



# UNDERSTANDING BLACK YOUTH HOMELESSNESS TO INFORM A COMPREHENSIVE HOUSING MODEL

Prepared for 360°kids By LogicalOutcomes



**360°  
kids**  
Surrounding kids  
in crisis with care

**JUNE 2024**

 **LogicalOutcomes**



This project is funded by  
the Government of Canada.

**Canada**

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# Acknowledgements

Thank you to United Way Greater Toronto and the Government of Canada for funding this initiative through the Reaching Home: Canada's Homelessness Strategy, a project of 360°kids. We also wish to recognize the valuable contributions of the members of our Black Youth Housing Community Advisory Committee (CAC) who have shared their expertise and best practices in assisting Black youth and their families. Above all, we express our deep appreciation to the youth and service providers who have played a pivotal role in producing this research report.

## Members of the CAC

Bonnie Harkness	Jerisha Grant-Hall
Clovis Grant	Josie Rose Lee
Cordelia Abankwa	Miller Nathan
Dagma Koyi	Okonta Ryan
Debbie Thompson	Holford Shernett
Fitzroy Gordon	Martin
Ginelle Skerritt	

## Logical Outcomes Team Members

Travonne Edwards	Taeja McKoy
Neil Price	Tameika Shaw
Olawale Olubowale	Evelyn Amponsah
Medha Aurora	



## Land Acknowledgement

360°kids wishes to acknowledge our presence on the traditional territory of many First Nations, including the Chippewas of Georgina Island, the Anishnabek, the Huron-Wendat, and the Haudenosaunee peoples whose presence here continues to this day. We would like to recognize their history, spirituality, culture, and stewardship of the land. We also acknowledge that York Region falls under Treaty 13 with the Mississaugas of the Credit and the Williams Treaties with several Mississauga and Chippewas First Nations. We thank them and other Indigenous for sharing this land with us and for their commitment to protecting the land and its resources.

## Ancestral Acknowledgement

360°kids acknowledges all Treaty peoples – including those who came here as settlers – as migrants either in this generation or in generations past – and those of us who came here involuntarily, particularly those brought to these lands as a result of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade and Slavery. We pay tribute to those ancestors of African origin and descent.

# Executive Summary

This report originates in an initiative by 360°kids to study the experiences of Black youth experiencing homelessness. By adopting a cultural lens and leveraging existing community relationships focused on working toward addressing the disparate needs of Black youth, the research sought to 1) better understand how to provide culturally relevant services to Black youth experiencing homelessness 2) inform the development of a long-term transitional home for Black youth experiencing homelessness and 3) identify policies, practices, and services which both support and hinder services in transitional homes designed for youth experiencing homelessness. This research is grounded in critical race theory (CRT), which highlights the ways in which anti-Black racism adversely impacts Black people as they interact with institutions and systems (James et al., 2010; Mahtani, 2014). CRT was used as a framework to illuminate the ways in which anti-Blackness underpins the experiences of Black youth within housing systems. Between November 2023 and March 2024, the research team conducted 31 in-depth semi-structured individual interviews with Black youth and service providers, along with two focus groups (n=12) with service providers involving a total of 43 participants. All project activities, including participant recruitment, development of interview guides and review of preliminary findings, were guided by the CAC.

## Key Findings

### Factors Driving Housing Instability

- **Anti-Black Racism:** Throughout the interviews, respondents were conscious of the ways in which anti-Black racism, as a form of structural, institutional, and interpersonal violence, shapes how Black caregivers and youth interact with and encounter Canadian systems such as the housing sector, and how historical and systemic oppression underlie many overt factors that drive housing instability in Black youth.
- **Familial Loss, Breakdown, and Discord:** Some Black youth reported the loss of one or more parents as the driving factor of their housing instability. Family breakdown and discord were a notable phenomenon and driver of homelessness from the perspectives of both Black youth and service providers, with many youth expressing a need for independence.
- **Policy and Structural Factors:** The research demonstrated that policy related to social housing is a driving factor for housing instability, with participants sharing experiences that pointed to “under housing,” leading to shelter use.

- **Financial Issues:** Financial instability was cited by participants as a factor leading to homelessness. Systemic racism leading to low education attainment and unemployment, were also identified as root causes contributing to high poverty and homelessness rates among Black youth.
- **Mental Health and Disability Issues:** Inadequate support and resources for managing mental health and disability issues emerged as themes and were often linked with family discord. Mental health issues, compounded by anti-Black racism, were also identified as pathways to addictive behaviours such as drugs or gambling, leading to homelessness. Participants shared vague, generalized statements about mental health, trauma, and disability, reflecting the difficulties that Black communities face with navigating mental health and disability issues due to stigma and shame surrounding these topics.

## Experiences of Black Youth in Housing Support

- **Pathways to Accessing Housing Support and Challenges Faced:** Youth cited friends and relatives as well as local organizations, such as the church, social workers, and online information as channels through which they learned about accessing housing support.
- **Beneficial Programs and Resources Received:** Youth participants discussed many services and programs they found helpful during their stay in shelters and transitional homes. Provisions of bedding, food and water were noted as basic but essential needs provided by housing institutions. Mental health services, educational and employment support emerged as valuable services.
- **Importance of Developing Meaningful Connections:** In some cases, youth received support from friends and family, such as housing, monetary supports, or most often, emotional support. Youth explained that creating and maintaining friendships with others in housing institutions played a large part in building self-awareness and remaining positive while experiencing housing instability.
- **Overcoming Obstacles and Challenges:** Youth participants shared about overcoming challenges experienced during their times in housing support. Lack of privacy emerged as a major concern, along with overcrowding. Participants used words, such as "congested," "confined" and "overcrowding" to describe their living spaces.
- **Desire for Culturally Affirming Programming:** Most of the youth reported that they did not access housing supports that cater to the unique needs of Black individuals experiencing housing instability because knowledge about or access to any such resources was scarce.

## Building the “Ideal” Transitional Home for Black Youth

Youth participants shared suggestions for the skills they think are necessary for independent living, the kind of programming support they imagine in an ideal transitional home, and the physical and social environment they desire in the home. Employment, entrepreneurship, and financial literacy were strong themes that were emphasized in all conversations.

PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT	SERVICES AND PROGRAMS	CULTURALLY AFFIRMING PROGRAMMING	BUILDING TRUST										
<p><b>Aesthetics</b></p> <p>Warm lighting Mature colors Gender neutral Fresh smells</p> <p><b>Privacy</b></p> <p>Individual and private spaces Private rooms and bathrooms Separated by gender Sharing with people with similar backgrounds Safety and security</p> <p><b>Comfort</b></p> <p>Comfortable couches and beds</p> <p><b>Community</b></p> <p>Spaces for socializing Art room Games area Group project Sports and fitness facilities</p> <p><b>Feels like "home"</b></p> <table><tr><td>Welcoming</td><td>Positive</td></tr><tr><td>Minimalist</td><td>Respectful</td></tr><tr><td>Beautiful</td><td>Queer-friendly</td></tr><tr><td>Dim</td><td>Includes nature</td></tr><tr><td>Supportive</td><td></td></tr></table> <p><b>House amenities</b></p> <p>Food and water Kitchen Heating and cooling Bedding Laundry</p>	Welcoming	Positive	Minimalist	Respectful	Beautiful	Queer-friendly	Dim	Includes nature	Supportive		<p><b>Primary healthcare</b></p> <p><b>Educational support</b></p> <p>Finishing school College guidance and admissions</p> <p><b>Counseling</b></p> <p>Mental health support Career counselling Mentorship</p> <p><b>Skills training for employment</b></p> <p>Computer and tech skills Trades Baking and cooking Salon and hairstyling Fashion design Handicraft Entrepreneurship training</p> <p><b>Financial literacy</b></p> <p>Budgeting investing and planning</p> <p><b>Home management</b></p> <p>Cooking, cleaning, repairs</p> <p><b>Social skills</b></p> <p>Physical appearance Body language Time management and discipline</p> <p><b>Homeownership</b></p> <p>Training and long-term planning</p> <p><b>Wraparound services</b></p> <p>Integrated team of support</p>	<p><b>Professional and diverse staff</b></p> <p>Adequate number of staff EDI and trauma-informed trained</p> <p><b>Empowerment and positive identity</b></p> <p>Building confidence for independent living Information about causes of homelessness and how to avoid and overcome them Positive cultural identity Breaking stereotypes</p> <p><b>Community networking</b></p> <p>Building connections with Black professionals Blackrole models Home alumni program Connections with neighborhood, local markets and social organizations Peer to peer support</p> <p><b>Recognizing diversity of Black experiences</b></p> <p><b>Culturally appropriate food</b></p> <p><b>Mental health support</b></p> <p>Black therapists and social workers</p>	<p><b>Reliability and stability</b></p> <p>Building rapport Having a single, dependable, stable point of contact</p> <p><b>Agency and leadership</b></p> <p>Co-creation of plans Youth involvement at every step Sense of ownership Power sharing</p> <p><b>Empathy and validation</b></p> <p>Meet them where they're at Making them feel heard Honesty and openness</p> <p><b>Relatability and connection</b></p> <p>Having staff and mentors they can relate to Sharing stories and experiences</p> <p><b>Opening opportunities</b></p> <p>Strengths-based approach Exploring interests and talents Opening door to new opportunities Promoting innovation and creativity</p> <p><b>Advocacy</b></p> <p>Standing up for them</p>
Welcoming	Positive												
Minimalist	Respectful												
Beautiful	Queer-friendly												
Dim	Includes nature												
Supportive													



# Recommendations

The following recommendations are based on empirical findings gathered through interviews and focus groups with Black youth and social service providers. An environmental scan of youth-focused agencies and supports (Appendix E) was referenced while forming these recommendations.

## • **Provide Comprehensive and Long-term Case Management**

Respondents stressed the need for providing youth experiencing homelessness with ongoing case management that is essential for helping youth navigate the full spectrum of social services. This includes assistance with securing personal identification, enrolling in school, accessing social services, such as Ontario Works, and navigating appointments and court appearances with a trusted and supportive case manager.

### **Action steps:**

- Assign each youth participant a dedicated case manager who can provide long-term, one-on-one support with tasks like obtaining necessary documentation, enrolling in public benefits, and coordinating appointments.
- Support the youth in meeting not just their current needs, but also help them organize their plans and goals for their future in the transitional home as well as independent living, by providing information and connections to relevant social services.
- Provide education and training for home management.

## • **Build a Culturally Affirming and Responsive Environment**

Respondents shared that it is essential to design living spaces that cater to the Black youth's unique needs and diverse experiences. Creating an environment that promotes a strong sense of belonging, empowerment, and cultural affirmation is crucial for supporting Black youth in their transition out of homelessness.

### **Action steps:**

- Incorporate design elements, artwork, and programming that reflect Black culture and identity.
- Provide private rooms with comfortable furnishings and neutral tones, as well as communal spaces for socialization, recreation, fitness, and creative expression.
- Encourage personalization of youth space to foster a sense of pride and ownership.

- Integrate green spaces and outdoor areas to promote relaxation, connection with nature, and overall well-being.

## • **Foster Trusting Relationships and a Strong Support System**

Respondents shared the critical importance of service providers building genuine, trusting relationships with Black youth experiencing homelessness. This requires active listening, validation of youth concerns, prompt issue resolution, and a demonstration of understanding and relatability. Transparency and honesty are paramount, ensuring clear communication about expectations and decisions. Consistency and reliability are key, serving as a dependable support system for youth, fostering an environment where they feel accepted, valued, and empowered to thrive.

### **Action steps:**

- Ensure diverse, representative staffing to foster cultural relatability and understanding. Train staff on culturally responsive practices, trauma-informed care, and effective communication techniques
- Cultivate an organizational environment where youth voices are actively sought out and valued. Integrate youth voice into decision-making by institutionalizing processes for systematically gathering youth feedback, such as regular focus groups, surveys, and open-ended discussions. Demonstrate how this input is being used to inform program changes and improvements.
- Develop a mentorship program linking youth with Black adults who have navigated similar barriers, providing role models and guidance.
- Encourage peer-led groups where youth can share experiences, strategies for coping, and mutual support in a culturally affirming context.

## • **Strengthen Community Partnerships with Black Focused Youth Service Organizations**

Developing partnerships with organizations that specialize in serving Black youth can unlock valuable expertise, resources, and tailored support services. These collaborations can encompass a range of areas, including mental health, education, mentorship, and other forms of holistic assistance. For a mapping of some existing organizations focusing on Black youth development, please refer to the environmental scan (Appendix E).

### **Action steps:**

- Conduct a comprehensive mapping of local and regional organizations serving Black youth to identify key community partners, both existing and potential.



- Leverage the specialized knowledge and resources of community partners to design the program and service offerings, and the delivery methods. This could include guest speakers, job shadowing opportunities, or co-facilitated workshops. Initiate formal partnership agreements that outline roles, responsibilities, and mutual benefits.
- Convene regular meetings or forums that bring together the various community partners working in this space. Encourage the sharing of best practices, identification of gaps, and collaborative problem-solving around supporting Black youth experiencing homelessness.
- Work with community organizations to develop capacities, opportunities and training for Black youth once they have transitioned out of housing support to independent living.
- Ensure youth voices are represented in the development and implementation of these partnerships.

## • **Address Systemic Barriers Specific to Black Experiences**

Tailored supports are needed to address the housing barriers specific to Black youth, including discrimination, ageism, and anti-Black racism in the housing market. Programs should be designed to acknowledge and mitigate these challenges, ensuring that interventions are culturally sensitive and responsive to Black youth's lived experiences.

### **Action steps:**

- Provide training and resources on recognizing and addressing anti-Black bias and racism for staff, community partners and youth participants.
- Advocate for policy reforms that consider the unique challenges of under housing and systemic barriers that disproportionately affect Black families, focusing on realistic and inclusive housing policies.

## • **Promote Holistic Healthcare and Integrated Treatment Services**

Providing holistic healthcare support is critical for enabling youth to fully utilize and benefit from the transitional housing program. Integrating addiction and substance abuse treatment programs within the transitional housing facility is essential for addressing underlying issues contributing to homelessness and promoting holistic well-being. This integrated approach aligns with the culturally affirming and trauma-informed approach advocated for throughout the recommendations.

### **Action steps:**

- Provide on-site mental health counseling, including individual and group therapy sessions with Black counsellors who are trained in trauma-informed care and culturally responsive practices.

- Develop individualized treatment plans that address the unique needs and circumstances of each youth participant.
- Provide access to a range of evidence-based treatment modalities, including individual and group therapy, medication-assisted treatment, and peer support. Closely coordinate addiction treatment with other wraparound services to support long-term stability and well-being.

## • **Support Family Reconnection**

Reestablishing positive familial relationships, when feasible, can provide crucial support networks for homeless Black youth and facilitate their transition to stable housing. Interventions should prioritize youth safety and well-being while promoting family reunification where appropriate. Existing organizations using models of culturally specific family interventions focusing on Black families can be partnered with.

### **Action steps:**

- Conduct thorough assessments to determine the feasibility and appropriateness of family reconnection for each youth.
- Leverage the collected data to conduct more robust, data-driven program evaluations on a recurring basis. Use these evaluations to assess the program's overall effectiveness and make evidence-based adjustments to strategy, design, and service delivery.
- Gradually facilitate supervised visits and reunification, with ongoing monitoring and adjustment as needed. Ensure youth maintain agency and autonomy in the family reconnection process.

## • **Provide Employment, Financial Literacy, and Life Skills Training**

Respondents emphasize the importance of equipping Black youth in transitional housing with the skills and resources needed for financial autonomy and successful transition to independent living. This includes access to employment, financial literacy, and comprehensive life skills development

### **Action steps:**

- Establish partnerships with local employers, workforce development programs, and entrepreneurship incubators.
- Offer job readiness training, resume building, interview preparation, and connections to internships and job opportunities.
- Encourage youth to explore entrepreneurial paths and support the development of their business ideas.

- Provide training for employable skills, such as data science, hairdressing, baking, construction, etc. based on interests of the youth.
- Provide financial education on budgeting, banking, credit management, and personal finance to help Black youth manage financial stressors and avoid the trap of homelessness due to economic reasons.
- Organize regular meetings and workshops focusing on empowerment, rights awareness, and personal development, tailored to the challenges Black youth face in society.

- **Establish a Research and Evaluation Framework**

A well-established evaluation framework can support with the collection of both process and outcomes-related data which can provide insights on how well the program is functioning and achieving its desired outcomes. The evaluation framework can help outline the theory of change and narrate a story about the program's current and future steps. Well-organized data can provide valuable insights into which program elements are working well, where challenges persist, and how to best allocate resources to support youth participants.

**Action steps:**

- Invest in a user-friendly, centralized data platform that can capture a wide range of participant data, including demographic information, attendance, academic progress, skill development, and post-program outcomes.
- Leverage the collected data to conduct more robust, data-driven program evaluations on a recurring basis. Use these evaluations to assess the program's overall effectiveness and make evidence-based adjustments to strategy, design, and service delivery.



## About the Report

This report was developed as a part of an initiative by 360°kids to build a culturally relevant transitional home for Black youth navigating homelessness in the York Region. For the purposes of this initiative, 360°kids led the formation of a Community Advisory Committee (CAC) consisting of members of several youth-serving organizations, and contracted LogicalOutcomes, a Toronto-based nonprofit consultancy, to undertake a research project to investigate the experiences of Black youth navigating homelessness and their vision of an ideal transitional home. Several methods were used for this project, including community consultations with the CAC, a systemic rapid literature review, interviews and focus groups with Black youth experiencing homelessness and service providers with experience supporting these youth, and an environmental scan of relevant programs and services. This report aims to provide the findings of this research and offer recommendations to 360°kids to guide the creation of a culturally relevant transitional home for Black youth in York Region. Funding for this project was provided by United Way of Greater Toronto through the Federal Reaching Home Strategy and managed by 360°kids.



## Background

According to a State of Homelessness in Canada report (2016), at least 235,000 Canadians experience homelessness in any given year. Youth between the ages of 13–24 years of age make up 20% of this homeless population (Gaetz, 2016). Of these youth, approximately 28% identify as members of racialized communities (Gaetz, 2016). The Regional Municipality of York, stretching from north of Toronto to Lake Simcoe, is home to a diverse population of over 1.2 million people in Ontario (York Region, 2022). According to a study by York Region, “I Count, York Region’s 2021 Homeless Count Report”, despite a thriving economy, several individuals and families experience housing insecurity in the region (The Regional Municipality of York & United Way Greater Toronto, 2022). As per the report, this was exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, with health restrictions limiting access to emergency shelters, an increase in housing prices and rents, and increased mental health issues faced by people experiencing homelessness. Specific groups were also found to be overrepresented among people experiencing homelessness; while less than 3% of York’s population identifies as Black (Statistics Canada, 2016), around 10% of I Count survey respondents self-identified as Black (The Regional Municipality of York & United Way Greater Toronto, 2022). Of the total respondents, 14% were youth aged 16–24 years (The Regional Municipality of York & United Way Greater Toronto, 2022). In Toronto, neighbouring York, the percentage of youth experiencing homelessness was 11% (Canadian Observatory on Homelessness, 2021).

The disproportionate percentage of racialized youth who are experiencing homelessness highlight the ways in which race intersects with pathways to homelessness. Systemic and structural drivers, such as inadequate child welfare services, lack of mental health care access, justice system failures, inequities in the education system, underemployment, poverty, and lack of affordable housing increase the risk of homelessness (Gaetz et al., 2018). Although research specifically related to the York Region is limited, Black students in the Greater Toronto Area (City of Toronto and the Regional Municipalities of Durham, Halton, Peel, and York) were twice as likely as white students to be suspended from school, and four times as likely to be expelled (James & Turner, 2017). In 2018, Black youth represented 7% of the child population in Ontario, while representing 14% of child welfare investigations (Bonnie & Facey, 2022). Compared to White children, Black children are also 2.5 times more likely to be placed in out of home care during an investigation (Bonnie & Facey, 2022). Black youth experiencing homelessness and in the general population are more likely to be stopped, questioned, and checked by the police at a higher rate than their White counterparts (Springer et al, 2013). It is critical that strategies tackling homelessness address systemic and structural inequities in addition to individual level factors (Gaetz et al, 2018; Okonta, 2022). Hence, different levels of interventions targeting these factors are needed, along with the immediate provision of subsidized, transitional, safe, and supportive housing options for youth (Gaetz, 2017). Youth should have access to skills training, education, mental health and physical health services, job placement/employment opportunities and life skills training as part of preventing long-term homelessness. Emergency services and interventions play a role but do not ensure housing stability, nor do they prevent homelessness (Gaetz et al., 2018).



Preventing and addressing homelessness requires multiple collaborators to address this complex issue, including all levels of government, specifically municipalities, legal and health-care professionals, social service agencies and people with lived experience (NCL, 2023). The high rates of homelessness among Black youth underscore an urgent need to address system inequalities and build culturally safe interventions through holistic approaches. By diving deeper into the experiences of Black youth and service providers, this report aims to further understanding of the pathways to homelessness, current lived experiences, culturally appropriate recommendations to support Black youth, and further ideas for prevention of homelessness in the York Region.

## • Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework that guides this research is critical race theory (CRT), with a focus on anti-Black racism. According to CRT, race is a social construct used to maintain systemic divisions that significantly impact the social, economic, and political realities of individuals and groups (James et al., 2010; Mahtani, 2014). Racism, as defined by CRT, involves the uncritical acceptance of negative social definitions of subordinate groups based on physical characteristics (James, 2003). In Canada, racism is evidenced by the perpetuation of false racial hierarchies valuing whiteness over non-white identities (James, 2003). Structural racism is further entrenched through the forming and application of rules, laws, and resource allocation, normalizing and perpetuating discriminatory practices (Essed, 2002). Anti-Black racism specifically refers to systemic and structural racism perpetuated against Black individuals in Canadian society (Benjamin, 2003). More specifically, anti-Black racism illuminates the ways in which the history of slavery and colonialism continue to impact Black people's experiences globally, including in Canada. In other words, 1) knowledge systems that were developed to justify the enslavement of Black people (including stereotypes which dehumanized African people), coupled with 2) the colonial system which ensured that the same dehumanization that happened during slavery would justify the resource extraction and exploitation of Africans and therefore lead to the disenfranchisement— internalizes racism and entrenches systemic racism which continues to impact Black people today. This concept emerged in response to racist policing practices, highlighting the prevalence of systemic racism in various facets of Canadian society (Benjamin, 2003). Yet, due to the erasure of Black experiences within state violence, Canada attempts to distance itself from its colonial past, and its participation in slavery, masking ongoing anti-Blackness as a problem of another time or place (Diverlus et al., 2020). Black individuals often face stigma, criminalization, and threat, due to the association of Blackness, with presumed guilt and criminality (Maynard, 2017). Policies, such as street checks or carding, disproportionately target Black individuals, restricting their access to public spaces and perpetuating systemic discrimination (Maynard, 2017). The killing of Jermaine Carby in September 2014 exemplifies the normalization of over-surveillance and criminalization of Black people, highlighting systemic injustices perpetuated by Canadian institutions (Cole, 2020).

This research is grounded in this framework to illuminate the ways in which anti-Blackness underpins contemporary Black experiences within housing systems (Mohamud et al., 2021). It is another example in a long line of research undertaken by Black communities to make visible



how the impact of anti-Black racism permeates all areas of Black people's lives. While the themes that emerge are similar to what many other families and youth experience, we analyze them through CRT and an anti-Black racism lens because we know that it is this experience that shapes and compounds the impact. Further, we know, it is this experience that should guide our solutions, as any solution that does not consider anti-Black racism may work on individual levels but will fall short of creating systemic change.

The goal is not to think about anti-Black racism as a nuance. The goal is that, once we understand the experience through an anti-Black lens, the stickiness and the entanglement of how Black experiences are linked to anti-Blackness will allow our interventions to be more robust and long-lasting.

## • **Research Rationale**

Currently, there is limited research that explores the intersectionality in experiences of Black youth experiencing homelessness across North America. This means that Black youth experiences have not been documented in a way that allows for service provision to be informed by Black youth experiences at a systemic level. This further impacts the sector's ability to advocate for, and meet, Black youth's needs. As such, our research aims to fill this knowledge gap to support Black youth facing housing instability and homelessness. While existing housing models provide useful services, they are inadequate for providing comprehensive and culturally sensitive supports for Black youth, as they are not grounded in frameworks of anti-racism and do not address the unique challenges and experiences of Black communities. Therefore, embedding services for Black youth within mainstream housing models is ineffective in meeting the specific needs of Black youth. This research aims to underscore the importance of building a culturally relevant transitional housing program specifically for Black youth. By engaging with youth and service providers directly, this research aims to provide community inputs regarding Black youth homelessness and contribute towards the co-creation of a housing model that is culturally sensitive, recognizes and addresses systemic discrimination, reduces barriers to access, fosters community building, and promotes holistic growth and empowerment for Black youth experiencing homelessness.

A rapid review was conducted with the research team and a librarian from Toronto Metropolitan University to synthesize the literature regarding Black-Canadian youth's homelessness experiences within the last 10 years. A rapid review is a knowledge synthesis method that expedites the process of a traditional systematic review by excluding methods to produce evidence in a time- and resource-efficient way (Hamel et al., 2021). A thorough evaluation of the appropriateness of a rapid review was conducted and deemed appropriate due to the project time constraints. On July 21st, 2023, a search was conducted to identify articles to include in the review. Articles were identified by searching the following electronic databases: Education Resources Information Center (ERIC), Applied Social Sciences Index & Abstracts (ASSIA), Social Services Abstracts, Sociological Abstracts, and Sociology Database. The search was restricted to papers published in English, document type (feature and article), full-text, peer-reviewed and by

publication date (2013–2023). However, the rapid review yielded no articles that met our inclusion criteria — becoming an empty review — which underscored a significant literature gap.

Given this knowledge gap, and the need for the community to understand Black youth's experiences navigating housing instability and homelessness, our research team conducted this empirical study. Using interpretative phenomenology as methodology, the objective of the second study is to investigate Black youth's experiences navigating homelessness, and service providers who have experiences supporting Black youth within this context, to understand the mechanisms through which transitional housing initiatives can be tailored to address their distinctive needs. Findings and the implications for policy, research, and practice will be discussed.

## • **Methodology**

The data for this study was collected as part of the Black Youth Housing Project led by non-profit consulting group, LogicalOutcomes. LogicalOutcomes was contracted by 360°kids to complete this one-year research study between March 2023 and March 2024. This research project engaged with the 360°kids CAC and other community and research-based stakeholders to inform the recruitment process, research questions, interview guides, data collection and identify key service provider groups and youth to share insights and provide feedback on findings identified from the interviews and focus group. As such, the objective of this study is to leverage existing community relationships that are working toward addressing disparate needs of Black youth experiencing homelessness from a cultural lens to:

- 1) Better understand how to provide culturally relevant services to Black youth experiencing homelessness
- 2) Inform the development of a long-term transitional home for Black youth experiencing homelessness
- 3) Identify policies, practices, and services which support and hinder services in transitional homes designed for youth experiencing homelessness

### 1) **Interpretive Phenomenology**

This research study uses interpretative phenomenology to investigate the experiences of Black youth who have experienced housing instability and homelessness, as well as the experiences of service providers who have supported Black youth within this context. Philosophically, phenomenology examines the foundation of what is experienced, which includes the individual's judgements, perceptions, and emotions (Balls, 2009; Connelly, 2010). As such, researchers employing phenomenology are concerned with the traits and various aspects which construct experience, using methods, such as interviews with participants who are living the experience that aligns with the researchers' interests (Connelly, 2010).

## 2) Interviews and Focus Groups

### *Recruitment*

The research team used a combination of two sampling approaches for recruiting participants for interviews and focus groups. First, a snowball sample was used, relying on the networks of the CAC, research team and various social media platforms (e.g., LinkedIn, Instagram, Facebook). Individuals in the broader community supported the recruitment process through reposting and sharing the recruitment flyers with their networks, which yielded interest from eligible participants. It is important to note that, throughout our recruitment process, phishing concerns were raised given the high number of respondents who would only complete the incentive-related questions and would often refuse to participate in the interviews once contacted and/or would attempt to participate in the study multiple times. Given this context, the research team used purposeful sampling as a secondary method, relying on the networks of the CAC and research team, both of whom have experience working with Black youth navigating housing instability and homelessness. Youth and service provider participants were willing to share the study flyer and project details with their peers. This recruitment strategy intended to 1) engage with a broad sample of service provider experts and Black youth with lived experiences of homelessness to develop a better understanding of the barriers and enablers of success for Black youth who are transitioning from homelessness to independent living and 2) assure eligible participants were recruited.

Prior to interviewing participants, their eligibility was assessed using a screening survey on Microsoft Forms created by the research team. The screening survey collected demographics (age, gender, race/ethnicity), work experience, educational level, experience with the Children's Aid Society, and job function information.

Youth participants who met the eligibility criteria for this study needed to be between 16–29 years of age and were currently or had previously experienced housing instability or homelessness in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) within the last five years (2018–2023).

Service provider participants who met the eligibility criteria for this study needed to have worked with Black youth experiencing homelessness within the last five years (2018–2023) in the housing sector (e.g., shelters, transitional housing). All participants recruited in the study provided informed consent. Participation in the study was voluntary and confidential. At the interview's conclusion, participants received a \$40 monetary incentive for their participation. The study protocol was approved by Community Research Ethics Office in November 2023.

### *Sample*

Between November 2023 and March 2024, the research team conducted 31 in-depth semi-structured individual interviews with Black youth and service providers, along with two focus groups (n=12) with service providers involving a total of 43 participants in sessions that lasted approximately 60 minutes each. Appendix A provides the characteristics- and role-related data of the participants. The screening survey had a total of 154 respondents, with 107 youth and 47 service providers. Those who met eligibility were contacted, and interviews/focus groups were conducted with 23 youth and 20 service providers.



## ***Data Analysis***

All interviews were digitally recorded using Microsoft Teams, transcribed verbatim using the GoTranscript transcription service, and checked for accuracy by the research team. Filler words such as 'uh', typographical errors, identifying names, and locations were excluded for coherence and to protect participant confidentiality. Condens software was used to manage the data and support the analysis. Thematic analysis was used, which entails identifying common themes, patterns, and meanings from data collected. It includes coding data to generate themes, then reviewing and defining each theme, and then a detailed analysis with examples from the data. AI tools were also used to support analysis and discussion.

### **3) Consultations with the CAC**

This project was guided by representatives from a broad cross-section of youth-serving, advocacy and policy- focused organizations at all stages. This research project was conducted in partnership with:

- 360°kids
- The Regional Municipality of York
- Toronto Metropolitan University's School of Child and Youth Care
- African- Canadian National Coalition against Hate Oppression and Racism (ANCHOR)
- REST Centres
- Newmarket African Caribbean Canadian Association (NACCA)
- York Region Alliance of African Canadian Communities (YRAACC)
- York Region Children's Aid Society



Members of these partner organizations formed the CAC, which was formed shortly after 360°kids received funding to deliver the Black Youth Housing Project. The CAC's involvement ensured that the project's approach and methods aligned with community perspectives. The CAC met with the research team monthly from October 2023 to March 2024, and will continue to play an advisory role on a quarterly basis once the transitional home has been established. Frequent communication between the research team and CAC promoted rich discussions and inputs, ensuring the CAC were updated on the progress of each phase of the project. Regular check-ins were facilitated to understand the organizational context and project objectives, and to receive feedback on data collection tools and methods. The CAC's objectives included making connections between the research team and service providers working with Black youth, guiding all research stages, and informing the project's final recommendations. The CAC contributed to the project through the following activities:

- 1) Project promotion and outreach to relevant networks
- 2) Participant engagement and recruitment (youth outreach, referrals, etc.)
- 3) Review and approval of project deliverables, including work plan, methodology, data collection tools, community engagement and knowledge dissemination.
- 4) Review and feedback on theme generation, findings and recommendations.
- 5) Continued support in the operations and services of the transitional home for youth

## Participant Demographics

This study yielded a sample of 23 Black youth and 20 service providers. Most Black youth participants in this study self-identified as African 57%, while 30% self-identified as both Caribbean and North American. Around 61% of Black youth self-identified as male, while 39% self-identified as female. 78% of Black youth within this sample reported experiencing housing instability or homelessness lasting between one to four years. 61% of Black youth within this study reported having accessed a youth homeless shelter. The second-most accessed service for Black youth was transitional housing (57%), followed by family and friends (43%) and child welfare services (35%). Most of the Black youth in this study reported experiencing housing instability or homelessness in York Region (57%), followed by Toronto (30%), Peel Region (9%), and Halton Region (4%).

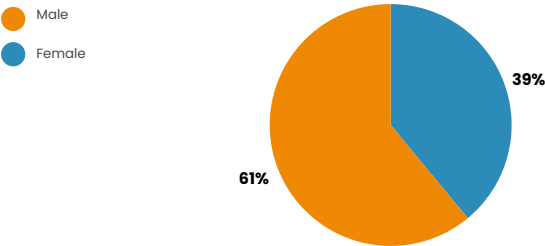


In our sample, 85% of service provider participants self-identified as part of the Black community, with 35% self-identified as African, 25% as Caribbean, 20% as North American, and 5% from the United Kingdom. The remaining 15% of service providers self-identified as Southeast Asian, Asian, and White North American. Half of the service provider participants self-identified as male and half as female. Regarding highest educational level obtained, 50% of service provider participants had an undergraduate degree, 30% had a graduate degree, 15% had a diploma, and 5% had a doctoral degree. Almost all (95%) of the participants were currently working within the housing sector supporting Black youth: 40% of service providers were working with case management, 25% within senior leadership, 25% as social workers and 5% as youth workers. Most service providers had experience working with Black youth in the housing sector, from two to four years (37%) and five to nine years (26%), primarily in the Toronto (45%) and Peel regions (45%).

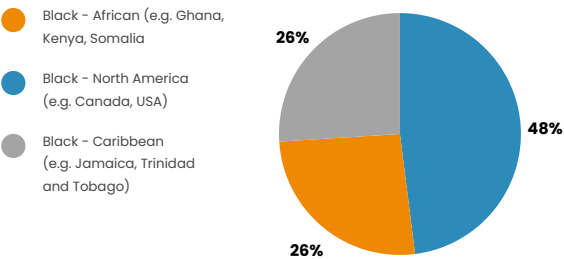


# Demographic Charts 1: Interviews with Youth (n=23)

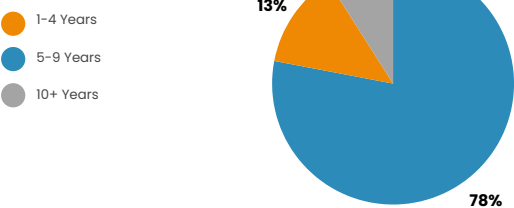
Gender Identity



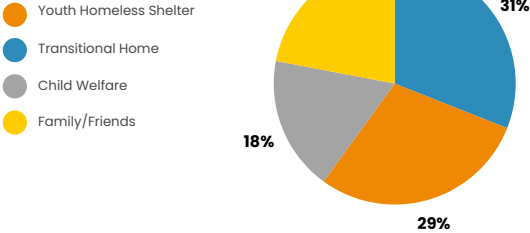
Racial or Ethnic Identity



Length of Housing Instability or Homelessness



Support Services Accessed During Housing Insecurity

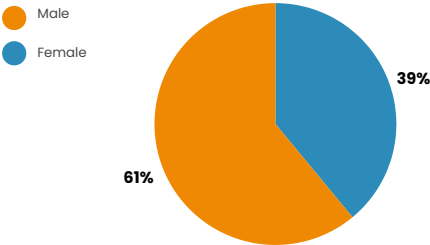


Region in which Housing Instability or Homelessness was Experienced

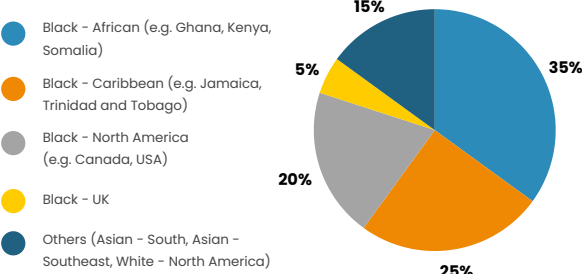


# Demographic Charts 2: Interviews and Focus Groups with Service Providers (n=20)

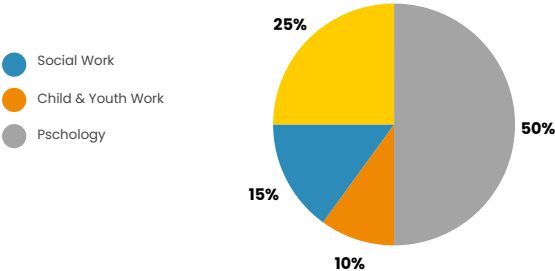
Gender Identity



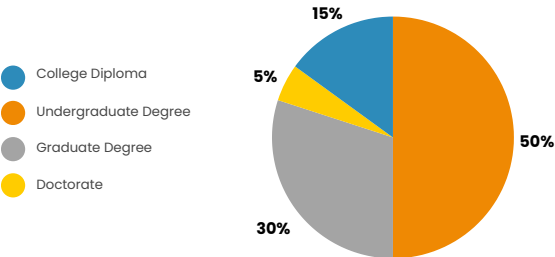
Racial or Ethnic Identity



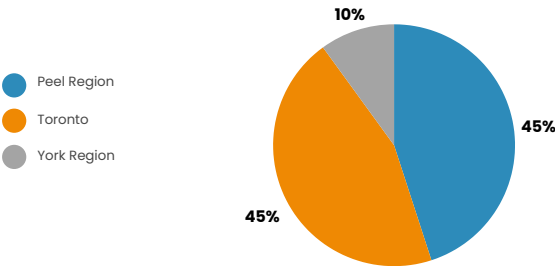
Educational Discipline



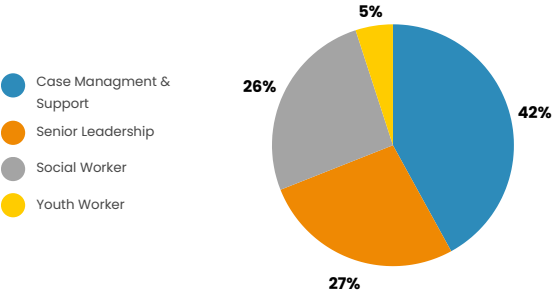
Highest Level of Education Obtained



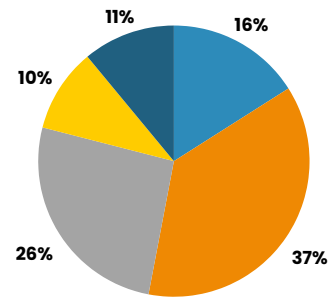
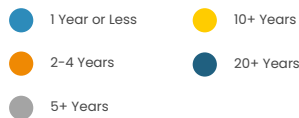
Primary Region of Practice



Current Role



### Length of work with Black Youth Experiencing Housing Instability or Homelessness in Ontario



## Findings

The qualitative findings from the interviews and focus groups have been organized into three thematic areas: factors driving housing instability, experiences of Black youth in housing support, and suggestions for building an ideal transitional home for Black youth. Recurrent themes under each have been listed and supplemented with relevant quotes from respondents.

### • Factors Driving Housing Instability

#### Anti-Black Racism

Throughout the interviews, service providers were conscious of the ways in which anti-Black racism, as a form of structural, institutional, and interpersonal violence, shapes how Black caregivers and youth interact with and encounter Canadian systems such as the housing sector. More specifically, service providers described how anti-Black racism excludes Black youth from rental opportunities. One service provider shared:

“Racism is a huge driving force regarding Black youth homelessness — it’s a major issue. I can tell you that the predominant population demonstrates racism towards Black youth and particularly Black males. They find ways of excluding people by saying you have to be a vegetarian to live in our house and other things like that.”  
(Service provider)

Anti-Black racism was also described as perpetuating racist stereotypes and assumptions about how Black youth would interact with landlords.



“Stereotypes, perceptions, how people view them. They just don’t think that they’re going to pay their rent on time. If they have to challenge them, [they think] Black youth are going to fight them. For example, the perceptions and the stereotypes that you have of Black men being gangsters or having guns and that kind of thing. All of those things, I think are issues.” (Service provider)

Service providers expressed being aware of how racism in broader society impacts Black youth’s ability to access income, being another driving force for housing instability and homelessness.

“Black youth face discrimination and racism in terms of income levels and as they navigate the process of acquiring dignified shelters. It’s intriguing that our clientele base, which consists of about 75% of Black youth, have 60% [of them] being unemployed. This highlights the challenges they encounter with housing programs or the [housing crisis] the country is facing.” (Service provider)

Anti-Black racism is a marker that not only drives Black youth into homelessness but also shapes their experience of housing instability. Racist and anti-Black stereotypes result in overpoliced and over-surveilled youth, as well as harsher punishments and other negative outcomes. With respect to experiences in homeless shelters, Black youth have shared that this context often means that Black youth receive less support, as staff often withdraw from engaging with them, leaving them feeling judged and even unsafe. The lack of training regarding anti-Black racism among shelter staff underscores the need for a unique, culturally supportive housing model for Black youth. As one service provider shared:

“A White person in a position of power may see another White kid and be reminded of a niece or a nephew. In the context of a Black person, the images that they receive of Black people are usually from television [and] movies that aren’t even written by Black people. They’re already an aversion [and] withdrawal. Some [Black youth] even [mentioned] going on the subway and sitting down and people holding on to their purse, passing by cars, people locking their doors. If you go to a place for help and you’re being perceived by the people who are there to help you as a certain threat, people pick up on that.” (Service provider)

## Familial Loss, Breakdown, and Discord

Throughout the interviews, some Black youth reported the loss of one or more parents as the driving factor of their housing instability and homelessness. One youth, as the eldest of their siblings, described being unprepared but forced to find independent living:

“I actually lost one of my parents. We are four, so it’s not easy for my mom to take care of the four of us. I just had to move out as the eldest to go and find something for us.” (Youth)

However, in other instances, family breakdown and discord were a notable phenomenon and driver of homelessness from the perspectives of both Black youth and service providers. For example, a service provider shared:

"I'll say family breakdown is a big one that I've come across just with speaking with clients. A lot of the times it's either they're being kicked out by their parents, or their parents may not have the means to support them, so now they want to see if they can live on their own. Sometimes it's either they're being kicked out, or it's their choice to leave. Family breakdown is an important issue that needs to be targeted when it comes to Black youth and homelessness." (Service provider)

Similarly, a Black youth shared:

"I got kicked out of the house by my stepdad. That was about three years ago. I'm quite an introvert. I really don't know people. I've been living from one friend's house to another, and it's not been easy. I've been struggling for the past year." (Youth)

A service provider shared that the intersection between anti-Black racism and transnationalism often shapes how Black families encounter and navigate Canadian society. This often drives Black parents to parent from a place of fear given the concerns for their children's well-being, which may not align with the state's perspective or Black youth's values. As such, this creates conflict in the home, which may drive the parent(s) to evict the youth, which can drive contact with local Children's Aid Society or street delinquency:

"Representation in the housing system is very high for Black youth. This is partly due to when [Black families] migrate and have to integrate into the society. They migrate and come with their own cultural beliefs and values. [Black youth are navigating] two different sets of rules. Whatever is inside of the house, which is what the parents are teaching them, [however] when they go outside and it's a completely different ballgame. Literally, most Black people tell you, "Do as I say. You learn from whatever it is that I tell you to do. This is my house." They have all these different types of parenting that they would have done in their own culture. You go out into the society, you hear, "You have a voice. You don't have to do this, you have to do that, this, and that." It's a pull. Now outside, inside. Sometimes this causes the breakdown in the family. You have a breakdown in the family, and it just escalates from there because then the parents can't deal with you, or they end up in problems. You end up with CAS or out on the streets because they put you out. A lot of it has to do with being immigrants as a whole are not being integrated properly into the system because there is no set way. They're thrown into it because when you land in the airport, there's no booklet. They give you a booklet, yes, and on when you have to learn to become a citizen. There is no booklet telling you, "Well, these are the rules. You can't beat your children, you can't tell them this, you can't tell them that." Or they don't train you on all these things you learn, some of them the hard way basically." (Service provider)



Multiple service providers expressed that once the family breakdown has occurred, Black youth are often apprehensive to engage in programs designed to support family reunification. Service providers have begun to highlight concern that many Black youth are not fully aware of the needs and difficulties of living independently and maintaining housing. As such, some agencies have begun to design preventative programs aimed to address the familial breakdown before the young person experiences homelessness. A service provider stated:

“We see it very often and it’s very hard to get clients to agree to any sort of family support. We have our family intervention program now. Even having those conversations with clients, it almost shuts them down in a lot of ways because they feel like you’re not listening to them because they have very specific reasons about why they can’t go back home and they’re not willing to look into any possibilities. Obviously, we have clients that have been through a lot of abuse and a lot of traumata at home, but we have other clients that haven’t, and there’s just been a lot of disagreements and they’re not willing to really work on that. I think that’s something that we’re trying to focus more on just to prevent that homelessness or get them back home. A lot of them don’t understand how hard it is out there to find a place to rent and maintain that. Even if we got you a house, you still need to maintain that and maintain your rent and all the other supports that you need.” (Service provider)

Another service provider found promise in the preventative approach to supporting Black families before the occurrence of any breakdown, and believes the pilot program has shown promising impacts:

“Our newer programs we’re trying to launch and that is family reunification and intervention management. The whole idea is to meet the families where the issues may obviously start where housing instability came about. That’s been quite a challenge because I think if the families can understand their heritage, their culture, the foundation of building a solid family unit, the foundation of working together as a family amidst internal family conflicts, the foundations of proper appropriate communication within a cultural context, that might reduce the issues where we have young people becoming homeless due to sometimes trivial issues that are being faced at home where a young person is leaving and thinking we can house them in a townhouse. That’s been one of the tougher challenges right now, but we’re hoping that we can tackle the root issue there, and work with the families. There’s little shifts right now, but we’re hoping with awareness, more of our families within the BIPOC community will invite us into that space to try and help them mediate, resolve, and come to an agreement as to what will work best for the young people. That’s a task ahead to even tackle this and try to reduce youth homelessness.” (Service provider)

## Policy and Structural Factors

The research demonstrated that policy related to social housing is a driving factor for housing instability, with participants sharing experiences that pointed to “under housing,” which led to their use of shelters. Under housing refers to when a family is housed in a unit that is too small for the family (e.g. a five-person family living in a two-bedroom apartment). The following quote from a Black youth provides a deeper understanding.

“The family shelter, when they moved us into Toronto housing, they looked at the two people who actually had incomes coming in. It was like a two bedroom, and I would sleep on the couch and stuff. I didn’t have a room, there was nowhere to put any of my stuff. It was like, if I’m going to sleep on a couch in this house, I just started couch surfing with my friends and stuff. I’d sleep at my friend’s house, or I’d sleep at like my friend’s boyfriend’s house. We just sleep all over because we didn’t really have stable housing. In our house, we didn’t have an actual place to rest our head. Yes, we had a couch, but it’s like, if I just have a couch to lay my head at my house, why am I going to be there?” (Youth)



A 2021 report by Social Planning Toronto noted that 24.3% of Black families in Toronto are underhoused (Wilson et al., 2020). When families are underhoused, some family members share rooms or sleep in areas that are not designated as bedrooms. In our research, this manifested with a youth not having their own room, but instead sleeping in the living room on the sofa. When this family received social housing, even though there were three members in the family, only a two-bedroom unit was leased due to income. The third adult was unemployed at the time. While technically this means the unemployed adult should not be living in the unit, the parent did not tell them they could not live there.

There are many ways in which policy regarding Rent-Geared-to-Income (RGI) households or social housing spaces lead Black families to difficult decisions. This is not limited to under housing. It also includes when families are moved, which on occasion has unintended consequences for youth (for being offered a unit in an area that they would consider to be unsafe) or when parents/lease holders may have to evict children who are involved in objectionable behaviours due to implications for lease holders. For example, lease holders can be evicted for objectionable behaviour committed by anyone who is either in or visiting the household. Returning to the issue of under housing, the example shared with us noted that sleeping on the couch as an adult was unfair, embarrassing, and difficult, which led this participant to seek support in a shelter. Policies, such as these that do not consider the reality for Black youth, also include higher rates of unemployment, poverty, over-policing, and harsher punishments. These policies rely on ideal/perfect situations to keep people housed. They also put families in challenging conditions in which leaseholders, who are often parents or caregivers, must choose between being housed and their child. These policies directly impact housing instability for Black youth.

## Financial Issues

Financial instability was cited by participants as a factor leading to homelessness. Service providers identified historical systemic racism leading to low education, unemployment, and low wealth in the Black community as root causes contributing to high poverty and homelessness rates in Black youth. As research has shown, financial disparity and disempowerment are remnants of anti-Black racism and colonialism, and continue to deeply impact the experiences of Black families:

“Systemic racism and the historical systemic racism that has resulted in the high rates of unemployment, low educational attainment, wealth gap for Black Canadians, so those things affect everything else. High rates of criminalization and homelessness, mental illness, substance use disorders, and problematic substance use, all stem from having low wealth.” (Service provider)

Several youths reported financial struggles and instability at home as the reasons for leaving, either to reduce the burden on their family or to be able to afford their desired lifestyle, ending up on the streets or receiving some form of housing support. Youth also shared that Toronto’s high cost of living made it difficult to manage expenses and found themselves homeless as they were unable to make rent, indicated in the following quotes.

"I would say the cost of housing is honestly a number one thing that impacts my housing insecurity. I think that it's really hard to find a place that's comfortable, that's central in terms of transportation. Also living with roommates nowadays you can only really afford partial living, where you would have to split rent and share with other people. Not everyone is like-minded, and I think living with other people could be really hard." (Youth)

"We know that staying in Ontario is really expensive, so I took a house, got a house up above my budget, and I lost my job so trying to maintain, I wasn't able to maintain and some of my friends couldn't take me in because there was this thing with cohabiting with some people. I had no other option than to move from shelter to shelter and it was a terrible time." (Youth)

Unemployment and job loss exacerbated this issue. A youth shared that they wanted to leave due to non-finance related reasons, such as family conflict, but the high cost of living and rentals in Toronto made it difficult to live independently. Two youth shared that gambling and money mismanagement led to their inability to cover rent, leading to homelessness.

"One factor was... I was gambling a lot, and I went pretty broke, and couldn't afford rent for a while, so I was homeless for a certain period of time due to that." (Youth)

"As a result of gambling. I had to say that. I put my house at risk, and unfortunately for me, it was gone." (Youth)

## Mental Health and Disability Issues

As highlighted above, experiences of anti-Black racism in systems, institutions and daily interactions perpetuate trauma for Black youth and negatively impact their mental wellbeing. As such, mental health emerged in this study as a theme that impacted both youth and their families and was often linked with family discord. In some instances, a parent's mental health was the driving factor, while in others it was the youth's mental health. Participants shared experiences with mental health issues often triggered by unstable family conditions. Mental health issues were also identified as pathways to addictive behaviours such as drugs or gambling, leading to homelessness. A lack of support for mental health understanding and management emerged as the critical factor, exemplified in the following quotes:

"Sometimes because of a person's mental health and needing a certain care, or maybe they're not taking their medication, maybe that becomes a factor, that they need some support that they're not able to receive at home. Mental health is a factor. There are the family breakdown issues around communication or safety." (Service provider)

"Some of the other factors that play a role is mental health, mental illness and I see examples of where kids are feeling neglected. They're feeling isolated. They start to go down a path where they're trying to find love and affection and belonging, and they can go down a whole bunch of different paths. Those paths sometimes are destructive, but they're looking for something that they're not getting. Then it might lead to substance use and that substance use might then deteriorate them even further. That can lead down the road to homelessness." (Service provider)

Some participants noted that once they or their parent received support and learned to manage their mental health, their conditions improved. However, what is notable is the adverse impact that the lack of support had, which then led to the negative experiences and homelessness. These experiences are also reflected in research by Fante-Coleman & Jackson-Best (2020), indicating that Black-Canadian youth experience systemic and organizational barriers to mental health care, long wait times, financial challenges and lack of culturally responsive care that overlap with each other. The inability to access meaningful mental health supports that are culturally relevant, timely and affordable has a snowball effect, which drives housing instability as well.

Inadequate support and resources for managing disability issues also emerged as a pathway to homelessness. Conditions such as autism spectrum disorder that contribute to behavioural challenges can lead to misunderstandings if not adequately understood or supported by the family. Such family conflicts can lead to youth having to leave their homes. Participants in our interviews often shared vague, generalized statements about mental health, trauma, and disability. This may reflect the difficulties that Black communities face with navigating mental health and disability issues due to stigma and shame surrounding these topics. The underrepresentation of Black healthcare professionals deepens this problem, creating barriers to building trust and promoting access to culturally responsive care. Both mental health and disability issues are often stigmatized and underdiagnosed in Black communities. A youth shared how being on the spectrum impacted their relationship with their family and lead to unstable housing:

"I have some, I don't even want to say mental health, but I'm autistic. I want to say I didn't understand the rules, but I guess my view of society has always been different, and that caused me to be kicked out of my family home really early. I was growing up with my grandmother and she wasn't able to handle my mental health at the time. I don't blame her for that, but I grew up in foster care from there, and then I moved into the group home system and eventually, I was just staying out in a tent. [...] In all these different places I've been, the rules always change and there's society rules that I've never really quite picked up on. In each new place I've been, I never really felt like I fit in, and I always ended up finding myself in a position where I had to leave. I think this is the longest I've been in one place for at least 20 years." (Youth)

## • Experiences of Black Youth in Housing Support

### Pathways to Accessing Housing Support and Challenges Faced

Youth cited friends and relatives as well as local organizations, such as the church, social workers, and online information as channels through which they learned about accessing housing support. One youth was referred to resources by their pastor as seen in the following quote:

"I first of all went to my local church, to my local pastor. Just had to share some resources. Some people around just shared some resources because they, first of all, gave me somewhere else to stay, but considering the distance from work, I wasn't able to stay because I was always running late to work so they gave me some other resources which were around my work environment." (Youth)



Service providers shared that youth often got referred via guidance counsellors and social workers, as supported by the following quote:

“Most referrals come from, I would say a little more than a half come from existing clients or former clients. The other are from probation officers, bail supervisors, teachers, principals, youth outreach workers, and then other community leaders who just know of our services and have referred for years.” (Service provider)

Some youth shared challenges they faced when trying to access housing support. A youth reported a complete lack of awareness about shelters or facilities providing support when they were on the streets. Others shared factors, such as illiteracy and fear of the system keeping them from accessing supports, while some cited reasons such as ineligibility and long wait times, as seen in the following quote:

“No, it wasn't right away. I would say it wasn't so easy. I did look for some places online and then I reached out to them, and sometimes there's not enough place in those places. A lot of times you have to be on a waitlist. It wasn't really easy or readily available. I did get into one after I joined a waitlist and submitted my name with them.” (Youth)

## Beneficial Programs and Resources

Youth participants shared many services and programs they found helpful during their stay in shelters and transitional homes. Provisions of bedding, food and water were noted as basic but essential needs provided by housing institutions. Mental health support emerged as a valuable service. Youth experienced many difficulties and barriers in their journey, with several youth experiencing trauma, maltreatment, and poor mental health. Youth faced several challenges as they coped with their living conditions, not just in their life experiences before accessing supports, but also during their time in housing support. Many expressed feelings of hopelessness and depression. They shared the importance of receiving emotional and mental support from staff and peers. In almost half of the youth interviews, counselling and therapy were mentioned as helpful services received in the housing institutions, as highlighted in these two quotes:

“[Counselling] was what helped me overcome my trauma. I actually received a lot of counseling, and the counselor I think he had a word with the people around me, you can guess. I think he had a word with the close persons around me, and he was like, “I think you'll help this lady. We are trying to help her.” (Youth)

“I do a lot of counseling. I feel like counseling is a huge one for me. I take counseling wherever I can get it, especially if it's free. A lot of counseling, a lot of friends that have been through similar situations. I have some really good friends from the foster care system where we've kept in touch all these years.” (Youth)

Service providers also stressed the importance of providing mental health counselling and taking time to understand the background and past experiences of youth as a primary step in supporting them:

“My experience working with Black youth so far, I’ve just been noticing that a lot of them have experienced trauma, have experienced different social transitioning, and really need support, need people. Also just flexibility, compassion. I think compassion is a huge part of supporting youth, the Black Youth, and the mental health. Then also destigmatizing mental health because I’ve been finding that for BIPOC youth, mental health can be very highly stigmatized especially for male Black youth too.” (Service provider)

Similarly, service providers elaborated on the importance of establishing rapport and connection with youth and understanding their context and stories to be able to support them appropriately.

“First of all, the major practices is other than providing shelter, there is a need for a psychological review. We’ve tried to sit with them ourselves, get to know what happened or why they are homeless. Get to psychologically review them and know what they want, or what they wanted, or what led to that particular situation that they are in. How we can gradually get them out of that cycle so we can-- How we can make them realize or make them know the areas where changes can be made gradually and slowly without making them feel like they’re unwanted or no one cares” (Service provider)

Financial assistance, along with education and employment, also emerged as a pivotal and valuable support. Three youth shared that they received monetary assistance for completing schooling. Two mentioned receiving small weekly allowances to support themselves. One fourth of the youth participants mentioned receiving assistance in finding employment opportunities as one of the most helpful services received. A few youths appreciated the training for trades and skills, which helped them secure employment or be self-employed. A youth mentioned that their housing shelter had an arrangement in which it sponsored the youth’s education and job search, and once the youth started working and earning wages, the youth would pay the housing shelter back to help out:

“The house had an option of going to school, they sponsor you, you get a job, and you get back to them. It’s just like a bond. They take you through your college. You get a job. You know that you’re owing them and then, of course, when you get a job, you send back to them and even more. Of course, you have to send more to them because you know how they put this together. I’ve sent mine years ago, and I do not regret it. In fact, I’m so thankful to them.” (Youth)

A service provider shared a similar example from their practice:

“A lot of them feel that when they are homeless, they can’t achieve this. Of course, it’s easy to think that if you’re homeless, how can you even achieve your college fees and all of that? When they come in and then we tell them, of course, we’ll get you through that, you see the relief is so-- In fact, that’s the start of them being happy and all of that because they feel, they know that “Come on, I’m going to stay here, I can study who I want to be.” (Service provider)

Further, several youths shared that the staff in the housing institutions were very helpful and ready to assist in whatever way they could, from helping them obtain official documents, to

finding independent housing, and helping with relocation. One youth shared that their social worker made efforts to find passes for local events that aligned with their interests, which made them feel valued, like they could still enjoy life and not like they were living in a shelter:

“Sometimes when you speak to them, they don’t leave you hanging, they try to help you, especially when you’re trying to leave the center, and you tell them you now have the money to take care of yourself. They try to stretch out their hand and look for where you could stay and refer and ask for a budget, you’ll be helped and all that, they don’t just leave it there hanging. Once you tell them you’re ready to leave, they offer a helping hand and all that.” (Youth)

## Importance of Developing Meaningful Connections

In some cases, youth received support from friends and family, such as housing, monetary supports, or most often, emotional support. Many youths explained that creating and maintaining friendships with others in housing institutions played a large part in building self-awareness and remaining positive while experiencing housing instability:

“I think that in a way, it was a way for me to actually realize how feeble life is. They actually brought me into a realization and made me admit or accept that I was, in a way, addicted to gambling. It also made me-- In a way, I would say there was a positive impact, I was able to connect with some lovely souls at the shelter home. I’m still friends with most of them and I visit there sometimes. It was like I said, a shelter, it was a very accommodative home or place for me at that time.” (Youth)

“I think that obviously number one, it’s helpful that I have a place to stay and then additionally, it helps me. They [friends] support me emotionally, which I do really appreciate. I think that’s honestly something that’s really important for me not to feel lonely or if I’m feeling down, I always have someone around me that can boost my mood and help me get through this.” (Youth)

Youth expressed that they received encouragement from community members, friends and family, which helped them persevere on their path to acquiring stable housing:

“In terms of the community support, I tend to get them from my community members and also my family members in terms of encouragement and also giving me the strength in terms of spoken words.” (Youth)

Some youth moved on to independent living with the friends they made while experiencing homelessness:

“When I transitioned out, I found another friend, someone that was in the shelter too, and he had already saved up. He was already working. He had also saved up enough to get an apartment, so we just looked for somewhere affordable, and then we moved out.” (Youth)

## Overcoming Obstacles and Challenges

Youth participants shared about overcoming challenges experienced during their times in housing support. Lack of privacy emerged as a major concern, along with overcrowding. Participants used words, such as “congested,” “confined” and “overcrowding” to describe their living spaces. They faced difficulties when sharing limited resources and spaces with a large

number of people who had differing opinions, perspectives, backgrounds, and ages from them. They shared feelings of frustration, fear, and discomfort. The crowded spaces often created safety concerns; at least three participants reported incidents of theft, two reported violence and fights in the shelter, and two reported being exposed to drugs and high drug usage in housing institutions. Crowds also brought other problems, such as lack of cleanliness and hygiene. The lack of safety felt is illustrated in this quote:

"The fact that it wasn't something that was constant and the fact that sometimes there was overpopulation. It was overcrowded most times. Especially during colder months, it was overcrowded. The fact that you never felt safe as in your home, you could decide to just drop your phone in your room and use the toilets. By the time you come back, you would still see your phone in your room but in the shelter system, it's not that way. Once you drop any of your belongings and move, the moment you turn someone else has taken it." (Youth)

Several other challenges made their experiences unpleasant or unideal. Mental health concerns were also prevalent; a participant reported needing but not receiving mental health support in the shelter. A few others experienced feelings of hopelessness and depression, and not having any means of coping with them as they lived with friends or relatives. Another stated that, while the shelter provided a roof over their head and food, it did not have the resources to provide other needed supports. A youth shared experiences at the shelter making them feel unwelcomed and unaccepted:

"I feel like maybe the stigma, I don't know, the stigma of what I have experienced is actually known to some type of persons, and I could not run away from it because I had no other option and I have to stay there. Some persons were actually going through some stuff. They were actually going through some mental issues resulting sometimes they break into fights too. They get violent and some persons are actually depressed... I felt like the crowd there was actually too much. You will see this person today and before you see the person it's like except you are actually friendly person. The crowd there is too much." (Youth)

Two expressed dislike and feelings of overwhelm with the many strict rules at the shelter, wishing they had more independence and agency:

"The challenges range from, of course, privacy, there was no privacy. I also think that there were lots of instructions, do's and don'ts. There were lots of them and sometimes they were becoming overwhelming. Another challenge was being confined in this space where you're with lots of people with different perspectives and sometimes it's annoying, but you just have to live within the space you're provided. Sometimes because maybe, you don't get to eat what you want to eat, what's on the timetable. That's about it." (Youth)



## Desire for Culturally Affirming Programming

Most of the youth reported that they did not access housing supports that cater to the unique needs of Black individuals experiencing housing instability, because knowledge about or access to any such resources was scarce. One youth stated that they felt that they did not need to access them because they did not think they would be experiencing homelessness long enough to need it.

“No. Finding programs for Black youth was scarce when I was a kid. I’ve done some Boys and Girls Club programs, but they weren’t even really centered towards Black kids. They’re just the crowd that came in.” (Youth)

Service providers also reiterated the scarcity of culturally affirming programming and trained and representative staff for Black youth.

“Not having enough Black therapists to refer people to, Black psych assessment, organizations and services and professionals, employment programs. Again, when the youth gain trust, and then I refer them to somebody who doesn’t-- or that communicates or provides unsafe service, then it reduces the youth belief in social services in general and reaching out for support. That’s a big one. That’s not having enough culturally related services. Then mainstream or non-Black cultural-focused services not being informed and trained and willing enough to support Black youth when they do engage with them.” (Service provider)

When youth were asked what they would like to see in a culturally affirming program, many explained that Black youth should be empowered and given the opportunity to acquire skills that will help them succeed in the future. They expressed that Black youth should receive guidance on navigating the world as a Black person. Additionally, participants stated that Black youth should receive access to a safe, brave space where they can receive support and advice from their peers and mentors. They emphasized the importance of Black youth receiving the opportunity to further their education and develop skills that will benefit them throughout their lives, as shown in the following quotes:

“I think that education services should be offered to them. I feel like as Black people, we should be taught that and understand that in this society, we’re people of color, and I think that’s a factor that should be taught or put out there for us. I think that there should also be, what’s that word? I think it’s like a support system or a disclosure that it’s a space that’s accepting of all. Here there’s no right or wrong answers, everyone is comfortable.” (Youth)

“It would look inclusive. It would have programming that was going to help people in the long run and motivate people to want to be on their own because they’re learning these skills while they’re there. What that is, is knowing you can keep your space clean and knowing you can cook and knowing you can-- When you’re thrown into a situation where you have your own house, these things aren’t impacting you.” (Youth)

Service providers stressed on the importance of opening up new opportunities for Black youth and helping them build a strong and positive self-identity:

“Sometimes what we don’t do a good enough job of is giving that young person the dignity, the self-esteem, the opportunity to feel good about themselves. I think more and more programs need to look at not so much putting everything in place for the youth but allowing the youth to grow up and understand and make mistakes. I think there’s a lot of pressure that these youth face, and they don’t tell you that. We have to be intuitive enough to push through without maybe making them feel like they’re less than.” (Service provider)

One youth commented that Black youth should not be limited to jobs in the trades or other physical labour but should also be encouraged to strive for white-collar jobs, such as lawyering, accounting, or doctoring:

“I would say a perfect job. More like, rather than having them do new jobs or labour, actual encouragement to go to college, get an actual job, like be a lawyer, an accountant or doctors to just motivate them. Just because they’re homeless doesn’t mean that life is over, they can always do better with themselves.” (Youth)

Some youth participants also acknowledged that Black people come from all types of backgrounds, so culturally affirming programming should represent this diversity by including these different cultures and identities. One participant stated that Black youth should receive the opportunity to learn and earn money from Black community members:

“A cultural relevant program... Something that’s inclusive. Something that would talk about we as Black people. Something that would encourage Black people to stay off the streets. Something that will encourage Black people to try to find crafts or maybe work around, maybe try to make money from members of their race. I don’t know if that makes sense” (Youth).

Youth participants in this study also shared that Black youth may benefit from programming that offers the opportunity to learn about hair maintenance and styling. Hair care was mentioned as an important skill for Black people desiring to live independently:

“Like, for us Black people, maybe learning how to braid like yours, braid your hair, things like that. Yes, I think these are important skills to learn. (Youth). Hair braiding. Hair braiding, because I remember being a youth in these systems and no one knew how to deal with my hair. It became a big self-conscious thing for me because I never knew what to do with it. I never knew how to handle it. I used to shave my head a lot. But if someone had just simply taken the time to teach me what different products were, how to use gels and how to braid my hair, I probably wouldn’t have grown up with that much of a... you know?” (Youth)

One participant expressed the importance of young Black women receiving supports that reflect their unique needs and experiences. They shared that Black girls and women should be empowered to establish boundaries, and to speak up and advocate for themselves:

“I want to say a workshop about being a person with boundaries versus being-- how being a Black woman with boundaries isn’t being that angry Black woman, if that makes sense. Because I feel like we’re usually portrayed like that. It affects us in situations where we’re homeless because the way we’re viewed is different and it makes us physically upset and it becomes even more of a problem from there.” (Youth)



## Building the “Ideal” Transitional Home for Black Youth

Youth participants shared suggestions for the skills they think are necessary for independent living, the kind of programming support they imagine in an ideal transitional home, and the physical and social environment they desire in the home. Employment, entrepreneurship, and financial literacy were strong themes that underscored in all conversations. Youth also expressed a want for technological and computer skills, stressing the importance of being tech-savvy and having technological skills for securing employment.

Skills such as managing a home and self-care were described as fundamental. Youth desired support for education, career services, counselling, and healthcare. They further shared ideas for seminars and workshops they think are crucial, highlighting the importance of social skills and training. Empowerment and self-confidence were noted as key for finding their path and making their way independently in the world.

In describing the physical and social environment of the home, not all participants were keen on providing specifics for aesthetics, but instead shared feelings they wanted to experience – safety, comfort, privacy, respect, and warmth. For several, basic amenities of food, water, and bedding in a clean environment were adequate. The desire for being in a group with like-minded individuals also emerged. Youth wanted spaces to socialize and develop all aspects of their personality, seeking areas for fitness, games, and art.

In our interactions with both youth and service providers, the critical role of building trusting relationships in a successful housing program was emphasised. Youth expressed wanting to be heard and attended to and to feel like they matter. Service providers shared many ideas and strategies that they have found useful in building trust with youth. The chart below presents a summary of youth and service providers insights about building an ideal transitional home and creating strong trusting relationships.

Chart: Ideas for building an ideal transitional home for Black youth

PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT	SERVICES AND PROGRAMS	CULTURALLY AFFIRMING PROGRAMMING	BUILDING TRUST										
<p><b>Aesthetics</b></p> <p>Warm lighting Mature colors Gender neutral Fresh smells</p> <p><b>Privacy</b></p> <p>Individual and private spaces Private rooms and bathrooms Separated by gender Sharing with people with similar backgrounds Safety and security</p> <p><b>Comfort</b></p> <p>Comfortable couches and beds</p> <p><b>Community</b></p> <p>Spaces for socializing Art room Games area Group project Sports and fitness facilities</p> <p><b>Feels like "home"</b></p> <table><tr><td>Welcoming</td><td>Positive</td></tr><tr><td>Minimalist</td><td>Respectful</td></tr><tr><td>Beautiful</td><td>Queer-</td></tr><tr><td>Dim</td><td>friendly</td></tr><tr><td>Supportive</td><td>Includes nature</td></tr></table> <p><b>House amenities</b></p> <p>Food and water Kitchen Heating and cooling Bedding Laundry</p>	Welcoming	Positive	Minimalist	Respectful	Beautiful	Queer-	Dim	friendly	Supportive	Includes nature	<p><b>Primary healthcare</b></p> <p><b>Educational support</b></p> <p>Finishing school College guidance and admissions</p> <p><b>Counseling</b></p> <p>Mental health support Career counselling Mentorship</p> <p><b>Skills training for employment</b></p> <p>Computer and tech skills Trades Baking and cooking Salon and hairstyling Fashion design Handicraft Entrepreneurship training</p> <p><b>Financial literacy</b></p> <p>Budgeting investing and planning</p> <p><b>Home management</b></p> <p>Cooking, cleaning, repairs</p> <p><b>Social skills</b></p> <p>Physical appearance Body language Time management and discipline</p> <p><b>Homeownership</b></p> <p>Training and long-term planning</p> <p><b>Wraparound services</b></p> <p>Integrated team of support</p>	<p><b>Professional and diverse staff</b></p> <p>Adequate number of staff EDI and trauma-informed trained</p> <p><b>Empowerment and positive identity</b></p> <p>Building confidence for independent living Information about causes of homelessness and how to avoid and overcome them Positive cultural identity Breaking stereotypes</p> <p><b>Community networking</b></p> <p>Building connections with Black professionals Blackrole models Home alumni program Connections with neighborhood, local markets and social organizations Peer to peer support</p> <p><b>Recognizing diversity of Black experiences</b></p> <p><b>Culturally appropriate food</b></p> <p><b>Mental health support</b></p> <p>Black therapists and social workers</p>	<p><b>Reliability and stability</b></p> <p>Building rapport Having a single, dependable, stable point of contact</p> <p><b>Agency and leadership</b></p> <p>Co-creation of plans Youth involvement at every step Sense of ownership Power sharing</p> <p><b>Empathy and validation</b></p> <p>Meet them where they're at Making them feel heard Honesty and openness</p> <p><b>Relatability and connection</b></p> <p>Having staff and mentors they can relate to Sharing stories and experiences</p> <p><b>Opening opportunities</b></p> <p>Strengths-based approach Exploring interests and talents Opening door to new opportunities Promoting innovation and creativity</p> <p><b>Advocacy</b></p> <p>Standing up for them</p>
Welcoming	Positive												
Minimalist	Respectful												
Beautiful	Queer-												
Dim	friendly												
Supportive	Includes nature												



# Recommendations

The following recommendations are based on empirical findings gathered through interviews and focus groups with Black youth and social service providers. An environmental scan of youth-focused agencies and supports (Appendix E) was referenced while forming these recommendations.

## • **Provide Comprehensive and Long-term Case Management**

Respondents stressed the need for providing youth experiencing homelessness with ongoing case management that is essential for helping youth navigate the full spectrum of social services. This includes assistance with securing personal identification, enrolling in school, accessing social services, such as Ontario Works, and navigating appointments and court appearances with a trusted and supportive case manager.

### **Action steps:**

- Assign each youth participant a dedicated case manager who can provide long-term, one-on-one support with tasks like obtaining necessary documentation, enrolling in public benefits, and coordinating appointments.
- Support the youth in meeting not just their current needs, but also help them organize their plans and goals for their future in the transitional home as well as independent living, by providing information and connections to relevant social services.
- Provide education and training for home management.

### **Community Example:**

Parents of Black Children offers many resources including tools for navigating the education and child welfare systems, funds for mental health support, youth scholarships, mentoring, and advocacy.

## • **Build a Culturally Affirming and Responsive Environment**

Respondents shared that it is essential to design living spaces that cater to the Black youth's unique needs and diverse experiences. Creating an environment that promotes a strong sense of belonging, empowerment, and cultural affirmation is crucial for supporting Black youth in their transition out of homelessness.

### **Action steps:**

- Incorporate design elements, artwork, and programming that reflect Black culture and identity.

- Provide private rooms with comfortable furnishings and neutral tones, as well as communal spaces for socialization, recreation, fitness, and creative expression. Encourage personalization of youth space to foster a sense of pride and ownership.
- Prioritize accessibility features to accommodate diverse needs.
- Integrate green spaces and outdoor areas to promote relaxation, connection with nature, and overall well-being.

## • Foster Trusting Relationships and a Strong Support System

Respondents shared the critical importance of service providers building genuine, trusting relationships with Black youth experiencing homelessness. This requires active listening, validation of youth concerns, prompt issue resolution, and a demonstration of understanding and relatability. Transparency and honesty are paramount, ensuring clear communication about expectations and decisions. Consistency and reliability are key, serving as a dependable support system for youth, fostering an environment where they feel accepted, valued, and empowered to thrive.

### Action steps:

- Ensure diverse, representative staffing to foster cultural relatability and understanding. Train staff on culturally responsive practices, trauma-informed care, and effective communication techniques
- Cultivate an organizational environment where youth voices are actively sought out and valued. Integrate youth voice into decision-making by institutionalizing processes for systematically gathering youth feedback, such as regular focus groups, surveys, and open-ended discussions. Demonstrate how this input is being used to inform program changes and improvements.
- Develop a mentorship program linking youth with Black adults who have navigated similar barriers, providing role models and guidance.
- Encourage peer-led groups where youth can share experiences, strategies for coping, and mutual support in a culturally affirming context.

### Community Example:

ANCHOR has a mentorship program to support new immigrants.

The Sankofa mentoring programs by YRAACC include exploration of Black culture, promoting life skills, community engagement, and civic responsibility.

MACCA has mentoring programs for Black teenagers who are newcomers or in contact with child welfare.

## • **Strengthen Community Partnerships with Black Focused Youth Service Organizations**

Developing partnerships with organizations that specialize in serving Black youth can unlock valuable expertise, resources, and tailored support services. These collaborations can encompass a range of areas, including mental health, education, mentorship, and other forms of holistic assistance. For a mapping of some existing organizations focusing on Black youth development, please refer to the environmental scan (Appendix E).

### **Action steps:**

- Conduct a comprehensive mapping of local and regional organizations serving Black youth to identify key
- Leverage the specialized knowledge and resources of community partners to design the program and service offerings, and the delivery methods. This could include guest speakers, job shadowing opportunities, or co-facilitated workshops. Initiate formal partnership agreements that outline roles, responsibilities, and mutual benefits.
- Convene regular meetings or forums that bring together the various community partners working in this space. Encourage the sharing of best practices, identification of gaps, and collaborative problem-solving around supporting Black youth experiencing homelessness.
- Work with community organizations to develop capacities, opportunities and training for Black youth once they have transitioned out of housing support to independent living.
- Ensure youth voices are represented in the development and implementation of these partnerships.

### **Community Example:**

NACCA hosts many programs for youth wellness and empowerment.

Black Talents helps prepare youth for career success through mentorship programs and workshops.

NABC provides networking, research, and knowledge mobilization for Black leaders.

YRAACC hosts annual Black History Month events.

## • **Address Systemic Barriers Specific to Black Experiences**

Tailored supports are needed to address the housing barriers specific to Black youth, including discrimination, ageism, and anti-Black racism in the housing market. Programs should be designed to acknowledge and mitigate these challenges, ensuring that interventions are culturally sensitive and responsive to Black youth's lived experiences.

### Action steps:

- Provide training and resources on recognizing and addressing anti-Black bias and racism for staff, community partners and youth participants.
- Advocate for policy reforms that consider the unique challenges of under housing and systemic barriers that disproportionately affect Black families, focusing on realistic and inclusive housing policies.

### Community Example:

ANCHOR provides anti-Black racism training for organization leaders and employees.

## • Promote Holistic Healthcare and Integrated Treatment Service

Providing holistic healthcare support is critical for enabling youth to fully utilize and benefit from the transitional housing program. Integrating addiction and substance abuse treatment programs within the transitional housing facility is essential for addressing underlying issues contributing to homelessness and promoting holistic well-being. This integrated approach aligns with the culturally affirming and trauma-informed approach advocated for throughout the recommendations.

### Action steps:

- Provide on-site mental health counseling, including individual and group therapy sessions with Black counsellors who are trained in trauma-informed care and culturally responsive practices.
- Develop individualized treatment plans that address the unique needs and circumstances of each youth participant.
- Provide access to a range of evidence-based treatment modalities, including individual and group therapy, medication-assisted treatment, and peer support. Closely coordinate addiction treatment with other wraparound services to support long-term stability and well-being.

### Community Example:

SAPACCY by CAMH provides support and counselling to African and Caribbean Canadian youth who are dealing with problem substance use and mental health concerns.

NACCA provides culturally representative and sensitive mental health supports.

## • Support Family Reconnection

Reestablishing positive familial relationships, when feasible, can provide crucial support networks for homeless Black youth and facilitate their transition to stable housing. Interventions should prioritize youth safety and well-being while promoting family reunification where appropriate. Existing organizations using models of culturally specific family interventions focusing on Black families can be partnered with.



### Action steps:

- Conduct thorough assessments to determine the feasibility and appropriateness of family reconnection for each youth.
- Provide family mediation and counseling services to address past conflicts and rebuild trust through partnering with other organizations or building expertise. Offer parenting education and support to help families develop healthy, supportive dynamics.
- Gradually facilitate supervised visits and reunification, with ongoing monitoring and adjustment as needed. Ensure youth maintain agency and autonomy in the family reconnection process.

### Community Example:

The African, Caribbean, Black Family Group Conferencing Project (ABC-FGC) is a culturally adapted model that is an alternative to court processes for families engaged in the child welfare system.

CAFCAN provides trauma informed programs for Black families.

## • Provide Employment, Financial Literacy, and Life Skills Training

Respondents emphasize the importance of equipping Black youth in transitional housing with the skills and resources needed for financial autonomy and successful transition to independent living. This includes access to employment, financial literacy, and comprehensive life skills development.

### Action steps:

- Establish partnerships with local employers, workforce development programs, and entrepreneurship incubators.
- Offer job readiness training, resume building, interview preparation, and connections to internships and job opportunities.
- Encourage youth to explore entrepreneurial paths and support the development of their business ideas.
- Provide training for employable skills, such as data science, hairdressing, baking, and construction, based on interests of the youth.
- Provide financial education on budgeting, banking, credit management, and personal finance to help Black youth manage financial stressors and avoid the trap of homelessness due to economic reasons.
- Organize regular meetings and workshops focusing on empowerment, rights awareness, and personal development, tailored to the challenges Black youth face in society.

### Community Example:

Eva's Independent Living Program (ILP) teaches classes for cooking, nutrition, house management, interpersonal skills, and financial literacy for all residents in its youth housing programs.

NACCA provides financial literacy programs based on Afrocentric models.

YRDSB has mentorship programs for Black youth that include leadership training, career exploration, skill development, and financial literacy.

## • Establish a Research and Evaluation Framework

A well-established evaluation framework can support with the collection of both process and outcomes related data which can provide insights on how well the program is functioning and achieving its desired outcomes. The evaluation framework can help outline the theory of change and narrate a story about the program's current and future steps. Well-organized data can provide valuable insights into which program elements are working well, where challenges persist, and how to best allocate resources to support youth participants.

### Action steps:

- Establish partnerships. Invest in a user-friendly, centralized data platform that can capture a wide range of participant data, including demographic information, attendance, academic progress, skill development, and post-program outcomes. Partnerships with local employers, workforce development programs, and entrepreneurship incubators.
- Leverage the collected data to conduct more robust, data-driven program evaluations on a recurring basis. Use these evaluations to assess the program's overall effectiveness and make evidence-based adjustments to strategy, design, and service delivery.

## Appendix A: Screening Survey

Thank you so much for your interest in the Black Youth Housing Project. This research initiative is led by LogicalOutcomes on behalf of 360°kids, a non-profit organization in York Region, that supports youth experiencing housing insecurity to achieve a state of safety and stability.

The purpose of the study is to draw on the experiences of both Black youth who previously or are currently navigating homelessness, and service providers who have supported Black youth under these circumstances, to inform the development of a culturally relevant transitional home. Each participant will receive a \$40 VISA gift card or \$40 payment via cash or e-transfer, in person or via mail, at the completion of a focus group or individual interview.

Your responses to this brief survey will help us understand a bit about yourself and your experiences and determine if you are eligible to participate in the study. Your responses will be kept private and confidential and will only be used for the purposes of research.

We understand that it may be difficult to talk about these experiences. Your well-being is important to us, so please only answer these questions if you feel comfortable doing so.

### QUESTIONS FOR YOUTH

- 1) Are you interested in participating in the Black Youth Housing Project?
  - a. Yes
  - b. No
- 2) Have you experienced housing instability or homelessness in Ontario at any point in the last 5 years (2018–2023)?
  - a. Yes
  - b. No
- 3) What is your date of birth? (Day/Month/Year)
- 4) How would you describe your racial or ethnic identity? Choose all that apply.
  - a. Indigenous
  - b. Asian – East (e.g., China, Japan, Korea)
  - c. Asia – South (e.g., Indian, Pakistani, Sri Lankan)
  - d. Asia – Southeast (e.g., Cambodia, Philippines, Vietnam)
  - e. Black – African (e.g., Ghana, Kenya, Somalia)
  - f. Black – North American (e.g., Canada, USA)
  - g. Black – Caribbean (e.g., Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago)
  - h. Latin American (e.g., Argentina, Chile, Costa Rica)
  - i. Indian-Caribbean (e.g., Guyana with origins in India)
  - j. Middle Eastern (e.g., Egypt, Iran, Lebanon, Armenia)
  - k. White – North American (e.g., Canada, USA)

l. White – European (e.g., England, Greece, Italy, Portugal)

m. Prefer to self-describe: \_\_\_\_\_

n. Prefer not to answer

5) How would you describe your gender identity? (We understand that labels might not fit everyone perfectly. Please choose the option that you feel most comfortable with.)

a. Female

b. Male

c. Transgender

d. Non-binary

e. Prefer to self-describe: \_\_\_\_\_

f. Prefer not to answer

6) What is your highest level of education achieved?

a. Elementary (Kindergarten to Grade 8)

b. Highschool (Grade 9 to 12)

c. Professional Certificate

d. College (Diploma)

e. University (Undergraduate/Graduate Degree)

7) Have you ever had experiences navigating the child welfare/protection system in Ontario?

a. Yes

b. No

c. Prefer not to answer

8) How long have/were you experiencing housing instability or homelessness?

a. Under 1 year

b. 1-2 years

c. 3-4 years

d. 5 years +

e. 10 years +

9) When experiencing housing precarity and/or homelessness what region did you primarily navigate?

a. York Region

b. Peel Region

c. Etobicoke

d. Toronto

e. Halton

f. Durham Region

g. Other \_\_\_\_\_

10) While experiencing homelessness and/or housing insecurity, did you access any support services? (click all that apply)

a. Youth homeless shelter

b. Transitional home

c. Child Welfare/Children's Aid Society



- d. Family/friends
- e. Other: \_\_\_\_\_

11) Are you comfortable with us contacting you for a one-on-one interview and/or focus group involving other Black youth who have experienced housing instability and/or homelessness?

- a. Yes
- b. No

12) (If yes to #11) Please share an email or phone number where we can follow-up with you.

### **To be included upon close of survey:**

Questions about the Research? If you have questions about the research in general or about your role in this study, please feel free to contact Neil Price. His confidential telephone is 647-526-2684 and his email is [neil@logicaloutcomes.net](mailto:neil@logicaloutcomes.net)

Thank you for reaching out and completing the survey. We will be in touch with you soon.

### **QUESTIONS FOR SERVICE PROVIDERS**

1) Are you interested in participating in this survey?

- a. Yes
- b. No

2) In the last 5 years (2018-2023), have you worked with Black youth experiencing housing instability or homelessness in Ontario?

- a. Yes, I have.
- b. No, I have not.

3) (If yes to #1) How long did you work with Black youth experiencing housing instability or homelessness in Ontario?

- a. Less than 1 year
- b. 1 year
- c. 2 years
- d. 3 years
- e. 4 years
- f. 5 years+
- g. 10 years+
- h. 20 years+

4) Are you currently working in a role where you are supporting Black youth experiencing housing instability or homelessness in Ontario?

- a. Yes
- b. No

5) (If, yes to #3) Which of the following best describes your current role or occupation?

- a. Medical Doctor
- b. Nurse
- c. Youth Worker
- d. Case Worker
- e. Social Worker
- f. Mental Health Practitioner
- g. Other (please specify)

6) (If, no to #3) Which of the following best describes your previous role or occupation?

- a. Medical Doctor
- b. Nurse
- c. Youth Worker
- d. Case Worker
- e. Social Worker
- f. Mental Health Practitioner
- g. Other \_\_\_\_\_

7) In what region did/does your practice primarily occur?

- a. York Region
- b. Peel Region
- c. Etobicoke
- d. Toronto
- e. Halton
- f. Durham Region
- g. Other \_\_\_\_\_

8) What is your educational discipline?

- a. Medicine
- b. Nursing
- c. Child and Youth Work
- d. Social Work
- e. Other:\_\_\_\_\_

9) What is your highest level of education obtained?

- a. High school diploma
- b. College diploma
- c. Undergraduate degree
- d. Graduate degree (masters)
- e. Doctorate
- f. Other:\_\_\_\_\_

10) How would you describe your racial or ethnic identity?

- a. Indigenous
- b. Asian – East (e.g., China, Japan, Korea)
- c. Asia – South (e.g., Indian, Pakistani, Sri Lankan)
- d. Asia – Southeast (e.g., Cambodia, Philippines, Vietnam)
- e. Black – African (e.g., Ghana, Kenya, Somalia)
- f. Black – North American (e.g., Canada, USA)
- g. Black – Caribbean (e.g., Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago)
- h. Latin American (e.g., Argentina, Chile, Costa Rica)
- i. Indian-Caribbean (e.g., Guyana with origins in India)
- j. Middle Eastern (e.g., Egypt, Iran, Lebanon, Armenia)
- k. White – North American (e.g., Canada, USA)
- e. White – European (e.g., England, Greece, Italy, Portugal)
- m. Prefer to self-describe: \_\_\_\_\_
- n. Prefer not to answer

11. How would you describe your gender identity? (We understand that labels might not fit everyone perfectly. Please choose the option that you feel most comfortable with.)

- a. Female
- b. Male
- c. Transgender
- d. Non-binary
- e. Prefer to self-describe: \_\_\_\_\_
- Prefer not to answer

12) Are you comfortable with us contacting you for an individual interview and/or focus group with other service providers?

- a. Yes
- B. No

13) (If yes to #12), please enter share an email or phone number where we can follow-up with you.

**To be included upon close of survey:**

Questions about the Research? If you have questions about the research in general or about your role in this study, please feel free to contact Neil Price. His confidential telephone is 647-526-2684 and his email is [neil@logicaloutcomes.net](mailto:neil@logicaloutcomes.net)

Thank you for reaching out and completing the survey. We will be in touch with you soon.

## Appendix B: Interview & Focus Group Protocol

Thank you so much for agreeing to participate in our interview/focus group. This research initiative is funded by 360°kids, a non-profit organization in the York region, who aims to support youth experiencing housing insecurity to achieve a state of safety and stability. The purpose of the study is to draw on the experiences of both Black youth who previously or are currently navigating homelessness and service providers who have supported Black youth under these circumstances to inform the development of a culturally relevant transitional home. Your responses will directly shape the recommendations for this designated housing initiative by 360°kids.

Before agreeing to participate in this study, it is important that you are informed about the purpose, procedures, benefits, and risks of your involvement. I just want to take a moment to ask if you had an opportunity to review the consent form and if you had any questions or concerns? Your feedback is important to us, however, please note that you get to decide how much or how little you choose to share. During the interview, you may feel uncomfortable discussing your experiences navigating homelessness. Please feel free to share only what you feel comfortable with. You do not have to answer any questions that make you upset and can end the interview at any point. If you withdraw, the research team will destroy your information at your request at any point before January 30th, 2024.

Your participation in this study will not change your relationship with 360°kids or the organization you are working with. Your participation will also remain completely private. We will not link your name to the questionnaire or your interview responses. All participants are assigned an ID code for the questionnaire and interview(s) that corresponds to your name and contact information in a separate codebook. This confidentiality will only be broken if we have reason to believe that you are likely to harm yourself, another person, or that a child under the age of 18 is being abused or neglected.

Lastly, each participant will receive a \$40 VISA gift card or \$40 payment via cash or e-transfer, in person or via mail, at the completion of a focus group or individual interview.

Did you have any question or concerns?

Okay great, I will officially start the recording. <start recording>

Before we begin, I just wanted to confirm that I have reviewed the consent form to your satisfaction and that you are voluntarily agreeing to take part in the study.

### FOR YOUTH

- 1) I'm so grateful to have you here with me today. Could you share what piqued your interest in our research project?



2) I'd like to understand your experiences with housing better, and I know some topics can be difficult to talk about. Could you share some factors which led to you experiencing housing instability or homelessness?

3) I understand that everyone's experience with housing is unique, and everyone has different experiences with different types of housing supports. Could you share what type of housing supports you've received (e.g., shelters)?

a. How did you receive access to these housing support(s)? (Try and have them be specific towards what type of housing it was)

b. How long were you there?

c. Were there any aspects of your housing support you found helpful?

d. What kinds of challenges have you experienced with these housing models?

i. In your opinion, how might these challenges be avoided or alleviated?

e. Were there any other housing services you utilized? If so, could you tell me a bit about them?

4) When your services were complete, where did you transition to? (If it was a transition home, skip to Q5, if not, go to Q6)

5) For those who experienced transitional housing, could you describe your general experiences receiving services?

a. What kinds of supports were helpful to you?

b. Were there any specific activities and/or supports that improved your readiness for independent living? Why or why not?? (I.e. knowledge, skills, employment, counselling, time etc.)

6) For those who have not lived in a transitional housing program, what types of services and/or supports do you feel would be helpful for you in gaining stability and security living independently?

a. What life skills would you be interested in OR do you feel are important?

b. What education and practical training do you feel are important?

7) If you imagine a transitional residence that feels right for you, what would that space look like? What would you want to tell the people creating this space?

a. What elements would it include?

b. What are some looks, sounds, smells that would make the space feel positive and inviting for you?

c. What is the maximum amount of people you'd be comfortable sharing this space with?

d. How would you feel about co-ed living?

8) Throughout your time receiving housing supports, were there any culturally specific interventions or programming offered to you as a Black youth experiencing homelessness? If so, could you please tell me more?

- a. What went well? Were there any activities that resonated with you the most?
  - b. How could these programs be improved?
- If you were not offered any culturally relevant services, what would a culturally relevant program look like to you?

9) That brings us to the end of our discussion. Is there anything we haven't touched on that you/anyone would like to share?

Thank you for your insights. I've added some resources in the chat. Feel free to access them if you need support after our interview.

Marcie Pekar is the contact person for 360°kids counselling services. Her contact is below:  
[marcie.pekar@360kids.ca](mailto:marcie.pekar@360kids.ca)  
437-423-5947

The Community Service Hub at Black Health Alliance provides various resources to support the Black community. <https://blackhealthalliance.ca/resources/community/>

Toronto for All: Anti-Black Racism & Mental Health Resources. <https://www.toronto.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/96a4-t4a-abr-bmh-resources.pdf>

Crisis Resources provided by CAMH. <https://www.camh.ca/en/health-info/crisis-resources>

## FOR SERVICE PROVIDER

1) Could you tell me a bit about your current role, as well as any previous experiences you might have working with youth experiencing housing instability and/or homelessness?

- a. What motivated you to join and continue to work in this field?
- b. What has been your general experience working in this role?

2) In your experience, what are some factors driving housing instability and/or homelessness for youth?

- a. How are youth accessing housing supports? What are the various pathways to receiving services?
- b. Could you share any recurring themes or patterns you have observed in your interactions with youth?

3) In your experience, are there any unique experiences which drive Black youth to housing instability and/or homelessness? If so, could you please explain?

4) In your experience, what are some practices and/or resources you have noticed to be effective in meeting the needs of youth experiencing homelessness?

a. What are some unique practices and/or resources you have noticed to be effective supporting the needs of Black youth experiencing housing instability and/or homelessness?

5) What are some challenges and/or barriers encountered in your role(s) supporting youth experiencing housing instability and/or homelessness?

a. What are unique barriers and challenges you encounter in your role supporting Black youth experiencing homelessness?

6) What are some specific processes that support you in operating a successful transitional housing program? (e.g., programming, staffing, resources)

In your experience, what are some

a. In your experience, what are some enablers that successfully move youth from transitional housing to independent living? (e.g., resources, skillsets and collaborators)

b. What are some key enablers for Black youth transitioning from housing to independent living?

c. What are noticeable gaps in the resources, skillsets, collaborators, or services available?

d. Are there any notable gaps for Black youth experiencing housing instability and/or homelessness?

7) In your experience what activities and strategies have helped to build trust with the Black youth experiencing homelessness?

Are you aware of any services that are culturally responsive and affirming for Black youth?

8) What advice would you recommend for a new transitional housing program aim at support Black youth experiencing homelessness?

9) We've reached the end of our interview. Is there anything else you'd like to share that wasn't captured in the conversation so far?

Thank you for your insights. I've added some resources in the chat. Feel free to access them if you need support after our interview.

Marcie Pekar is the contact person for 360°kids counselling services. Her contact is below:

[marcie.pekar@360kids.ca](mailto:marcie.pekar@360kids.ca)

437-423-5947

The Community Service Hub at Black Health Alliance provides various resources to support the Black community. <https://blackhealthalliance.ca/resources/community/>

Toronto for All: Anti-Black Racism & Mental Health Resources. <https://www.toronto.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/96a4-t4a-abr-bmh-resources.pdf>

Crisis Resources provided by CAMH. <https://www.camh.ca/en/health-info/crisis-resources>

## Appendix C: Demographic Tables

Table 1: Characteristics of Youth Participants Interviewed (N=23)

Participant Characteristics	Percentage/Average
<b>Demographic</b>	
Age	37 (range: 23, 58)
Gender	
Female	50% (n=10)
Male	50% (n=10)
Race/Ethnicity (not mutually exclusive)	
Black – African (e.g. Ghana, Kenya, Somalia)	37% (n=7)
Black – North American (e.g. Canada, USA)	26% (n=5)
Black – Caribbean (e.g. Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago)	21% (n=4)
Black – UK	5% (n=1)
Asian – South (e.g. India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka)	5% (n=1)
Asian – Southeast (e.g. Cambodia, Philippines, Vietnam)	5% (n=1)
White – North American (e.g. Canada, USA)	5% (n=1)
Primary Region of Homelessness	
York	10% (n=2)
Toronto	45% (n=9)
Peel	45% (n=9)
Highest Level of Education	
College diploma	15% (n=3)
Undergraduate degree	50% (n=10)
Graduate degree	30% (n=6)
Doctorate	5% (n=1)



Table 2: Characteristics of Service Provider Participants Interviewed (N=20)

Participant Characteristics	Percentage/Average
<b>Demographic</b>	
Age	25 (range: 21, 28)
Gender	
Female	39% (n=9)
Male	61% (n=14)
Race/Ethnicity (not mutually exclusive)	
Black – African (e.g. Ghana, Kenya, Somalia)	57% (n=13)
Black – North American (e.g. Canada, USA)	30% (n=7)
Black – Caribbean (e.g. Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago)	30% (n=7)
Primary Region of Homelessness	
York	57% (n=13)
Toronto	30% (n=7)
Peel	9% (n=2)
Halton	4% (n=1)
Highest Level of Education	
High school diploma	17% (n=4)
College diploma	17% (n=4)
Undergraduate degree	9% (n=2)
Graduate degree	31% (n=7)

## Appendix D: Themes, Key Concepts, and Sample Quotes

### Factors Driving Housing Instability

Themes	Key Concepts/Ideas	Sample Quotes
Anti-Black racism	Discriminatory experiences, including structural and systemic racism, and its impact on day-to-day life.	<p>"Sometimes racists are one of the major problems, so the temperament and the anger should be controlled. Like the psychologist or something, she try to calm them down, tell them what to do at the right time." – Youth interview</p> <p>"Anyways, so I once overheard a youth speaking to a staff about their position at the FreshCo in terms of racism and being excluded, et cetera. He described that the manager at the FreshCo, the grocery store kept critiquing his walk and his hair as an issue with being on the job. What is it about his walk that the manager didn't like? What is it about his hair, which was actually, I believe, locked or twist? This is just emphasizing what Jacqui shared in terms of racism is huge. I've said to many of the young people when we talk about what the issues are with finding a job like, "Maybe you'll have to leave Brampton." You know what I mean? Even as a parent with Black youth, I tell my husband, "I don't think Brampton is a place for them. I don't see how they're going to survive here." We're vastly outnumbered and my children will not get a job at</p>

Themes	Key Concepts/Ideas	Sample Quotes
		<p>Starbucks. They will not get a job at Tim Hortons. They'll not get a job at Walmart.</p> <p>It just does not represent the multicultural...that we know. A lot of the more, I want to say for lack of a better expression, archaic racial issues we already faced some 30 years ago, because I'm more mature staff here and I've been in the field for about 27 years. Now I'm seeing things here in Brampton that I didn't even see in Toronto when I was working in my 20s and my 30s. I'm seeing things in Brampton that I never experienced as a Black female in Canada, which is a bit bizarre. We've really gone backwards." — Service provider</p>
Parent and child conflict	Familial discord — (mental health, behaviour, criminal behaviours) and misalignment of values	<p>"I think parental pressure is actually one unique thing about the Blacks because the truth is white folks, the parents are more liberal than [chuckles] the Black folks. I didn't know, but that's what I've seen and how I felt over the years because a lot of the Black youth leave the house because their values do not align with their parents and they become uncomfortable in the house. I think that's one factor that drives the Black youth off their homes to becoming homeless" — Service provider</p>

Themes	Key Concepts/Ideas	Sample Quotes
The need/want for independence	Longing for independence/freedom from parental rules, however lacking an understanding of the complexities in owning/maintaining housing.	<p>"I don't really want to make it look like I'm putting more burden on my family, so I just have to leave. It's just like that. I just want to be independent, so it shouldn't be like I'm causing more burden to my family." – Youth</p> <p>"I think there's another side to it that sometimes gets missed. I think Alyssa started to mention it. A lot of times youth are homeless because of pride, because of stubbornness, because of self-entitlement, and also due to a lot of ignorance. I had a youth who was upset with her mom and came to see me and referred to me and said, "I want to leave home." I said, "Okay." She was 17 at the time. I said, "What kind of accommodation would you be looking for?" She says, "Oh, a townhouse." I said, "Okay, fine. How many bedrooms?" She said, "Three bedrooms, three bathrooms, blah, blah, blah." I said to her, "What's your budget?" She was like, "Zero." She's not on no OW, she's not getting pocket money. Zero, but she wants this townhouse. That level of ignorance is so concerning to me. These are all, I feel real driving factors, which I think sometimes are not addressed and are not really looked at but are really important to focus on at some point." — Service Provider</p>



Themes	Key Concepts/Ideas	Sample Quotes
		<p>“First, is a test for independence. I think a lot of youths want to be independent and then without proper planning. You see that a lot of them just leave the house. They want to be on their own. At the end of the day, they miss a whole lot of steps, and they just lose everything and there is nothing else they could do other than coming down to a homeless center. Secondly, I also think it's parental pressure. We have a lot of youth who left the house on their own because their values do not align with the values of their family, so to speak. We have issues with people who left the house because of their sexual orientation or their spiritual orientation. There are some youths who also left the house because their academic orientation does not align with the parent orientation.</p> <p>You see these things make youths elope, run away from the house, and seek for being in the homeless center. That's another factor. Another factor is unforeseen circumstances on youth. Of course, they become orphans at an age where they're unable to take care of themselves, unable to sustain the family's business, at the end of the day, because there is no adult tutorage, there is no parental tutorage, they end up in homelessness.”</p> <p>— Service provider</p>

Themes	Key Concepts/Ideas	Sample Quotes
Financial Issues/Cost of Living / Unemployment	Economic hardship, especially high housing costs, increasing cost of living and job insecurity in the region, contributes to homelessness.	<p>"I would say the cost of housing is honestly a number one thing that impacts my housing insecurity. I think that it's really hard to find a place that's comfortable, that's central in terms of transportation. Also living with roommates nowadays you can only really afford partial living, where you would have to split rent and share with other people. Not everyone is like-minded and I think living with other people could be really hard." – Youth</p> <p>"Poverty is one of the major or economic things or one of the major factors that cause a lot of youths to be homeless. Some of them are products of families that parents probably lost their jobs, can't afford to take care of them and feed them, clothe them." – Service Provider</p>
Loss of family/parents	Loss of the family's breadwinner. This can include one or both parents. Youth may have to move in with a relative, often causing compatibility issues leading to homelessness, or may not have any sources of support – financial or social- to keep their house, leading to homelessness	<p>"The factors that makes me experience homelessness was because I lost my parents at a younger age. My aunties, my uncles, they fought to just get everything my father had just to take over everything from us because I have a younger one, we are just two. My parent had us just two. My family just stood up to fight to get everything they wanted. Since I was too young to, let me just say, report this thing to the police or let me just go to court, I was too young for that, so I had to stay on the streets for many times." – Youth</p>

Themes	Key Concepts/Ideas	Sample Quotes
Mental Health	Youth can have mental health issues which is often misunderstood, or the family does not have the needed support to care for the youth at home.	<p>"Sometimes because of a person's mental health and needing a certain care, or maybe they're not taking their medication, maybe that becomes a factor, that they need some support that they're not able to receive at home. Mental health is a factor. There is the family breakdown issues around communication or safety." – Service Provider</p> <p>My experience working with Black youth so far, I've just been noticing that a lot of them have experienced trauma, have experienced different social transitioning, and really need support, need people.</p> <p>Also just flexibility, compassion. I think compassion is a huge part of supporting youth, the Black Youth, and the mental health. Then also destigmatizing mental health because I've been finding that for BIPOC youth, mental health can be very highly stigmatized especially for male Black youth too. That's it."– Service provider</p> <p>"First is mental services. A whole lot is done to improve on the mental health of these youth. I think that's basically one resource that actually keeps them going. Everyone in the youth homeless centre has one mental issue or the other. Some of them are traumatized, some of them are depressed, some of them, they are not really coming in, they are not happy coming in. We have to do a lot of mental work, like counseling, group activities, just to first of all</p>

Themes	Key Concepts/Ideas	Sample Quotes
		make them mentally fit and happy. That's one thing I think works best for them" — Service provider

## Experiences of Black Youth in Housing Support

Themes	Key Concepts/Ideas	Sample Quotes
<p>Accessing Housing Support (Religious institutions, friends, social workers, social media)</p>		
Community Assistance	Youth would often access shelter or transitional housing through referrals for friends, religious institutions, social workers and social media	<p>"I first of all went to my local church, to my local pastor. Just had to share some resources. Some people around just shared some resources because they, first of all, gave me somewhere else to stay, but considering the distance from work, I wasn't able to stay because I was always running late to work so they gave me some other resources which were around my work environment." -Youth interview</p> <p>"He (social worker) was the initial person I had contact with when I became homeless." - Youth interview</p>



Themes	Key Concepts/Ideas	Sample Quotes
Challenges experienced in access		
Ineligible for housing support, Inaccessibility, lack of awareness	Some youths were not eligible for housing due to their income. Others could not be provided needed services.	<p>"It was supposed to be somewhere temporary, but expenses keeps coming up, other things kept coming up and as at that time I wasn't eligible for some housing benefits and all that, considering that I was working and I wasn't really-- I wouldn't be taken as a priority case considering the fact that I was working. I think my homelessness was as a result of mismanagement." - Youth</p> <p>"The challenges were they were unable to meet the complex need or my complex need at that moment. I wasn't in a very well stable mental condition. I was battling homelessness at that time, I was battling being broke and having no money, and all that. I needed support, I needed therapy, but they didn't have those services readily available". - Youth</p>
Long wait times		<p>"No, it wasn't right away. I would say it wasn't so easy. I did look for some places online and then I reached out to them, and sometimes there's not enough place in those places. A lot of times you have to be on a waitlist. It wasn't really easy or readily available. I did get into one after I joined a waitlist and submitted my name with them." - Youth</p>

Themes	Key Concepts/Ideas	Sample Quotes
		<p>"I think it was the only shelter available at the time that had any space, so I went there."-Youth</p>
Challenges experienced in Housing Support		
Anti-Black racism	Youth experience systemic racism and discrimination in housing.	<p>"I think they were being quite discriminating. I think it was just specifically to people of color, so I wasn't really comfortable there. I couldn't really be myself. A shelter should be comfortable, a shelter should provide love, and wants, and all that. I really didn't get that from there, except the friends I met there." - Youth</p> <p>"Racism is number one. Systemic racism and the historical systemic racism that has resulted in the high rates of unemployment, low educational attainment, wealth gap for Black Canadians, so those things affect everything else. High rates of criminalization and homelessness, mental illness, substance use disorders, and problematic substance use, all stem from having low wealth."- Service Provider</p>

Themes	Key Concepts/Ideas	Sample Quotes
Lack of privacy and overcrowding	Youth experienced overcrowding in transitional housing and shelters that led to lack of privacy due to shared spaces.	<p>"Yes, I experienced a lot of challenges because I'm the kind of person that loves privacy, but I wasn't given that privacy of my own. I was kind of occupied due to the fact that I stayed in someone's home. A little bit more occupied." – Youth</p> <p>"it's kind of like being congested with a lot of people in it.....I wish a day will come where I'll have my own space in the youth homeless home. That's just one of the challenges." – Youth</p>
Inadequate staff and workers	Inadequate number of staff, especially people of color working with youth.	<p>"I usually got a female social worker. It wasn't until I was in care, and I was transitioning to being 18 that I got like, I would say, my second person of color social worker". – Youth</p> <p>"Not having enough Black therapists to refer people to, Black psych assessment, organizations and services and professionals, employment programs.....That's a big one. That's not having enough culturally related services. Then mainstream or non-Black cultural-focused services not being informed and trained and willing enough to support Black youth when they do engage with them". – Service Provider</p>

Themes	Key Concepts/Ideas	Sample Quotes
Distance from loved ones	Distance from family and loved ones that could improve youths' mental health and/or overall well-being.	"I've experienced distance from my siblings that live with my mom. That's a big challenge for me because I have a good relationship with them and it's saddening to be away from them." - Youth
Lack of trust	There is a general lack of trust for providers because some provide unsafe services that reduces homeless youth's' belief in the system.	<p>"Again, when the youth gain trust, and then I refer them to somebody who doesn't-- or that communicates or provides unsafe service, then it reduces the youth belief in social services in general and reaching out for support". - Service provider</p> <p>"Anything you want to do that the government will assist you, you have to write or sign or tampering it or something." I was scared. I was feeling very intimidated. I was feeling very unsettling. I was just emotionally distressed. I needed somewhere to go to, so I ran back, actually. I was scared. I was just scared of all the writing. I felt the cops were going to catch me and throw me some-- I thought about a lot of things". - Youth</p>
Development of meaningful connections and support		
Friendships and community support experienced in housing	Youth were able to make strong positive friendship connections with people they met in shelters and transitional housing.	"In a way, I would say there was a positive impact, I was able to connect with some lovely souls at the shelter home. I'm still friends with most of them and I visit there sometimes. It was like I said, a shelter, it was a very

Themes	Key Concepts/Ideas	Sample Quotes
		<p>“They [friends] support me emotionally, which I do really appreciate. I think that’s honestly something that’s really important for me not to feel lonely or if I’m feeling down, I always have someone around me that can boost my mood and help me get through this.” – Youth</p>
Supportive staff	Staff were supportive and were able to help youth by providing culturally sensitive programs.	<p>“I want to say, yes. Although the community is very diverse at the same time because our workers are Black and it is a Black program, they look at all the struggles that you may have gone through as a Black person throughout life. It’s like if you had struggles with school and stuff because you’re Black. They’re also very culturally sensitive here and I’ve really noticed that. It’s very culturally sensitive”. – Youth Interview</p>

## Suggestions for transitional housing programs

Transitional housing space	Areas for consideration	Sample Quotes
Physical and Social Environment	<p>Communal space(s) (gym, art room, recreational room, library, dining room)</p> <p>Private spaces</p> <p>Cozy furniture, warm lighting</p>	<p>“To me, I would really say each person could live in maybe a room and a better space. Having stuff privately if you want to.” – Youth</p>



Transition al housing space	Areas for consideration	Sample Quotes
	<p>Basic needs and amenities (food, clothing, healthcare, etc.)</p> <p>Opportunities for social interaction</p>	<p>"I would love a paint room where you could go paint. A games room for the boys and people who love gaming. Like I said, group work brings people together and also a library where you could go read, something like that. I think that's what I would love to see." – Youth</p> <p>"It should also include a better space. Like you having your own privacy.....I just feel outside, the exercise court, the gym, the gym equipment, providing the gym service." – Youth</p>
Services and Programs	<p>Opportunities for employment</p> <p>Preparing for independent living (cooking, cleaning)</p> <p>Mental health support</p> <p>Education/Training</p> <p>Financial literacy (budgeting, saving, money management)</p> <p>Wraparound services</p> <p>Case management</p> <p>Mentorship</p>	<p>"A huge one is navigating paying bills and priorities like that. The budgeting. The budgeting is something we never really had to do on the street. You went to drop-ins to eat and stuff. Being in an apartment and now the water bill's hitting and the groceries hitting. That's something I wish I had learned before." – Youth</p> <p>"Budgeting, saving, financial literacy, money management, credit and debt. Homeownership is something that too many services often miss out on." – Service provider</p>

Transition al housing space	Areas for consideration	Sample Quotes
		<p>"The staff that are trained and then are ongoing training and support supervision to be able to keep them motivated and focused on allowing staff to go out of the shelter and accompany youth to appointments, doctor's appointments, court appointments, school, et cetera. That's a big one that is a hindrance that I've seen in some shelters and some employment programs for sure, and some youth outreach programs as well because it's like, "Okay, you say that you are helping me in that we have a relationship, but then there's some major limits to that." If I'm not comfortable whatsoever to go to this whatever on my own, and your staff can't go with me or connect me to another service or support person that could, then the trust starts to be reduced, and the long-term impact is reduced as well." – Service provider</p>
Culturally Affirming Programming	<p>Empowers a positive sense of identity and culture Professional, diverse staff Recognizes the diversity of the Black experience</p>	<p>"Something that's inclusive. Something that would talk about we as Black people. Something that would encourage Black people to stay off the streets. Something that will encourage Black people to try to find crafts or maybe work around, maybe try to make money from members of their race. [...] Just something that they could use to make money in their</p>

Transition al housing space	Areas for consideration	Sample Quotes
		<p>environment.” – Youth Interview</p> <p>“The programming really recognizes the cultural backgrounds of the individuals and really gives them a sense of ownership over how the program proceeds because they in a sense become not only participants, but also co-creators in a way. I think the programs, for one, for me, was a major part of that experience, and just really focusing on people’s cultural backgrounds. If race could be a very abstract way of articulating that, but yes, race”. – Youth</p> <p>“His lawyer’s like, “I can’t take you, I don’t know what you’re going to do,” and then he’s like, he’s stressing. He is like, “It’s seven days,” and so I was like, “You know what. I have access to a car, let me double check with my boss that the insurance is covered. I got you,” and so me and a staff member went, so I could support him, and then this was his third time in court and at the end of the first day, he’s like, “I’ve never had anyone in my corner, you guys, this means so much to me,” so on his third day, we brought someone else...We were like, “We’re going to let people know that people care about you.” He ended up winning the case. He was really emotional like, yes, it was good.” – Service provider</p>

# Appendix E: Environmental Scan

## Systemic Level Approaches supported by literature

People experiencing chronic homelessness tend to have history of mental and physical health issues, addictions, legal and justice issues, and discrimination (HYR Memo, 2023). Insufficient income, family break down, domestic violence and insufficient supply of housing were listed as contributors to homelessness based on York Region’s 2021 point in time report.



## Chart: Organizations and Types of Programs and Services Offered for Black Youth

	Training and education	Employment opportunities and skills	Mental health services	Addiction and substance use support	Healthcare and healthy living	Family and community support	Financial support	Legal support	Independent living skills	Empowerment + addressing racism
1 Across Boundaries										
2 African, Caribbean, Black Family Group Conferencing										
3 ANCHOR										
4 Aurora Black Community										
5 Black Legal Action Centre										
6 Black Business and Professional Association										
7 Black Women in Motion										
8 Black Talents										
9 Black Ladders										
10 Black Entrepreneurship Alliance										
11 Boomerang Health										
12 Black Youth Helpline										
13 Black Queer Youth Collective										
14 Black Youth York Region										
15 CAFCAN										
16 Family Services York Region										
17 Kinark Child and Family Services										
18 Lumenus Community Services										
19 Markham African Caribbean Canadian Association										
20 Newmarket African Caribbean Canadian Association										
21 Parents of Black Children										
22 SAPACCY (CAMH)										
23 Stepstones Youth Support Services										
24 TAIBU Community Health Centre										
25 YMCA Youth Substance Abuse program										
26 YMCA Black Achievers Mentorship Program (Scarb)										
27 York Region Alliance for African Caribbean Canadians										
28 YRDSB Black Student Excellence										

Note: While the above chart lists organizations in York and Toronto regions, it is not an exhaustive list of all organizations working in these areas and only presents a sample. Other important organizations and services can be noted in other resources such as the York Region Children's Aid Society's resource and service directory for organizations providing services for Black communities.



## Who/What needs to be considered

- Families, agencies representing families
- Cultural groups or agencies with culturally affirming practices embedded in care.
- Enhance capacity of staff and volunteers providing service to those experiencing Black youth
- Funding for programs that support entrepreneurship, direct financial supports
- Partnerships between private sector, training and education institutions, community-based organizations and not for profit sector that supports the many services related areas identified as barriers and or drivers for successful housing solutions
- Commitment to anti-oppressive policies, and policies aimed at reduction of discrimination and stigma in services tailored to youth experiencing homelessness, specifically Black youth.

# Appendix F: Promotional Flyers



BLACK YOUTH HOUSING PROJECT

**CALL FOR RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS**

Have you experienced housing instability or homelessness?

## PURPOSE

This study will explore the experiences of Black youth who have experienced housing instability and homelessness, as well as service providers who have supported Black youth under these circumstances in the Greater Toronto Area. The findings will inform the development of a transitional home in the York Region.

Criteria	We are recruiting African, Caribbean, and/or Black youth aged 16–34, who have experienced homelessness or housing insecurity in the Greater Toronto Area within the last 5 years.
Format	Online or in person 60-minute interview or 90-minute focus group.
Consent	Participants will be compensated \$40 e-Visa or cash.
Consent	If you meet the study eligibility, you will receive an information letter outlining informed consent.

Participation in this study is entirely voluntary. Participants can choose to withdraw at any time or not answer questions

If interested, contact Principal Investigator Neil Price  
blackyouthhousingproject@logicaloutcomes.net

Please do not communicate personal or sensitive information by email.  
This study is managed by LogicalOutcomes, a Canadian non-profit.

Thank you to United Way Greater Toronto and the Government of Canada, through Reaching Home: Canada's Homelessness Strategy for funding this initiative, a project of 360°kids



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# CONTACT US

## EMAIL ADDRESS

[info@360kids.ca](mailto:info@360kids.ca)

## PHONE NUMBER

905-475-6694

## ADDRESS

80F Centurian Drive, Suite #200  
Markham, ON. L3R 8C1

**JUNE 2024**

 **LogicalOutcomes**



**United Way**  
Greater Toronto

This project is funded by  
the Government of Canada.

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