

INTERIM REPORT:

A Youth-Engaged Approach to Addressing Anti-Black Racism in Social Services



Wisdom2Action
Savoir pour agir

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1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY AND COVER LETTER

I am very pleased to have been involved on the Anti-Black Racism Advisory Committee, convened by Wisdom2Action, and in the development of resources on behalf of the Committee. To see a measured response to archaic and outdated systems which are well integrated and invisibilized Anti-Black Racism has been very meaningful as a young African Nova Scotian myself.

The Delmore “Buddy” Daye Learning Institute and Wisdom2Action combined their expertise and experience to launch an evolving project on June 29th, 2020 to address the gaps and challenges of anti-Black racism in youth social services. Both Black service users and service providers in social services engaged with our project to identify and refine key areas of importance and action. These areas were Education, Recreation, Community, and Justice. However, participant collectively identified that while efforts to tackle anti-Black racism in social services are important, anti-Black racism is a systemic issue requiring a systemic response. Social services cannot do it alone.

Black youth and social service providers had common perspectives in terms of the institutional responses needed to address issues accessing services and within social service work environments. The correlation between growing demands for Black representation in social services and the lack of positive engagement of Black individuals with social services was quite telling. We heard a lot of first-hand experiences that were shared across diverse Black communities. However, the barriers and experiences of Black youth and service providers were shaped by differing experiences, such as living in urban versus suburban regions, as well as membership in different ethno-cultural groups and distinct regional challenges, such as in the case of Black Nova Scotians.

Black youth were often more aware of stratifications within their own communities and the Canadian system. This is analogous to the observation of the young Black social movements such as Black Lives Matter, that are causing us to reevaluate the systemic racism and biases that shape practices in all areas of civic life. Throughout this project, we identified that in order to move forward, we need to: that we need to move forward include; increase the availability of both qualitative and quantitative race based data; increasing Black representation in all areas in social services; and raise the bar on how we can identify and correctly respond to Anti-Black Racism.

As this project continues, we hope to consult more Black youth and provide them with the opportunity to be more engaged with work in the social service sector. I am glad to be a part of this work.

Jade Byard Peek

Member of the ABR Advisory Committee

2.0 INTRODUCTION

2.1 OVERVIEW OF PROJECT

With the shared goal to combat, counter, challenge and dismantle systemic and institutional anti-Black racism in social services with a youth-engaged approach, it was natural for the Delmore “Buddy” Daye Learning Institute (DBDLI) and Wisdom2Action to come together to bring their own experience and expertise to this issue. This came as a response to growing unrest and the cultural and institutional shift of recognizing the bottleneck of inequity that has pervaded through our services and communities, and finding opportunities to move this work forward in a meaningful way.

This initiative began with the creation of two Wisdom2Action national advisory committees, composed of youth and social service leaders from different sectors, as well as the DBDLI Youth Advisory Committee, ranging from high school students to young adults, to meet the moment of combating systemic racism. The goal was to outline priority areas in terms of research and developing resources and training, and support knowledge mobilization practices for systematic dismantling of anti-Black racism in our services.

The Anti-Black Racism Advisory Committee is composed of a range of regional and national partners that represent both diverse sectors and the diverse experiences of Black individuals and communities across Canada. Members to date include Families Canada, the Ontario Association for Agencies Serving Immigrants, Recreation Nova Scotia, and we have approached several other organizations and individuals to join the work of the Committee.

2.2 SANDBOX IMPACT GRANT

This project has been funded in part by the Sandbox Impact Grant. The goal of the Sandbox Impact project grants is to support innovative cross-sectoral knowledge mobilization amongst partners that have not previously been able to collaborate. We are thankful for the financial support we received for Phase 1 of this project through the Sandbox Project.

2.3 OBJECTIVES

This project has been operating on a three-phase approach around content development and knowledge mobilization:

Phase I

(May – December 2020)

- a. Develop and establish both a national advisory committee, and a youth advisory committee representing service users and service providers across the country and building a comprehensive range of experiences and regions.
- b. Connect service user and service provider perspectives in creating and running a qualitative semi-structured consultations and focus groups.
- c. Begin the mobilization of findings and key focus areas identified by youth and providers and begin creating relevant resources and training modules.
- d. Develop a report on the results of the consultations

Phase II

(September 2020- ongoing)

- a. Present webinars and training modules for social services across Canada, and in key geographical regions based on the results and findings of consultations.
- b. Secure funding to continue youth engagement, by launching a survey developed by the YAC (see Appendix A).
- c. Secure funding to support the development of a mentorship program to support Black youth and Black professionals working in youth-serving organizations (funding application submitted September 2020).

Phase III

- a. Ongoing advocacy, training and awareness through knowledge mobilization.
- b. Development of a framework for creating, evaluating, measurement of success and tangible actionables in tackling systemic challenges in individual sectors
- c. Maintain and increase Black youth engagement to advocacy, well-being, employment and social services overall.

3.0 CONSULTATIONS

3.1 SERVICE PROVIDERS

We engaged service providers through an active Anti-Black Racism Advisory Committee to formulate the development of our consultation, and to conduct a scan on issues related to anti-Black racism in social services. Through this process, we also sought to investigate challenges within various jurisdictions and identify the infrastructure needed to handle anti-Black racism incidents and practices.

Black professionals in the social service sector also provided a pragmatic approach to the systematic barriers that professionals encounter within social services, demonstrating a unique correlation through the lack of Black employees in social services, lack of support for the small number of Black service providers, and the desire expressed by Black youth for more Black professionals in social services

In addition, a consultation and the launch of the project were held on June 29th, 2020 with more than 60 participants in attendance from across Canada, the United States and the United Kingdom to gain additional knowledge and recommendations to address systemic and point-of-care issues. Participants identified the following recommendations for how social services can build capacity to address anti-Black racism:

I.

Increase the number of Black healthcare workers, especially in mental health services, and create and maintain effective and integrated referrals for services.

II.

Acknowledge the negative experiences of many Black youth in the sector, and integrate trauma informed care as a key component of an equity-based approach. Black youth are educated in their experiences in this age of technology and deserve access to inclusive care.

III.

Address the lack of data of racism in the workplace and at the point-of-service, and increase internal capacity to handle complaints of racism. Create a framework for the purpose of tracking improvements and building Black youth resilience.

IV.

Address the safety of Black workers in social services and take action on institutional anti-Black racism in the workplace through ongoing capacity building, including the provision of training and mentorship programs.

V.

Address barriers to engagement and participation within institutions and policy development.

VI.

Increase employment experiences and skills for Black youth and increase Black-led mentorship between youth and adults.

VII.

Increase understanding of experience of, and support for, Black staff in youth programs and services.

VIII.

Increasing the capacity of non-profit and public service providers in Canada to start to dismantle racist systems within their organizations.

IX.

Improve capacity to serve Black youth, families and communities and understand the unique experiences and community challenges.

X.

Acknowledgement and understanding that this goes beyond just individual action or individual based racism. Systemic racism must be addressed through a systemic response.

3.3 YOUTH SERVICE USERS

To coincide with International Youth Day on August 12th, 2020, with help from the ABR Advisory Committee, a consultation was hosted by members of the ABR Youth Advisory Committee. The consultation was based on congruent themes brought up and highlighted by both committees.

The consultation questions were created for qualitative open-ended answers to gain an unrestricted response to general issues within interpersonal, social, and systematic barriers in social services.

Out of the 40 participants from across the country here were some general themes and recommendations related to Justice; Healthcare; Education and Community in which social services:

I.

Creating positive experiences during point-of-contact is important, Black service users can often detect the 'awkwardness' of the service provider especially when the content under discussion touches on issues of racism.

II.

Addressing the Intellectual dissonance between clients and service providers regarding how the behaviour of non-Black service providers has a direct and significant impact on the interest of Black youth returning to or seeking additional care in social services. Black youth are very aware of their experiences individually and collectively.

III.

Increasing representation in social services and access to service providers that can handle the complexity of race, mental health and oppression.

IV.

Create equitable policies in partnership with young people and strengthen opportunities for Black youth to engage in policies development, implementation and frequent review.

V.

Implement decisive responses to interpersonal and cultural racism within institutions and services that continue to set up barriers for Black youth.

VI.

Strive to advertise and create opportunities in the community for Black youth engagement, in recreation, volunteer positions and traditional employment.

VII.

Introducing training programs that are annual and can be easily integrated into pre-existing trainings or staff professional development plans.

VIII.

Adapt a trauma informed approach to acquiring race-based data in services, to better understand the experienced of young black people, and measure the progress of efforts to combat anti-Black racism.

4.0 YOUTH PARLIAMENTARY FOLLOW UP

During the consultations, youth had an opportunity to speak and engage with Member of Parliament Matthew Green to share their perspectives on the issues and hear a parliamentarian's response to the increased urgency to address anti-Black racism. The Youth Advisory Committee responded with a letter outlining priorities that were identified in the consultations and solutions that need to be implemented at a systemic level. Here are the systemic recommendations provided from the youth consultation:

4.1 HEALTHCARE

I.

Healthcare workers must be thoroughly educated on the social determinants that influence a patient's access to care and overall physical and mental health.

II.

Changes must be made to the curriculum in Canadian Medical Schools; including mandatory training courses to build provider knowledge of the diversity of factors connected to the health of Black Canadians:

1.

Efforts should be made to strengthen diversity and inclusion education, with an emphasis on anti-Black racism, across all fields of education pertaining to community, health and social services.

2.

Stigmas such as pain tolerance and abuse of prescription medication should be addressed in an unbiased manner. As well, alternative medicine for patients uncomfortable (or unable to afford) traditional methods of treatment should be considered.

3.

Healthcare workers (MDs, Nurses, RPNs, Dieticians, Pharmacists, Specialists, etc) should be thoroughly educated on social determinants that may influence a patient's access to healthcare and overall health (ie: education, food security, dealing with patients who may be unable to afford certain prescriptions, mental health issues, apprehension in trusting the medical system, etc) and how to appropriately address patients with these experiences.

III.

A commitment to training and hiring more Black healthcare professionals in healthcare systems across Canada:

A

This will also allow for healthcare provider to better serve a larger number of Canadians that access their care by facilitating communication and comfort through shared identities with key communities that are currently under-served.

B

If it is difficult to hire healthcare providers meeting the criteria above (ie: of an ethnic background, racialized, fluency in English/French as well as another popular minority language) make a commitment to hiring advocates and mediators within the healthcare system to relay information between people and communities of colour and their health care team, or to simply provide a reassuring authoritative presence to black individuals accessing care.

IV.

Strengthen the collection of race-based data that includes data on systemic health issues and chronic conditions related to environmental racism.

4.2 EDUCATION

I.

Create policies and procedures in the Canadian public-school education system that are inclusive of Black identity, culture, and history.

II.

Incorporating these lenses into existing epistemologies to help create safer spaces within schools for Black youth and enable a sense of belonging.

III.

Anti-Black racism must be translated into compulsory and ongoing training for educators and staff:

1.

Clarify what anti-Black Racism looks like in Canadian schools.

2.

Equip staff members with the necessary tools and strategies to recognize and address anti-Black racism.

3.

Create comprehensive plans to implement safer spaces and address anti-Black racism.

4.3 JUSTICE AND CORRECTIONS

I.

Explore alternatives to traditional policing and justice, such as transformative justice and/or community-led programming to begin addressing the over-representation of Black communities within the justice and prison systems.

II.

Reallocate funds from local, provincial and federal budgets to provide preventative services for Black youth and communities.

III.

Prevent the unnecessary over-policing of Black communities by limiting police presence in marginalized neighborhoods and introducing additional community-led programs.

4.4 RECREATION AND COMMUNITY

I.

Create opportunities for youth employment in recreation and parks thus increasing representation of Black Canadians.

II.

Alleviate the financial burden associated with the high costs of participating in recreation activities for Black families.

III.

Development of a training module for recreation service providers to help them to understand the social factors and barriers that Black youth face in accessing multiple recreation opportunities that is rooted in anti-Black racism.

5.0 NEXT STEPS

From our initial consultations, we have been able to identify key areas that need to be addressed and have been able to narrow down priorities echoed among black service providers and service users. With phase one in completion, we will be moving on to our second phase; we will be presenting webinars and training modules for social services across Canada based on our current and ongoing results from this project.

We hope to secure more funding for the purposes of developing a mentorship program, high level engagement for youth to be involved in social services and development of future resources, and modules. We will be conducting ongoing advocacy, training and awareness through knowledge mobilization and hope to maintain increased Black youth engagement with advocacy, well-being, employment and social services overall. We are looking for support as well to undertake a survey designed by the youth to further explore service issues. See sample questions below.

PROPOSED WISDOM2ACTION SURVEY QUESTIONS

Anti-Black Racism Youth Advisory Council: August 2020

Questions in regards to barriers faced by racialized people when accessing 4 main sectors (health, justice, recreation, and education)

1. Do you, or any of your family members, resist visiting the doctor/healthcare providers? Why?
2. Do you feel heard and/or understood when visiting your healthcare provider?
3. Do you feel confident that your healthcare provider is advocating for your best interests, that they are on your side?
4. Do you feel represented in your local family/mental health clinic?

5.	Do you feel comfortable being honest with your doctor about your ability to afford certain prescriptions, issues in dealing with drug/alcohol abuses/addictions, mental health struggles, or other barriers that may affect your ability to access proper healthcare treatment?
6.	Do you know where to turn when you feel discriminated against within the healthcare system?
7.	What could be done to increase your confidence in the healthcare system?
8.	Do you know the rights guaranteed to you when being detained/pulled over/questioned by police?
9.	Are you aware of any youth civic engagement opportunities available in your town/city?
10.	Do you feel encouraged by your teachers/school staff to pursue community initiatives?
11.	Do you feel encouraged by your teachers/academic counselors when talking about your long term/short term goals?
12.	How fair are school administrators in handing out punishments to students?
13.	Do you have recreational buildings or services in your residential area?
14.	What does Justice look like for you?
15.	What alternatives are there to traditional policing?
16.	What alternatives are there to traditional sentencing and incarceration?
17.	What additional reforms should be made to the correction and justice system?