

**BY
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The Black Youth Resilience Project

Backgrounder

**REVIVE
2020**



About the Black Youth Resilience Project (BRYP)

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The Black Youth Resilience Project (BYRP) is a multi-year, community-based project led by REVIVE in partnership with Strides Toronto,¹ and is funded by the Ontario Trillium Foundation through the Youth Opportunities Fund.

The questions driving this project are:

- What are the experiences of Black youth facing multiple barriers when seeking and receiving support within their communities in Toronto?
- What are the ways in which Toronto's youth service providers can better meet the needs of Black youth facing multiple barriers?

This Backgrounder is an informational resource that summarizes key issues relevant to the BYRP.

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About REVIVE

REVIVE is a social planning firm based in Toronto. We work to address the causes of neighbourhood distress and inequality.

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REVIVE



¹ Formerly East Metro Youth Services (EMYS) and Aisling Discoveries.

Overview and Purpose



The Black Youth Resilience Project (BYRP) was developed in response to a recognition that Black youth facing multiple barriers—specifically, those impacted by sex trade, housing instability or homelessness, and encounters with the criminal justice system—often do not receive the right support, in the right places, or at the right time. These experiences are driven and compounded by systemic anti-Black racism, and limited access to culturally responsive and trauma informed services.

We believe that the confluence of these circumstances contributes to disproportionately poorer outcomes for Black youth facing multiple barriers, and that these outcomes continue to remain unaddressed.

The key objectives of the BYRP are as follows:

1. Seek to understand the experiences of Black youth facing multiple barriers when seeking and receiving support within their communities in Toronto.
2. Generate insights about the ways in which Toronto's youth service providers can better meet the needs of Black youth facing multiple barriers.

Youth Amplifiers' engagement with Black youth as well as their peers, parents, service providers, community knowledge keepers, policy makers and funders in the youth-serving sector is pivotal to this project.

The BYRP's primary goal is to leverage the experiences of youth along with insights from stakeholders to produce tangible actions² that will help to shape service delivery to Black youth facing multiple barriers.

² For example, Jennifer Clarke, Julian Hasford, Leyland Gudge, and Sonia Mills-Minster, "Imagining a Community-Led, Multi-Service Delivery Model for Ontario Child Welfare: A Framework for Collaboration Among African Canadian Community Partners (Part II)," *Journal of Law and Social Policy* 28, no. 1 (2018): 42-66; Usha George, "A Needs-based Model for Settlement Service Delivery for Newcomers to Canada," *International Social Work* 45, no. 4 (2002): 465-480; Tana Turner, *One Vision One Voice: Changing the Ontario Child Welfare System to Better Serve African Canadians. Practice Framework Part 2: Race Equity Practices*. (Toronto: Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies, 2016).

Context and Background

The Black Youth Resilience Project (BYRP) emerged from informal conversations in which front-line youth service workers and community members expressed their concerns about the challenges encountered by Black youth, when accessing services in Toronto. In some instances, youth may turn to the individuals within their communities to informally receive the support they need.³ This project seeks to better understand these experiences and the compounded obstacles Black youth face, particularly when seeking and receiving the support that they identify they need. In the context of this project, Black youth facing multiple barriers include Black-identifying individuals between 16 and 29 years of age impacted by one or more of the following:

- sex trade
- housing instability or homelessness
- encounters with the criminal justice system

We also recognize that identity can shape the dimensions of these lived experiences. We, therefore, intend to include the voices and experiences of Black youth across multiple and intersecting identities (for example, 2SLGBTQIA+, newcomers, and many others).

As noted, the BYRP is a multi-year project with aims of engaging youth as leaders to understand the experiences of Black youth



facing multiple barriers when seeking and receiving support within their communities in Toronto. Support, as conceptualized in this project includes, but is not limited to, community-based services and programs such as homeless assistance programs, trafficking community supports, and reintegration programs. In part, we are building on existing conversations that drive the ongoing efforts, services, and initiatives. Black youth are disproportionately impacted by systemic barriers that challenge their well-being. Anti-Black racism limits access to supportive and culturally relevant social services.⁴ Furthermore, it is likely that many youth-service providers are not fully equipped to meet the unique and time-sensitive needs of this population.

This creates significant gaps in how services impact this population and threaten organizational efforts centered around equality and access in the sector. Furthermore, youth-serving organizations in Toronto face the daunting reality of operating in a challenging funding environment, low

prioritization of improving service access for Black youth specifically, and a service landscape that in many cases, does not support culturally relevant service delivery for Black communities.⁵

An important step towards developing sustainable solutions to the challenges encountered by Black youth is recognizing that these issues exist; documenting the scope, size and scale of the problem; and making them a priority for policy makers and youth service providers. It is imperative that Black youth facing multiple barriers have opportunities to develop and shape the services that matter to them.

In this project, to incorporate a multiplicity of perspectives on these issues, we also intend to engage members of the community supporting Black youth with multiple barriers as participants which include community knowledge keepers, public sector stakeholders, representatives from community and local organizations as well as parents and caregivers.

³ For example, see Deborah Rutman and Carol Hubberstey. "Is Anybody There? Informal Supports Accessed and Sought by Youth from Foster Care." *Children and Youth Services Review* 63 (2016): 21-27.

⁴ Anjana Aery, "Inclusive Cities and the Experiences of Racialized Youth," July 23, 2019, <https://www.wellesleyinstitute.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Racialized-Youth-Think-Piece.pdf>

⁵ Ibid; Kristin Rushow, "Government Funding Cuts Hit 'Youth Most in Need,' Toronto School Board Says," *The Star*, December 21, 2018, <https://www.thestar.com/politics/provincial/2018/12/21/government-funding-cuts-hit-youth-most-in-need-toronto-school-board-says.html>; Jennifer Pagliaro, "Toronto is Falling Behind on Its Own Plans to Help At-Risk Youth," *The Star*, October 12, 2018, https://www.thestar.com/news/city_hall/2018/10/12/amid-spike-in-shootings-toronto-is-falling-behind-on-its-own-plans-to-curb-youth-violence.html

Our Approach

Activating Resilience and Promoting Better-served Communities

Although Black youth do face barriers, what they do not often lack is resilience. Navigating systems in which access to support services targeted to address their needs remains persistently difficult.⁶ However, Black youth, their families and broader communities have a resounding resilience. This is reflected in the communities that have been built upon rich cultural heritages, cultural expressions, adaptability, and creativity. Relatedly, “active communities have the capacity to improve local well-being and directly shape their resilient capacity.”⁷ The BYRP builds on Black equity-focused initiatives at local, provincial, national, and international levels to support the community engagement and leadership development of Black youth in Toronto. This project is an opportunity for Black youth to share their perspectives about the ways in which local programs and services can better serve them and support their needs. The BYRP amplifies Black youth voices and builds their knowledge and capacity for collectively influencing systemic change.

Engaging Black Youth as Leaders and Impacting Communities

By way of design, this project offers leadership development opportunities to Black youth, to better understand the challenges they face. The BYRP ensures that Black youth who face multiple barriers and access formal and informal support in their communities in Toronto are involved as co-leaders at every stage of the research process. As co-leaders of the BYRP project, Youth Amplifiers alongside members of the REVIVE team co-design and co-develop strategies for conducting research and mobilizing knowledge through outreach and engagement activities. Given the range of initiatives underway and the potential for strategic alignment, we now have a critical window of opportunity to leverage leadership and skills development initiatives that support the engagement of Black youth in their communities. The BYRP will broadly benefit Black youth in Toronto, their communities, and youth-serving sectors.



⁶ City of Toronto, *Toronto Youth Equity Strategy*, 15; Maria Bernard, “Affirmative Governmentality and the Politics of Youth Inclusion: A Critical Analysis of Youth Voice and Engagement in Dominant Political Discourse in Ontario.” *Canadian Review of Social Policy* 75 (2016): 131-132.

⁷ Mark A. Brennan, “Conceptualizing Resiliency: An Interactional Perspective for Community and Youth Development.” *Child Care in Practice* 14, no. 1 (2008): 61.

Systemic Issues Impacting Black Youth in Toronto

Anti-Black Racism

The City of Toronto defines anti-Black racism as, “policies and practices embedded in Canadian institutions that reflect and reinforce beliefs, attitudes, prejudice, stereotyping and/or discrimination that is directed at people of African descent and is rooted in their unique history and experience of enslavement and colonization here in Canada.”

⁸ Anti-Black racism is a systemic, pervasive issue that has a detrimental impact on the lives of Black community members, particularly youth, in Toronto. The legacy of systemic anti-Black racism is reflected in the social, economic, and political marginalization of Black people in Toronto and poor outcomes across education, employment as well as the criminal justice, and child welfare systems.⁹

Anti-Black racism is so “deeply entrenched in Canadian institutions, policies, and practices that (it) is either functionally normalized or rendered invisible to the larger white society,”¹⁰ and results in the persistence of racial inequities.¹¹ Such racism is a reality for many Black Canadians. Results from the 2019 Race



Relations in Canada Survey reveal that one in five Canadians experience discrimination on a regular basis.¹² Furthermore, and “not surprisingly, such treatment is most widely reported by Indigenous and Black people.”¹³

The impact of anti-Black racism on Black youth in Toronto is significant. The Black Experience Project found that Black youth between the ages of 16 and 29 years of age identified racism as one of the biggest challenges facing the Black community, and this group shared that they frequently experienced day-to-day discrimination.¹⁴ In fact, the Black Experience Project found that eight in ten participants experienced one of several forms of

daily microaggressions, such as others expecting their work to be inferior or being treated in condescending ways.¹⁵ Additionally, the Ontario Human Rights Commission found that 72.5% of Black-identified survey participants had previously experienced racial profiling.¹⁶

Misconceptions about Black youth are particularly problematic: “since the assumption is that Black youth in Toronto are largely poor and uneducated and contribute little to economic development... they are routinely ignored and even more dangerously constructed as inimical to the goals of national and economic prosperity.”¹⁷

⁸ City of Toronto, *Toronto Action Plan to Confront Anti-Black Racism*, 2017, 1, <https://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/mmis/2017/ex/bgrd/backgroundfile-109127.pdf>

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Uzo Anucha, Sinthu Srikanthan, Rahma Siad-Togane and Grace-Edward Galabuzi. *Doing Right Together for Black Youth: What We Learned from the Community Engagement Sessions for the Ontario Black Youth Action Plan* (Toronto: Youth Research and Evaluation eXchange, 2018), 6.

¹¹ Ontario Anti-Racism Directorate, *A Better Way Forward: Ontario's 3-Year Anti-Racism Strategic Plan*, 2016, https://files.ontario.ca/ar-2001_ard_report_tagged_final-s.pdf

¹² Environics Institute for Survey Research and Canadian Race Relations Foundation, *Race Relations in Canada 2019: A Survey of Canadian Public Opinion and Experience*, 2019, https://www.environicsinstitute.org/docs/default-source/project-documents/race-relations-2019-survey/race-relations-in-canada-2019-survey---final-report-english.pdf?sfvrsn=ef8d61e3_2

¹³ Ibid, 5.

¹⁴ Environics Institute for Survey Research, *The Black Experience Project in the GTA_Overview Report*, 2017, <https://www.theblackexperienceproject.ca/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/Black-Experience-Project-GTA-OVERVIEW-REPORT-4.pdf>

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ontario Human Rights Commission, *Under Suspicion: Research and Consultation Report on Racial Profiling in Ontario*, 2017, <http://www.un.org/en/events/africandescentdecade/index.shtml>

¹⁷ Andrea Davis, “The Real Toronto: Black Youth Experiences and the Narration of the Multicultural City,” *Journal of Canadian Studies* 51, no. 3 (2017): 725-748.

When this population of youth constantly feel that they are perceived as problematic or feel disrespected by people and institutions based on race, they are discouraged from participating in civic life.¹⁸

Engagement sessions for the Ontario Black Youth Action Plan captured perspectives on the impact of anti-Black racism on Black youth as reflected in their lived experiences, which include feelings of disempowerment, isolation, internalized racism, and poor self-esteem.¹⁹ Anti-Black racism can also disrupt broader sense of community well-being.²⁰ Systemic racism is also a driver of economic challenges faced by Black populations. Youth unemployment rates have increased over the past several years, with the unemployment rates for Black youth doubling that of the national average (28%, specifically).²¹ In addition, given the fact that unemployed Black youth

most often reside in low income communities, this finding draws great consideration of “the link between racialized inequalities in youth joblessness and patterns of urban geo-spatial inequality in metropolitan cities like Toronto.”²²

The impact of poverty in the lives of Black youth in Toronto is significant. Poverty contributes to the social isolation and limited access to services experienced by Black families and communities in Toronto.²³ A report on child and family poverty in Toronto found rates of poverty among Black families almost three times higher than those of non-racialized families, and these rates persist across generations.²⁴ Alarming, Toronto also has the highest rate of child poverty among large Canadian cities.²⁵ These findings make clear the multi-faceted nature of the challenges that Black youth face, as well as the impact of these long standing issues on the broader demographic.

Exploring the dimensions of these challenges with accessing the right support, in the right places at the right time could generate sectoral shifts in the ways that services are accessed by and delivered to Black youth facing multiple barriers.

Anti-Black racism permeates systems that Black youth interact with, which can be threatening to one’s sense of well-being. Such racism can be particularly problematic when it comes to accessing local support services.²⁶ The BYRP aims to highlight the ways in which anti-Black racism impacts access to community support services as experienced by Black youth facing multiple barriers, specifically those impacted by sex trade, housing instability or homelessness and encounters with the criminal justice system.



¹⁸ Anucha, Srikanthan, Siad-Togane, and Galabuzi, *Doing Right Together*.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ St. Stephen’s Community House and Access Alliance, *Tired of the Hustle: Youth Voices on Unemployment*, 2016, 3, <https://youthrex.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/TiredoftheHustleReport.pdf>

²² Ibid.

²³ Roy McMurray and Alvin Curling, *The Review of the Roots of Youth Violence (Vol 1: Findings, Analysis and Conclusions)*, 2008, <http://www.children.gov.on.ca/htdocs/english/documents/youthandthelaw/rootsofyouthviolence-vol1.pdf>

²⁴ Michael Polyani, Beth Wilson, Jessica Mustachi, Manolli Ekra, and Michael Kerr, *Unequal City: The Hidden Divide Among Toronto’s Children and Youth* (2017 Toronto Child and Family Poverty Report Card), 2017, <https://d3n8a8pro7vnm.cloudfront.net/socialplanningtoronto/pages/1779/attachments/original/1522073852/CAST-2017-report-v13-web.pdf?1522073852>

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ James D. Chesney and Rafael Jacob Engel, “Racial inequities in the delivery of social services,” *Journal of Sociology & Social Welfare* 9 (1982): 602-612.

Facing Multiple Barriers and Accessing Community Services

Youth with multiple, inter-related and intersecting challenges encounter difficulty with accessing services.²⁷ Compounded, these challenges can leave many Black youth feeling isolated, disconnected from community, and vulnerable to a range of risk factors. The challenges encountered by Black youth facing multiple barriers, particularly when seeking and receiving support within their communities, remain unaddressed.

Overall, some of the major challenges identified with accessing services for youth in the Toronto Youth Equity Strategy (TYES) are relevant to the BYRP and include the following points:²⁸

- The complex and ever-changing nature of the youth services sector and the disjointed nature of service delivery in Toronto
- The need for cultural shift to eradicate systemic racism and discrimination that continue to impact youth, particularly those at-risk for engaging in violence and crime
- Barriers to accessing programs targeted for youth
- Insufficient access to safe spaces

As previously stated, these factors make it especially challenging for Black youth facing multiple barriers to access local services and support.²⁹

Black 2SLGBTQIA+ youth have also identified specific challenges encountered when attempting to access local services in the city. Apart from the challenges that are logistical in nature (e.g. distance from services and programs and lengthy waits), there are notable gaps in service delivery. For Black 2SLGBTQIA+ youth accessing local services in Toronto, encounters with microaggressions from service providers and staff remain challenging.³⁰ In addition to the lack of providers advocating on their behalf, there were concerns about the lack of service providers with lived experience who could provide the responsive support needed.³¹ Often, youth are challenged by lacking the navigational knowledge needed for accessing services.³² These gaps are indicative of the existing need for recommendations on how to best support the needs of Black youth already facing barriers in ways that are responsive to their lived experiences as well as their multiple and intersecting identities.

Finally, inequities impacting Black communities continue to be unveiled amid the ongoing

coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. Black people living in Toronto have been disproportionately impacted by COVID-19.³³ Emerging data makes clear of some of the impact that the pandemic has had on youth.³⁴ However, forthcoming race-based data will likely provide a fuller perspective on the effect this pandemic is having on Black youth in Toronto.³⁵ Alarming, as the pandemic continues, Black people in Toronto remain vulnerable to the criminal justice system.³⁶ The ever-shifting circumstances and uncertainty during the COVID-19 pandemic naturally raises new and evolving concerns about compounded difficulties for Black youth who were already experiencing multiple challenges.³⁷

The implications of Black youth facing multiple barriers being unable to, or having limited access to, the necessary services to support them bettering their lives can be far reaching. A key focus of the BYRP will be the proposal of tangible actions³⁸ for enhancing access to and delivery of community services for Black youth encountering multiple barriers. Our aim, guided by the leadership of Black youth, is to reduce and eliminate systemic barriers to accessing services and contribute to the development of more supportive community services.

²⁷ For example, see City of Toronto, *Toronto Youth Equity Strategy*; Noble, Donaldson, Gaetz, Mirza, Coplan, and Fleischer, *Leaving Home*.

²⁸ City of Toronto, *Toronto Youth Equity Strategy*, 22.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Confronting Anti-Black Racism Unit (CABR), "Participant Recommendations," *Blacks Lives Getting Better Together (BLGBT): Spill the Tea Symposium*, (Toronto: City of Toronto, 2019).

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.

³³ Olivia Bowden and Patrick Cain, "Black Neighbourhoods in Toronto are Hit Hardest by COVID-19 – and It's 'Anchored in Racism': Experts," *Global News*, June 2 2020, <https://globalnews.ca/news/7015522/black-neighbourhoods-toronto-coronavirus-racism/>

³⁴ Rubab Arim, Leanne Findlay and Dafna Kohen, "The Health and Behavioural Impacts of COVID-19 on Youth: Results from the Canadian Perspectives Survey Series 1," *Statistics Canada*, 2020, https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/en/pub/45-28-0001/2020001/article/00020-eng.pdf?st=73cBXhY_

³⁵ Faiza Amin, "Ontario to Begin Collecting Race-based Data During Coronavirus Pandemic," May 6, 2020, <https://toronto.citynews.ca/2020/05/06/ontario-to-begin-collecting-race-based-data-during-coronavirus-pandemic/>

³⁶ Wendy Gillis, "From Police Shootings to Protests over Anti-Black Racism: Toronto's Last Three Decades of Racial Controversy," *The Star*, June 2 2020, <https://www.thestar.com/news/gta/2020/06/02/from-police-shootings-to-protests-over-anti-black-racism-torontos-last-three-decades-of-racial-controversy.html>

³⁷ Alliance for Healthier Communities, *Statement from Black Health Leaders on COVID-19's impact on Black Communities in Ontario*, April 2, 2020, <https://www.allianceon.org/news/Statement-Black-Health-Leaders-COVID-19s-impact-Black-Communities-Ontario>; City of Toronto, *COVID-19: Changes to City Services*, n.d., <https://www.toronto.ca/home/covid-19/covid-19-latest-city-of-toronto-news/affected-city-services/>

³⁸ For example, Clarke, Hasford, Gudge, and Mills-Minster, "Imagining a Community-Led, Multi-Service Delivery Model for Ontario Child Welfare;" George, "A Needs-based Model for Settlement Service Delivery;" Turner, *One Vision One Voice*.

Impacted by Housing Instability and Homelessness

Black youth are more likely to experience housing instability than non-racialized youth.³⁹ Interviews conducted with Black and mixed race Caribbean youth in Toronto revealed some difficulties in accessing programs targeted to support homeless youth.⁴⁰ Black youth were aware of the role that systemic anti-Black racism has contributed to their housing instability.⁴¹

Community services played an integral role in supporting Black youth experiencing housing instability: “for racialized or otherwise marginalized subgroups within the homeless population, community outreach workers who are rooted in these

communities (for instance, the Black community, or the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transsexual/transgender, or queer community) and their cultures play a vital role in effectively targeting and drawing homeless youth into supportive community structures and services.”⁴² The findings make clear that “barrier-free access to community supports and programs... (are) critical to help youth transition from homeless to housed. Agencies that serve youth of all backgrounds need solid anti-discrimination policies and procedures.”⁴³ Additionally, and particularly in the context of Toronto, there is a need for more responsive, relevant, and better tailored community programs for Black 2SLGBTQIA+ youth experiencing housing instability.⁴⁴

Impacted by Sex Trade

For individuals impacted by sex trade, in particular survivors of sex trafficking, accessing social services can be accompanied by cultural, linguistic, and psychosocial challenges.⁴⁵ Quite often, professionals have little knowledge of the risk factors and indicators of victimization.⁴⁶ In Ontario, most identified victims of trafficking are racialized youth, females in particular between the ages of 14 and 34 years of age.⁴⁷ 2SLGBTQIA+ youth and youth experiencing housing inadequacy are disproportionately affected by sex trade and trafficking.⁴⁸ As such, challenges with accessing community services will likely impact these groups.

Additionally, anti-trafficking discourse around advocacy campaigns are often reductive and “does not fully consider, nor take accountability for, the political stakes of the appropriation of Black suffering, the implications of its imagery on other people and other causes, or the collateral damage (always already racialized) a well-intended project can cause.”⁴⁹ Such misconceptions and erasures of experiences of Black youth facing such barriers are concerning particularly given the existing challenges around access to community services.



³⁹ Amanda Noble, Jesse Donaldson, Stephen Gaetz, Sabina Mirza, Isaac Coplan, and David Fleischer. *Leaving Home: Youth Homelessness in York Region* (Toronto: Canadian Homelessness Research Network, 2014).

⁴⁰ Joseph Springer, Janet Lum, Terry Roswell, “Policy Challenges to Homelessness among Caribbean Youth in Toronto,” in *Youth Homelessness in Canada: Implications for Policy and Practice*, eds. Stephen Gaetz, Bill O’Grady, Kristy Buccieri, Jeff Karabanow, and Allyson Marsolais (Toronto: Canadian Homelessness Research Network Press, 2013), 445-468.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid, 462.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Lance T. McCready, “Black Queer Youth, Unstable Housing and Homelessness: Understanding the Impact of Family Conflict, School and Community-Based Violence on Racialized LGBTQ2S Youth,” in *Where Am I Going to Go? Intersectional Approaches to Ending LGBTQ2S Youth Homelessness in Canada & the U.S.*, eds. Alex Abramovich and Jama Shelton. (Toronto: Canadian Observatory on Homelessness Press, 2017): 205-215; *Confronting Anti Black Racism (CABR) Unit, City of Toronto, 1st Annual Report Confronting Anti-Black Racism Unit 2018-2019*, <https://www.toronto.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/97ab-cabr-annual-report-2018-2019.pdf>

⁴⁵ Antonio Pascual-Leone, Jean Kim, and Orrin-Porter Morrison, “Working with Victims of Human Trafficking,” *Journal of Contemporary Psychotherapy* 47, no. 1 (2017): 51-59.

⁴⁶ Kyla Baird, Kyla P. McDonald, and Jennifer Connolly, “Sex Trafficking of Women and Girls in a Southern Ontario Region: Police File Review Exploring Victim Characteristics, Trafficking Experiences, and the Intersection with Child Welfare,” *Canadian Journal of Behavioural Science* 52, no. 1 (2020): 8-17.

⁴⁷ Nicole A. Barrett, *An Assessment of Sex Trafficking*, (Toronto: Canadian Women’s Foundation, 2013), <https://www.canadianwomen.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/NB-Nov-14-FINAL-REPORT-Assessment-of-Sex-Trafficking-in-Canada.pdf>

⁴⁸ Laura T. Murphy, *Labor and Sex Trafficking Among Homeless Youth: A Ten-City Study* (Executive Summary), 2016, <https://www.covenanthouse.org/sites/default/files/inline-files/Loyola%20Multi-City%20Executive%20Summary%20FINAL.pdf>

⁴⁹ Lyndsey P. Beutin, “Black Suffering for/from Anti-trafficking Advocacy,” *Anti-Trafficking Review* 9 (2017): 14-30.

Impacted by Encounters with the Criminal Justice System

In Canada, Black youth have disproportionately more encounters with the criminal justice system than non-Black youth.⁵⁰ Furthermore, the overrepresentation of Black youth in the criminal justice system is indicative of a racially biased system.⁵¹ Black male youth, in particular, are often subjected to punitive treatment, structural violence and unnecessary policing driven by assumptions of bias.⁵² A lack of research on Black female youth and Black 2SLGBTQIA+ youth encounters with the criminal justice system and subsequent complications they may face with accessing local services in the Canadian context may be indicative of the work needed in this area. Nonetheless, based on existing evidence, we know that the needs of youth impacted by encounters with the criminal justice system are complex and at times require the individual access to multiple (and coordinated) services in the community.⁵³

The Toronto Youth Equity Strategy (TYES) highlights that “youth who are most vulnerable to involvement in serious violence and crime do not have equitable access to the comprehensive support they need to change their lives for the better.”⁵⁴ More specifically, they may lack awareness

of existing programs and services targeted to support their needs and, due to having criminal records, may experience ongoing barriers when accessing programs and services.⁵⁵ In addition, there is a lack of local life skills programs in existence targeted to support the needs of Black youth, and for the programs and services that do exist, there is insufficient involvement of those closest to youth vulnerable to violence and crime (e.g. family members, friends and allies) in local programs and services.⁵⁶

A four-year project, The Cross-Over Youth Project, engaged providers across service sectors to determine best practices for serving youth facing multiple barriers—specifically, youth in the child welfare system who also had encounters with the criminal justice system. The findings, in part, indicated the following: “front-line workers and organizations that engage with Black and racialized cross-over youth must implement Anti-Oppressive Principles that promote practices and policies that confront systemic barriers resulting from Anti-Black Racism and Colonialism that directly impact these Young People’s lives.”⁵⁷ The need for responsive and relevant services to address the needs of Black youth facing such encounters with the justice system, remains unfulfilled.

Lack of Local Leadership Opportunities

One of the key findings from the 2017 engagement sessions for the Ontario Black Youth Action Plan underlined the lack of Black representation in leadership roles in Ontario, a consequence of systemic racism in education and the labour market,⁵⁸ which can have serious implications for Black youth and their opportunities for healthy development.

Acknowledging this reality, the BYRP will create space for Black youth to be involved as leaders in driving community-based change and build skills that will support their transition into adulthood. This is a priority for the BYRP in recognition of anti-Black racism, inequitable access to services, and the resulting limited leadership opportunities for Black communities in Toronto.



⁵⁰ Ontario Human Rights Commission, *A Collective Impact: Interim Report on the Inquiry into Racial Profiling and Racial Discrimination of Black Persons by the Toronto Police Service*, November 2018, <http://www.ohrc.on.ca/en/public-interest-inquiry-racial-profiling-and-discrimination-toronto-police-service/collective-impact-interim-report-inquiry-racial-profiling-and-racial-discrimination-black>

⁵¹ Owusu-Bempah, Akwasi, and Scot Wortley, “Race, Crime, and Criminal Justice in Canada.” *The Oxford Handbook of Ethnicity, Crime, and Immigration* (2014): 321-359.

⁵² Ontario Human Rights Commission, *A Collective Impact*; Wesley Crichlow, “Weaponization and Prisonization of Toronto’s Black Male Youth.” *International Journal for Crime, Justice and Social Democracy* 3.3 (2014): 113-131.

⁵³ Elizabeth K., Anthony, Mark D. Samples, Dylan Nicole De Kervor, Silvina Ituarte, Chris Lee, and Michael J. Austin, “Coming Back Home: The Reintegration of Formerly Incarcerated Youth with Service Implications.” *Children and Youth Services Review* 32, no. 10 (2010): 1271-1277.

⁵⁴ City of Toronto, *Toronto Youth Equity Strategy* (2014), 5, <https://www.toronto.ca/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/9062-Attachment-1-TYES-Creative-Report.pdf>

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 22.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ Judy Finlay, Brian Scully, Matthew-Eaton Kent, Tara-Rose Farrell, Peter Dicks, and Jessica Salerno, *Cross-over Youth Project: Navigating Quicksand*, (Toronto: Ryerson University, 2019), 59.

⁵⁸ Anucha, Srikanthan, Siad-Togane, and Galabuzi, *Doing Right Together*.

Policy Responses to Issues Impacting Black Youth

The BYRP is informed by policy responses aimed to support Black youth in Toronto. Existing initiatives developed at the local, provincial, federal, and international levels provide promising strategic direction and guidance in support of the BYRP's goals. In the federal context, Canada's Anti-Racism Strategy 2019-2022 made clear the government's commitment to eradicating barriers for racialized communities and funding efforts to combat racism.

Expanded federal funding commitments were initiated in 2018 and 2019 for community supports for Black Canadian youth⁵⁹ and building the capital and capacity of Black communities.⁶⁰ A total of \$9 million was committed over the course of three years to fund projects aiming to support Black youth in overcoming barriers and participating "fully and equally" in Canadian society.⁶¹ This funding launched as part of the Community Support, Multiculturalism, and Anti-Racism Initiatives Program,⁶² namely the Community Support for Black Canadian Youth Initiative, will support projects that help combat discrimination; promote Black history, culture, and

identity; develop leadership skills; and encourage local community involvement.⁶³

This funding is, in part, Canada's recognition of the United Nations International Decade for People of African Descent.⁶⁴ This initiative will run from 2015 to 2024 and will provide a framework to work together with people of African descent to implement several activities.⁶⁵ In proclaiming this Decade, the international community recognized that "people of African descent represent a distinct group whose human rights must be promoted and protected."⁶⁶

Locally, the 2014 Toronto Youth Equity Strategy (TYES) informed by community volunteers and a working group of staff from across the municipal government.⁶⁷ The framework provides 28 recommendations and accompanying actions to address the underlying causes of youth violence and improve city services. In addition, the *Toronto Action Plan to Confront Anti-Black Racism*, a five-year plan implemented in 2018, recognizes that anti-Black racism is persistent in the lives of Black

Canadians and deeply entrenched in Canadian society, and is a plan for municipal action for the eradication of anti-Black racism in the city.⁶⁸ Notably, "investing in Black children and youth" is one of the four priorities of this plan.⁶⁹ Furthermore, city-based efforts, such as End Trafficking TO⁷⁰, Housing TO⁷¹ and grants for youth violence prevention projects,⁷² aim to support community services that are likely to be accessed by Black youth impacted by sex trade, housing instability, and/or encounters with the criminal justice system.

The BYRP also operates in the context of the Ontario Black Youth Action Plan policy initiative, which aims to improve access to services.⁷³ Additionally, Ontario's 3-year *Anti-Racism Strategic Plan* provides important context and strategic direction for the BYRP, particularly around anti-racism as a key area of focus particularly pertaining to issues of health and wellness, civic engagement and youth leadership.⁷⁴

⁵⁹ Government of Canada, *Promoting Health Equity: Mental Health of Black Canadians Fund*, June 26, 2019, <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/news/2019/06/promoting-health-equity-mental-health-of-black-canadians-fund.html>

⁶⁰ Government of Canada, *Recognizing the International Decade for People of African Descent*, n.d. <https://www.canada.ca/en/canadian-heritage/campaigns/anti-racism-engagement/anti-racism-strategy/international-decade-african-descent.html>

⁶¹ "9M Federal Fund to Help Black Youth Overcome Unique Challenges," *The Canadian Press*, June 29, 2018, <https://ipolitics.ca/2018/06/29/9m-federal-fund-to-help-black-youth-overcome-unique-challenges/>

⁶² Government of Canada, *Community Support, Multiculturalism, and Anti-Racism Initiatives Program*, n.d. <https://www.canada.ca/en/canadian-heritage/services/funding/community-multiculturalism-anti-racism.html>

⁶³ Finlay, Scully, Kent, Farrell, Dicks, and Salerno, *Cross-over Youth Project*, 59.

⁶⁴ Government of Canada, "The Government of Canada Announces New Funding for Black Canadian Youth," June 29, 2018, <https://www.canada.ca/en/canadian-heritage/news/2018/06/the-government-of-canada-announces-new-funding-for-black-canadian-youth.html>

⁶⁵ United Nations, "International Decade for People of African Descent," <http://www.un.org/en/events/africandescentdecade/index.shtml>

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ City of Toronto, *Toronto Youth Equity Strategy*.

⁶⁸ City of Toronto, *2018 Toronto's Action Plan to Confront Anti-Black Racism*, n.d., <https://www.toronto.ca/city-government/council/2018-council-issue-notes/torontos-action-plan-to-confront-anti-black-racism/>

⁶⁹ The four priorities of this plan include, "creating culture change at the City, investing in Black children and youth, connecting Black Torontonians to civic decision-making, and improving customer service" (City of Toronto, *Toronto's Action Plan to Confront Anti-Black Racism*).

⁷⁰ City of Toronto, "End Trafficking TO," n.d., <https://www.toronto.ca/city-government/accountability-operations-customer-service/long-term-vision-plans-and-strategies/end-trafficking-to/>

⁷¹ City of Toronto, "HousingTO 2020-2030 Action Plan," December 2019, <https://www.toronto.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/94f0-housing-to-2020-2030-action-plan-housing-secretariat.pdf>

⁷² City of Toronto, "City of Toronto Launches Youth Violence Prevention Grant," May 1, 2020, <https://www.toronto.ca/home/media-room/news-releases-media-advisories/?nrkey=6AE4F55ABCEB79B98525855B00634ABC>

⁷³ Anucha, Srikanthan, Siad-Togane, and Galabuzi, *Doing Right Together*.

⁷⁴ Ontario Anti-Racism Directorate, *A Better Way Forward: Ontario's 3-Year Anti-Racism Strategic Plan*.

Conclusion

The BYRP seeks to create a space for Black youth to assume leadership in driving the change needed in systems established to respond to the voices of Black communities in Toronto. We anticipate that, as a result of this project, knowledge translation between youth, community organizations, and the policy community will be better informed about the ways in which programs and services can improve their capacity to better serve and more effectively respond to the needs of Black youth facing multiple barriers. The tangible actions produced will drive community-informed, systems level, strategic actions aimed at improving the quality and responsiveness of community services accessed by Black youth facing multiple barriers.





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