the perception or desire to view Black people as homogenous. The expectation that the organizations which represent different aspects of the Black community should act in a homogenous way does not reflect the current reality. It is important that the diversity of the Black community is respected within our city. Each group represents an aspect of the Black community that is important to be heard.

Recently, following the illegal occupation of the city of Ottawa by protesting truckers and their unruly allies, the first and only Black Chief of Police in Ottawa, Peter Sloy resigned. Yet only three of the Black community groups in the city spoke up in protest of his involuntary departure. How would you explain the resounding silence from the majority of these organizations?

I did not expect, nor did I anticipate that all Black community groups will see things the same way. I realize and accept the fact that people and groups operate in different ways; some prefer the limelight; others prefer the sidelines and others prefer to work behind the scenes. There are many ways people effect change and not all are visible, not all will be open about what they are doing, and not all may feel that their time is now. I respect those differences and I personally don't make too much from the fact that only three Black groups spoke up in protest because I can assure you that others were using different tools from the proverbial toolbox.

Looking at Ottawa's Black community, what do you see as our biggest challenges? Crime, unemployment, school dropouts, other? How do we overcome them?

In my view, it is inadequate levels of strategic civic engagement. I use the word STRATEGIC for a very specific reason. We sometimes want to see change, but don't always do what needs to be done or understand what needs to be done to effect change. You are your best advocate. Simply put, if you are not at the table, you are on the menu. Being on the menu means that while you might influence a person's choice, YOU don't make that choice. We need to have people at the table to be better advocates for issues that affect Ottawa's Black community.

In the years since you have been in Canada, have you seen the situation of Black people change for the better: more access to jobs, social inclusion etc.

After moving to Canada 29 years ago, I would say that some areas have improved. I am seeing more Black people in senior positions in the public and private sectors compared to even a decade ago. However, Black people are still widely underrepresented at middle and senior levels within the public and private sectors, despite the fact that recent data from Statistics Canada shows that the Black population now accounts for 3.5% of Canada's total population. (Source: https://www.statcan.gc.ca/en/dai/smr08/2022/smr08_259).

According to the same source, the Black population has doubled in two decades. This links to my previous answer, if we want to see change, it is important that we have a seat at the table with the power to make decisions that impact our lives.

Finally, do you have a message for readers of Black Ottawa Scene?

Let us be our brothers and sisters' keepers. If we follow the old adage "Each one, Teach one" we will rise beyond belief. Be the change you want to see! Get involved, representation DOES matter!


Please consider donating to the **Epale Family Memorial Award**. Every dollar donated will directly support African and Caribbean students who are working to accomplish a dream.

Do not hesitate to call/text/WhatsApp me at 613-797-0944 or depale@yahoo.ca should you have any questions regarding the **Epale Family Memorial Award**.

Leave a Reply

Your email address will not be published. Required fields are marked *

Comment

Recent Posts	Popular
	St.Vincent's Association aids volcano victim...
Celebrating Ethiopia's National Day, 5 May	
Celebrating Eritrea's Independence Day, 24 M...	
Celebrating Guyana's Independence Day, 26 Ma...	
Hockey players suspended over alleged racial abuse...	

Sponsor