1/3/21

Star Letters Editor:

Re “Civilians to staff crisis calls in new program” (1/3/21)

My sincere congratulations to Black Lives Matter and to mental health workers Asante Haughton and Rachel Bromberg, co-founders of Reach Out Response Network, for their advocacy that resulted in City Council establishing civilian-run crisis response teams. These are a long-overdue, desperately needed alternative to the Toronto police’s coercive and racist Mobile Intervention Crisis Teams. In April 2012, I delivered a deputation at a public meeting of the Toronto Police Services Board (TPSB), which featured a proposal for a six-month pilot program of two Community Crisis Response Teams staffed with psychiatric survivors, street nurses and community workers trained in de-escalation and in crisis and trauma counselling. The TPSB callously ignored my anti-racist and empowering proposal. If they’d listened, it could have saved many lives of Indigenous and Black people and psychiatric survivors in crisis, not to mention a lot of trauma. I’m very pleased to know a special team will soon be established for Indigenous people – hopefully staffed with Indigenous health workers.

I feel sure the civilian response teams will minimize trauma and provide emotional and social support to thousands of people in crisis, prevent institutionalization, and save lives, especially during the pandemic.

But why must it take City Council another year to set up these teams? These response teams are needed now. They deserve full funding, trained staff, and public support.

Don Weitz, social justice advocate and author of *Resistance Matters* (2019)