

COMMENTARY

Hard conversations critical for progress

SOMETIMES we need to listen to the stories and experiences from the proverbial horses' mouth and hear their feelings and opinions in order to truly understand the human impact of discrimination.

Last Wednesday, the EOC launched its monthly TTT programme, *The Hard Conversations: Let's Talk Equality*, that seeks to do just that. What are the hard conversations? They are those topics we tend to avoid because they are hard to tackle but these are exactly the conversations we need to have if we want to see a difference.

The first topic of the series explored an in-depth look at geographical stereotypes and their link to discrimination in employment.

The EOC brought together a panel of young people from areas that are typically stereotyped as being ghettos or hot spots to tell their stories and be advocates for the productive people from these areas.

The main message that emerged from the panel discussion was that



there are many young people from hot-spot areas who are hardworking and honest, and employers should recruit people based on merit. The panel also asserted that to access the best talent the country has to offer includes giving a chance to those from areas that are stereotyped.

The studio was charged with positive and powerful testimonies and Dike Rostant, host of the programme, captured the mood perfectly when he showed his arms to the camera and said on air, "I just got goosebumps listening to that story." We are hopeful at the commission that these genuine and open stories resonated with the viewers in the same way.

The series is a partnership between the EOC and TTT. We en-

courage you to view the full episode on the EOC or TTT's Facebook page to see the discussion.

What does the act say?

Discriminating against someone based on their origin is not just frowned upon, it is unlawful. The Equal Opportunity Act protects seven status grounds. These are: religion, race, ethnicity, marital status, disability, sex and origin (including geographical origin). To lodge a complaint, however, the discrimination had to have occurred under at least one of the categories covered by the act. These are: employment, education, provision of goods and services and provision of accommodation.

Therefore, the first episode in the series was based on discrimination against a person of a particular origin, under the category of employment. Though there is no definition of origin in the act, origin generally means a country, race, or social class of a person's parents or ancestors. Origin covers both geographic and familial origin.

An example of this is: one of the speakers on the programme spoke about a manager who kept a watchful eye on her when she found out that the young woman was from the Beetham.

Another example is that of an applicant who was asked where she resides and when she listed a hot-spot area, the recruiter paused and then changed her tone and demeanour. The applicant did not get the job. It is difficult in the latter example to determine whether or not the applicant did not get the job because of her origin. Employers are advised to avoid posting vacancies asking that applicants reside in a certain area or asking where they reside during the interview process.

If you have been discriminated against based on any of the status grounds or categories covered by the act, you can lodge a complaint with the Equal Opportunity Commission. Visit our website www.equalopportunity.gov.tt to lodge a complaint or send an e-mail to complaints@eoc.gov.tt.