

Public trust in police eroded in aftermath of Whitby altercation

Trust. Its literal meaning is the 'firm belief in the reliability, truth, ability or strength of someone or something.' It's a small word that packs plenty of meaning.

For police officers, earning the trust of the public they're sworn to protect is paramount. Trust is their stock-in-trade as the public has to know unequivocally that officers are going to do what's right and honourable and, above all, uphold the law of the land.

Trust, we know from experience, is hard to earn, but is so very easy to shatter. The story of Whitby teen Dafonte Miller should serve as a wake-up call to not only the Durham Regional Police Service, but also to the Toronto Police Service as it pertains to public trust.

The story begins with what has been described as an altercation between Miller, 19, and off-duty Toronto Police Constable Michael Theriault on Erickson Drive in Whitby on Dec. 28, 2016. Miller was severely beaten and suffered serious injuries, including being blinded in one eye. Miller was subsequently charged with offences including assault with a weapon, theft and marijuana possession – all withdrawn in May of this year.

It was only after the Miller's family contacted renowned Canadian human rights lawyer Julian Falconer did the Special Investigations Unit (SIU), an oversight agency that examines incidents of injury or death involving police, become involved in the incident. Neither the Toronto nor the Durham police services had previously reported the incident to the SIU, although both services ought to have known a peace officer was involved.

The SIU investigation began in April and last Tuesday, July 18, it announced the arrest of Const. Theriault, charging him with aggravated assault, assault with a weapon and public mischief. The constable is currently suspended from his duties with pay. The allegations and charges have not been proven in court.

Durham Regional police spokesman Dave Selby noted in an interview that the onus was upon the Toronto police force to inform the SIU and not the Durham force. And, that after the SIU invoked its mandate to investigate, Durham has 'co-operated fully with their investigators.'

Falconer has alleged police have engaged in a "cover up" over the failing to report the incident. Whether it was the Toronto police's responsibility to report the incident to the SIU or Durham's, the fact remains those details were only presented to the agency at the insistence of Falconer. And that, sadly, can only lead to the erosion of the public trust in the police.



This Week

865 Farewell St., Oshawa ON L1H 6N8
www.durhamregion.com

metrolandmedia
Connected to your community®

Tim Whittaker - Publisher
twhittaker@durhamregion.com

Fred Eismont - Director of Advertising
feismont@durhamregion.com

Mike Johnston - Regional Managing Editor
mjohnston@durhamregion.com

Deb Macdonald - Sales Manager
dmacdonald@durhamregion.com

Abe Fakhourie - Director of Distribution
afakhourie@durhamregion.com

Cheryl Haines - Composing Manager
chaines@durhamregion.com

ADVERTISING 905-215-0472
CLASSIFIEDS 905-576-9335
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GENERAL FAX 905-579-2238
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COLUMN

Health a high-growth sector but not without its challenges

As a data person with a specific responsibility to understand the data behind the local labour market, I am often asked about the major employment sectors in our region. One such sector that plays an important role across Durham Region and continues to grow is health and bioscience. Not only is this a growth sector, it's also a major employer.

Health and bioscience depends on several allied subsectors to support growth such as life science, agriculture, advanced manufacturing, regional health care, post-secondary institutions, and multimodal transportation.

Through new and developing programs at local universities and institutions such as Lakeridge Health, Durham Region has established itself as an emerging hub for the sector. The health care and social assistance industry subsector continues to be a multi-billion-dollar industry. In 2009, it accounted for 6.9 per cent of Canada's GDP and continues to post employment gains.

This is a small example of the health and bioscience activity in the region:

- 20 per cent of all Ontario prostate biopsies are processed in the Dynacare Next Centre for Precision Diagnostics in Bowmanville.

- 75 per cent of all North American pediatric eye cancer genetic tests are performed in the Dynacare Next Centre for Precision Diagnostics in Bowmanville.



Heather McMillan
Guest columnist

- 3 per cent of all Canadian pregnancies are tested non-invasively in the Dynacare Next Centre for Precision Diagnostics in Bowmanville.

- Holburn Biomedical's pathology business was transferred to Dynacare in an agreement made several years ago. The physiological studies on irritable bowel syndrome have opened novel treatment options which are being pursued in other partnerships.

- Lakeridge Health has more than 4,500 doctors and cares for more than 1,600 people every day. The Cancer Centre has doubled the number of people served since 2007 (now close to 500 people each day) and is one of the top-ranked cancer centres for quality by Cancer Care Ontario.

Although this sector continues to grow, it faces challenges to meet the demands of a growing population and changing demographic. Many health care workers currently within the industry have an aging profile, which suggests there will be the need for additional workers to replace the aging workforce. When many employees begin closing in on retirement, the replacement of highly-skilled and experienced workers becomes important.

In the health care sector, 67 per cent of the respondents to a Durham Workforce Authority employer survey in 2016 expected to experience retirements in their organizations over the next three to five years.

Employers report challenges in filling occupations in pharmaceutical and medicine manufacturing such as chemical plant machine operators, chemical technologists and technicians, manufacturing managers (with specialization in the sector), and technical sales specialists — wholesale trade.

If you want more information about the Labour Force Survey and other local labour market information, please contact the DWA at admin@durhamwa.ca.

— Heather McMillan is the executive director at the Durham Workforce Authority. The DWA provides local workforce information and champions workforce development initiatives unique to Durham Region. The DWA is one of a network of 26 Workforce Planning Board areas across the province.



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How to submit a letter to the editor:

MAIL 865 Farewell St., Oshawa, L1H 6N8

EMAIL newsroom@durhamregion.com

FAX 905-579-2238