



 **TORONTO
YOUTH**
EQUITY STRATEGY

 **TORONTO**

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TORONTO YOUTH EQUITY STRATEGY: BUILDING RESILIENCE AND SUPPORTIVE SYSTEMS

Notice to Readers:

The Toronto Youth Equity Strategy was developed with contributions from Toronto youth. We have included creative content from youth throughout the report. These creative works are intended to help readers understand the experiences of Toronto youth most vulnerable to involvement in violence and crime.

To ensure their experiences are communicated authentically, language that some readers may find challenging has been included. All creative pieces are noted in italics.

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THE GOOD KID

by Drae Walsh

Dejuan lives in Rexdale. His mother doesn't understand why he doesn't want to move to Finch, their new home where the family received a transfer to. After a lot of resistance, many arguments, and staying at friends house's, Dejuan gave up and went with his mom.

Living in Finch wasn't as bad as he thought, he was playing basketball, making new friends, people liked him. Until a girl from his old block came to visit one of the "Badmen" from Finch. When she said "hi" to Dejaun, the bad manz who were in a street war with the gang from Rex's moved in closer and asked where she knew Dejuan from? She said " he from my old neighborhood Rex" . The "Badmen" didn't like the sound of that and felt like Dejuan was an enemy. They began to trying to intimidate and plot against him.

Leading up to this, Dejuan was on a good track, going to school, playing sports; he wanted to get a athletic scholarship. One day on his way home from basketball practice he was suddenly cornered, surrounded and stabbed in his back.

Dejaun's time spent in the hospital kicked off a war in his neighborhood. When Dejuan came out of the hospital he was afraid for his safety, so he went to the friend who he was trying to stay away from but he knew he would help him. His big homey gave him a gun and a ounce of crack and said "you can't go to war with out money". All Dejuan wanted was to be safe, but if that's what it had to be then that's what he was going to do.

About 3 months later, Dejuan was making money , he had not gone back to school since the attack and was carrying a Glock 40mm. There on the strip he saw the guys that stabbed him but they saw him too and pulled out their guns to finish the job they began with the first attack. Little did they know they underestimated Dejuan who was too quick for all three of them. Dejuan was on the run! But soon after he was caught, not by the enemies, but by the cops. He was then arrested.-----

The good kid!

YOUTH ARTS CONTRIBUTORS

The Toronto Youth Equity Strategy was developed with the contributions of youth involved with youth-led arts groups. The photographs and stories included in this report shed light on some of the complex and diverse experiences of Toronto's youth. The graphic design and logo of the report was also completed by a youth entrepreneur, running his own social enterprise, Corex Media.

More creative contributions can be found on the Toronto Youth Equity Strategy website, including a short film and song (www.toronto.ca/youth). This work demonstrates the wealth of skills and talent many young people possess. The richness of these contributions add further understanding to the complexity of Toronto's youth most vulnerable to involvement in violence and crime.



For more information: www.toronto.ca/youth

WHY A YOUTH EQUITY STRATEGY

The City of Toronto strives to ensure all youth can equally pursue their hopes, dreams and aspirations free of barriers based on race, gender, economic status and geography, and that all youth have the opportunity to meaningfully contribute to Toronto's strength, vitality and governance.

This vision requires comprehensive and collaborative action on the part of all residents to support positive youth development and equitable access to meaningful opportunities, so that current and future generations of Toronto youth may live, learn and thrive in an age-friendly city. This vision is first made possible by recognising that all youth are complex individuals and express themselves in resilient ways.

The Toronto Youth Equity Strategy (TYES) is based on the idea that those youth who are most vulnerable to involvement in serious violence and crime do not have equitable access to the comprehensive supports they need to change their lives for the better. The purpose of this Youth Equity Strategy is to address what the City can do to better serve the needs of this specific population, within its authority to plan, manage, deliver, and advocate.



MYTHS & REALITIES

Myth

Reality

Youth violence only affects some (i.e. low-income) communities.

Youth violence affects all communities. Young people from all communities engage in violence, regardless of race and class.

Many young people will experience some form of violence over the course of their lives and most of these incidents will never be reported and therefore remain absent from official statistics.

More importantly, violence in any community affects the broader society because it contributes to public fear, and contributes to social and economic costs that affect us all.

Youth violence is rampant.

The level of violence involving youth has remained largely stable over the past 30 years; however, the level of gun violence involving youth has increased.

Public fear is a reflection of the reality of violence and crime.

Public fears of youth violence have grown considerably over time while levels of youth violence have remained fairly stable.

Youth are naturally violent.

Although the likelihood of a person engaging in violence peaks during the teenage years and declines with age, it should be emphasized that only a few young people (across all groups) ever engage in serious forms of violence. Most youth never engage in serious forms of violence.

Parents of young people engaging in violence know about their children's violent behaviour but fail to intervene.

According to the International Youth Survey of Toronto students in grades 7-9, less than half (42%) of violent incidents involving youth are ever discovered by adults.

Only accomplices of violence keep a 'code of silence' that protects perpetrators of violence.

Less than half of all youth 15-19 years of age report being victims of violence offenses.

There is a clear difference between a perpetrator of violence and victims of violence.

Most youth who commit acts of violence have also been victims of violence. Victims of bullying at school are more likely to engage in acts of violence. Children who witness violence in the home are more likely to be involved in aggressive behaviour including violence.

Myth

Reality

Family well-being is not a cause of violence.

Children and youth of parents who suffer from depression are more likely to engage in violence.

Children and youth in families that are forced to move frequently, and/or have substantial problems securing housing, are more likely to be involved in violence.

Youth violence is not a social issue; it's an issue of morality and individual faults.

Poverty and social exclusion from opportunities are key causes of youth violence.

The only solution to youth violence is more policing, surveillance and severe punishment.

More than 1 in 3 youth charged with a violent offence (34.7%) are unemployed and not in school.

Among youth charged with violent offences enrolled in school, more than two-thirds are unemployed (67.6%). This is several times higher than the average youth unemployment rate. Clearly, youth unemployment is a serious pre-condition for youth violence.

It is fiscally responsible to police and incarcerate violent offenders instead of applying socio-economic opportunities for youth who are vulnerable to violence.

There are several effective and more affordable alternatives to reducing violence. These include making ultimately cost-effective investments in early childhood development; improving school attachment and educational attainment; providing opportunities for social engagement, employment and career success among low-income youth.

Investing in early childhood well-being, socio-economic opportunities for youth engaged in violence, and social programs that are proven to prevent violence are considerably more cost-effective than policing and incarceration.

The average daily cost of incarcerating a Federal inmate is \$357; the average cost of incarceration for provincial inmates is \$171 per day – either option equates to a substantially high fiscal burden and this does not account for legal fees and the cost of policing.

It is considerably cheaper to apply community-supervision to individuals prosecuted for offences than incarceration. Also, community supervision may be favourable because of the risk that incarceration 'hardens' inmates and further ostracizes them from successfully reintegrating into society once they are released.

PROCESS

The motivation for the Toronto Youth Equity Strategy is the need to take action. Toronto City Council asked City staff to recommend initiatives that the City of Toronto can implement now to support youth most vulnerable to involvement in serious violence and crime. There has been lots of discussion and numerous reports about how to address youth violence, so the City's interest was on developing and implementing a comprehensive, effective action plan rather than starting a whole new conversation.

Instead of a big, widespread consultation, we focused on making good use of all the knowledge that exists in the community, whether in the form of reports from careful studies of the issue, the ideas of people who've been working with youth, or the experiences of youth who deal every day with the root causes of youth violence.

The Toronto Youth Equity Strategy is centred on youth most vulnerable to involvement in serious violence and crime. This means that the Strategy does not address all forms of violence youth face; for example, gender-based violence is also a very serious issue impacting many of Toronto's youth. The City of Toronto needs to do more to address this kind of violence, and our intention is to develop a strategy specific to gender-based violence in the future based on lessons learned from the development and implementation of the Strategy.

To create the TYES, we recruited a panel of community volunteers, made up of 20 members representing neighbourhoods across the City of Toronto. The

External Panel had a balance of male and female membership, ranging from age 15 to 50, with half its members aged 30 or younger. The panel included representation from a variety of youth serving and youth advocacy organizations, and included members with diverse lived experiences. This External Panel worked with us to refine the goals, recommendations, and actions of the Strategy. Along the way, we also talked with key community leaders about the issues, recommendations and actions of the Strategy to make sure there was agreement about the direction we were taking. We also undertook a creative engagement component where youth used photography, video, poetry, song-writing and storytelling to add further understanding to the complexity of Toronto's youth.

We brought together a working group of staff representing the different parts of the municipal government that provide a lot of services and programs for youth. Through this group, we arranged sessions where we talked in greater depth both with City staff who work directly with youth and staff who supervise or manage programs for youth. We talked about the challenges they face in providing services to youth, and what the City can do to better serve the needs of youth, especially those youth who are the most vulnerable to involvement in serious violence and crime.

Using all this input, we identified 28 key issues that the City can act on to address the root causes of youth violence. For each issue, we crafted a broad recommendation for the City to follow, and then we challenged ourselves to commit to actions to fulfill these recommendations.



Pregnant Ghosts

by Faduma Mohamed

I used to believe that my voice merely capsules the sound of pointless matter. Until the day I heard my nonverbal autistic brother speak. That one sentence. In that one breath. For that one moment had the ability to change my life forever. I never heard him say a sentence ever since. My brother is 16 now.

Oddly enough, hearing his voice transformed his years of silence into a novel of words unspoken. I understand what it means to not metaphorically feel like you do not have a voice, with my own experiences of feeling neglected and invisible.

But my metaphorical understanding increased dramatically when I fully understood the literal form of being silenced. I see the frustration that my brother deals with every single time he has to interact with someone.

A few days after my brother turned seven my father left for his flight to Edmonton. Money was low, so low my

parents couldn't possibly hide it from us. The fabricated tale was my father would leave to work and come back with enough money to pay off my tuition fees and maybe even get me my own car. I wonder how many fathers tell their kids that same story? "I'm leaving for you." At first, the calls were every night! As time danced on, phone calls would fade from once a week... once a month... only hear his voice on the answering machine. Now, I forgot his number.

My best friend in high school is conveniently my cousin as well. Her father left her at a young age so when we were young, my dad took his place. In high school, my best friend and I would always play the card games he taught us.

By grade 10, I had already picked out the university I would be attending: University of Toronto for neurology. I knew most of my peers wouldn't make it that far. But I didn't think my best friend would be a part of that group. She was supposed to be with me. But she got pregnant and was forced to drop out. And then, like my father, she became a ghost.

That same year I met a real ghost- my older cousin, who was like a sister, passed away. To this day, I don't know how. I heard a few stories about a drug overdose. My family does not do trauma. Especially trauma sprouted from death. Death is swept under a thousand sewn rugs, like it were a roaches' ash. I was an honour roll student and for the first time in all of my classes I was getting C's. I couldn't think about school. My brother's autism was getting severe, my other brother was getting into trouble with the gangs in the neighbourhood and money was just too low. And it hurt to see my mom desperately trying to make ends meet.

One night, I cried myself to sleep due to a painful combination of hunger and sorrow. I knew I had to find a way out. I used spoken word and theatre for the first time as coping mechanisms and I focused even more in school and got back on the honor roll with an acceptance to University of Toronto.

I will never forget what my sociology professor said in my first year lecture: "Poverty breeds hopelessness." Surely, the socio and economic structures that exist allow people to be born and

raised into suffering due to the inability to sustain life with ease. But what we are born into doesn't shape us. It doesn't have to. Through our pain and suffering, we can find Our voice. And once we combine our voices, somehow, someday, things will change.

Faduma Mohamed is in her third year at the University of Toronto studying English and Women and Gender Studies. With extensive experience in spoken word writing and performing, she hopes to be an established spoken word poet, journalist, actress, and professor.

The Unseen

by **Zakisha Brown**

Frustrated. Confused. Angry. Aloof. She could not believe what had just happened to her. She would never fathom she would meet the devil reincarnated in the flesh. Just like that. He took her soul. Her beautiful essence and life force... vanished. She has contemplated her physical body vanishing alongside her soul. Seven letters. Suicide. "I mean what else am I good for?" She would ask herself on a daily basis. Sitting there pathetically waiting for help but no one was coming. In this neighborhood you were trained to look the other way and only speak when spoken to. You hear blood curdling screams, bangs, gun shots, cries for help... but you keep it moving. Don't even think twice about helping anyone unless you think you're some type of foolish superhero. There is no love on this side of the city. Shoreham was the name of the living purgatory she was in, located in Toronto. "The side where the sun doesn't dare to shine its light," she would often say. Pondering if there really was a heaven and if she killed herself would that be cheating death or was that how the course of her life was supposed to go? All these questions. No Answers. She lay there looking around her torn and messy apartment looking for any sharp item that would end her excruciating mental, spiritual, and physical pain. Until she heard her two year old son. He just woke up. The irony, just as she was about to put herself to sleep. Permanently.

Melissa Wisdom is the name of a family friend who has been a victim of mental and physical abuse from her partner of 3 years. They had a son together. The day she decided she had enough of being his punching bag was the day she thought her life had hope for a fresh start with her son. It was quite the opposite, her life literally flashed in front of her eyes when she told him over the phone, which she thought she would be safe from his reaction. Later that night he came banging on her apartment door in the middle of the night around 11pm, yelling at her to open the door. She woke up, looked into the peep hole and kept the top latch on the door while opening the bottom lock and opening the door halfway. He was furious as he kicked down the door until it broke off and began to choke her as she struggled away from him and tried yelling for help. Of course in this at risk neighborhood no one even bothered to open their door. He grabbed Melissa and began tying her arms and legs with the rope he brought and lifted her inside of the shower and turned the water temperature on extreme heat and left her in there. As she was fighting and screaming for her life, he brought a pot of boiling hot water that was on the oven and dumped it on top of her body. Their son was now startled by the noise and began crying. He ignored the tears of his son and began taking Melissa out of the shower onto the bathroom floor and began punching and kicking her until she was bleeding helplessly while

still screaming for her life. Finally someone came outside of their apartment and asking what was happening, as a woman and a man came inside Melissa's torn up apartment he showed his 9mm gun and they ran to seek help. A few minutes of almost making her unconscious with his vicious attacks, just when you thought it couldn't get worse... it did. He lifted her up and brought her to the balcony of the apartment building and hung her body dangling over threatening to drop her. She lived on the 22nd floor. If you know what it is like to fight for your life knowing there is nothing else left to lose, the only thing you can do is fight or die. She fought knowing her life depended on it. Kicking, Screaming, Punching, she was able to at least distract this 5 foot 7 man that had her life on his shoulder. She was no longer intimidated by him. Her son was all she thought about. The reason to live was that fact that her son Jahsun was standing behind them in their apartment building watching everything. Crying loud enough that every neighbor on that floor came outside of their homes. The same people who had seen this earlier called the police and they were seen coming when Melissa and her ex were on the balcony. He ran. He left Melissa laying there crying, bleeding, exhausted and angry. Shocked that she was still alive she grabbed Jahsun and rocked back in forth until the police came.

Months later, her ex boyfriend was caught. The

police left a note at her door stating “We left him 10 times worse than he left you.”

She needed to express this story to someone since this never made the news; it was only heard on the streets of Shoreham. I am her vessel, my name is Zakisha Brown and she has opened herself up enough to tell me this. She has also left a message for youths who have gone through this or similar situations.

“Never Give up. Don’t be ashamed of what you have gone through. You are NOT alone. Share your story, even if it’s with ONE person. Do not harbour in negative thoughts and most importantly don’t be afraid to seek help, I am still in the process of finding the necessary help and surrounding myself with positive people, one step at a time I find healing through writing. R.I.S.E Poetry has been the main outlet to help me go through life hearing everyone’s strengths and weaknesses. They are just like me. I am just like them. I have am still finding out what loving myself REALLY means. I LOVE MYSELF. I love my son, Jahsun is my motivation. So thank you for allowing me to express myself to you.”

20-year-old Zakisha Brown is more known by her emcee ego, Lady Z. Her lyrics focus on substance and meaning. Her ultimate goal is to spread her message to billions of people who she believes are all worthy to be themselves.





SERVICE PLANNING PRINCIPLES

A service plan approach sets out principles to guide future decisions regarding funding priorities and service improvements. These principles provide direction for the planning, management and delivery of services, initiatives, programs and investments for youth most vulnerable to involvement in serious violence and crime. This Strategy endorses six key service planning principles to guide action on its recommendations and future City decision-making and priority-setting.



SERVICE PLANNING PRINCIPLES

1. EQUITABLE ACCESS AND OUTCOMES

Each action developed under the Toronto Youth Equity Strategy will be implemented with the understanding that not all of Toronto's youth live in the same context of opportunity and support. The Toronto Youth Equity Strategy is committed to developing and delivering City programs in ways that support equitable access and outcomes for marginalized youth.



2. COMPLEXITY OF VULNERABILITY

Each action developed under the Toronto Youth Equity Strategy will be implemented in a way that honours the complex intersections of vulnerability and resiliency in each young person's life.

While we worked to develop the Strategy, we struggled with the words “at risk” and “high risk.” Not only did we find that these labels were often unclear in describing the circumstances that place racialized and low-income youth in positions of vulnerability, but youth have told us repeatedly that these labels further stigmatize and marginalize youth in their communities.

Vulnerability is defined by the City of Toronto as “a service gap, context or situation, not a characteristic or feature of a person.” The City of Toronto believes that people become vulnerable when there are barriers or gaps in overall service delivery.

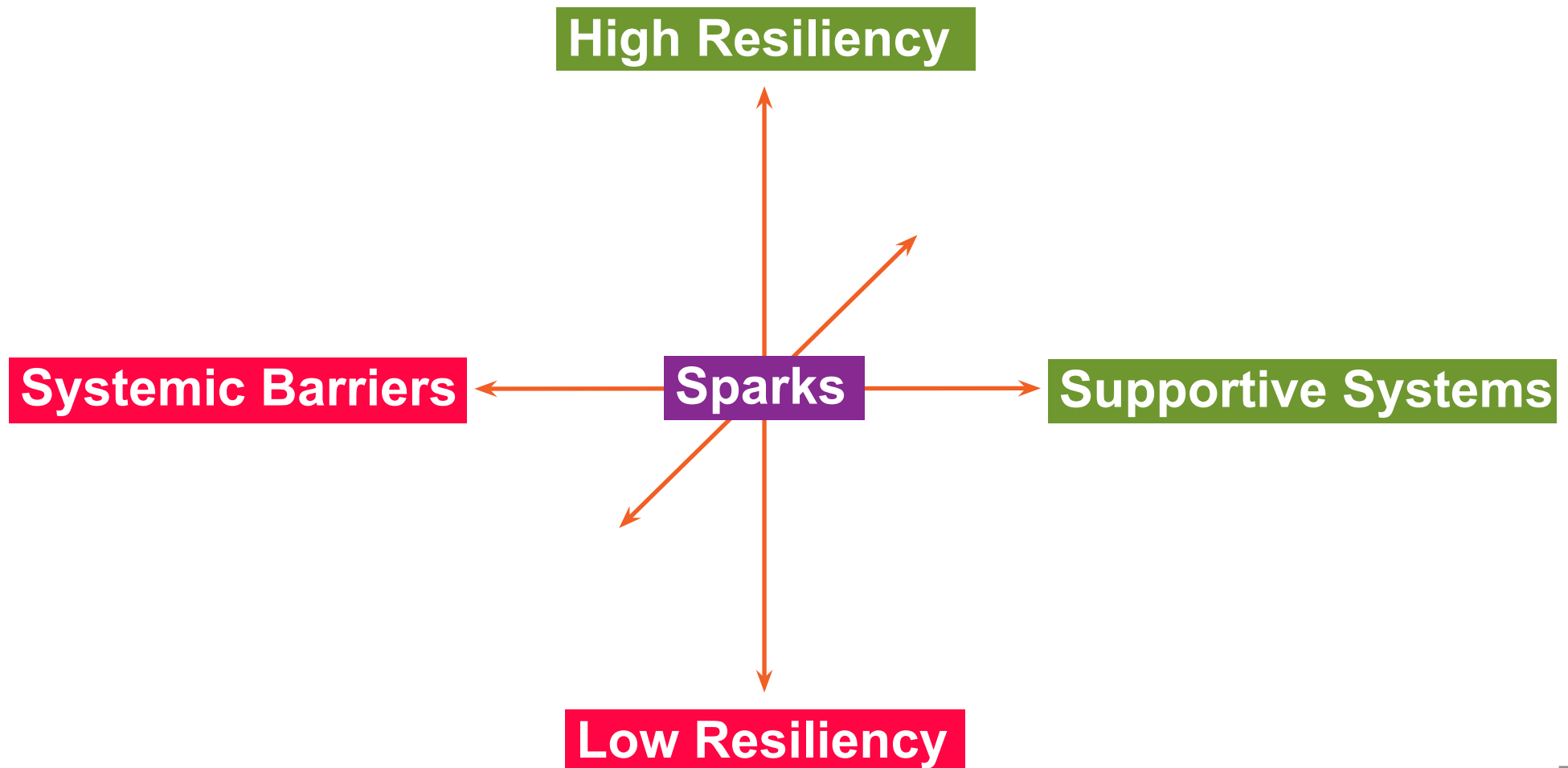
The challenge, though, is that we know that the deep roots of youth violence (such as poverty, racism, issues in the education system, family issues, lack of economic opportunity for youth, issues in the justice system, etc.) interact with young people's vulnerability. As the *Review of the Roots of Youth Violence* report describes, the deep roots “frequently interconnect and intertwine in ways that create devastating cumulative impacts for far too many of our youth.”

TYES is built on the understanding that vulnerability to involvement in serious violence and crime comes from both a mix of these deep roots and the complex interactions between a young person's individual resilience and vulnerabilities.

COMPLEXITY OF VULNERABILITY

This “Vulnerable Youth Spectrum” is intended as a tool for service providers working with youth most vulnerable to involvement in serious violence and crime to assist them to understand that multiple and intersecting factors impact an individual youth. Depending on a young person’s level of resilience, the nature of the systemic barriers she faces may have different impact on her

life than on another young person’s. **Sparks**, events that take place in a young person’s life that can be positive or negative, can either increase or decrease resiliency and systemic barriers for vulnerable youth. The Spectrum helps service providers identify how programs and systems can become supportive and assist youth in building resiliency.



3. A COMMITMENT TO POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

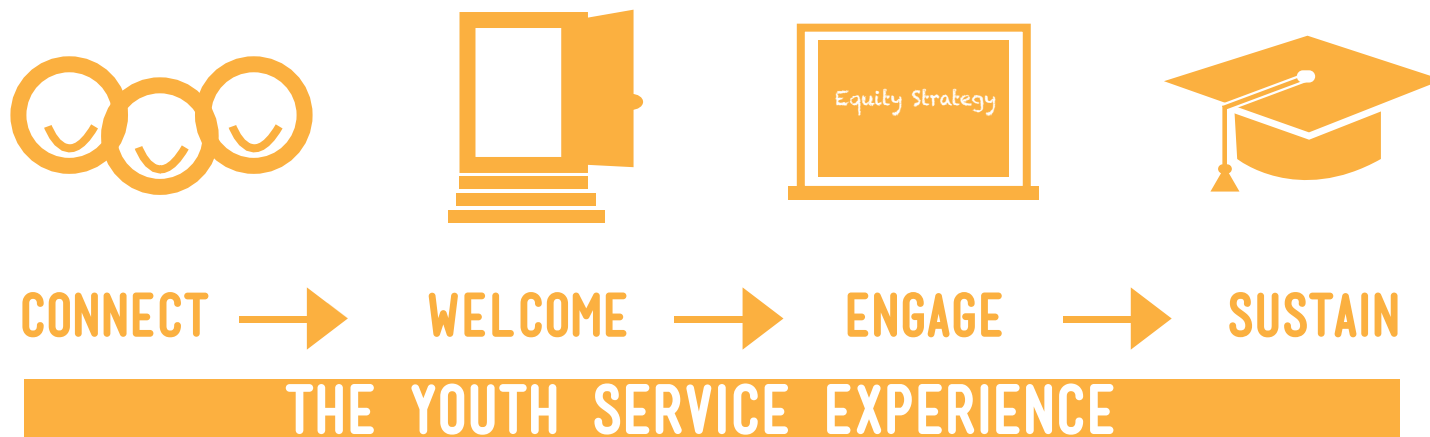
Each action developed within the Toronto Youth Equity Strategy will be implemented in a manner that emphasizes providing services and opportunities to support all young people in developing their own resiliency. Positive Youth Development is an evidenced-based approach that emphasizes the strengths and potential of youth. It also considers the family and environmental context in which youth develop. The Positive Youth Development approach employs four key success factors:

- Strong relationships between youth and non-family adults;
- Youth meaningfully engaged in designing programs and decision-making to positively influence themselves and their communities;
- Intentional skill-building in multiple aspects of a young person's life to achieve physical, emotional, intellectual, psychological and social health, and;
- High expectations for youth.

4. AN AGE - FRIENDLY CITY

In an age-friendly city or community, policies, services and structures related to the physical and social environment are designed to support and enable all residents to live in security, enjoy good health and participate fully in society.

TYES will use a simple tool to understand the service experience of youth throughout their engagement with City programs. The tool considers: how youth **connect** to a program, the **welcome** that youth experience when they arrive at a program, how programs **engage** youth in the delivery of their services, and how the program's impact is **sustained** into the future.



5. COLLABORATIVE ACTION

Each action developed within the Toronto Youth Equity Strategy cannot be addressed by a municipal government alone. While the TYES focuses principally on what the City of Toronto can and should do to address the root causes of youth violence, collaborative action is a core consideration for every action taken in support of the TYES. To be successful, the TYES must connect to the efforts of residents, communities, service providers, businesses, and other governments.

6. ACCOUNTABILITY

Proposing recommendations is the easy work. Taking actions that produce real improvements in the lives of vulnerable Toronto youth is what matters in this Strategy. An accountability and monitoring plan is vital to making these improvements happen.

Each action developed within the Toronto Youth Equity Strategy contains three elements for accountability and monitoring:

- A clearly identified lead program area with responsibility to implement;
- a timeframe for implementation; and
- a measure by which the status of each action will be reported to the public.

These elements mean that responsibilities for action are clearly assigned, a timeframe to get started on the work is clear, and expectations for reporting are well defined. You can find the full details of these elements posted on the TYES's website (www.toronto.ca/youth). They're also listed in the Staff Report for the Toronto Youth Equity Strategy that is presented to City Council.

Born from She-wolves

By Maryama Ahmed

Born from She-wolves,
a baby lamb bred in the hills of Jamaica
From green grass and fresh air,

Cuddled by his mother, she loved him so
but he died on his back.

Caught at the door,
he thought he was all grown up,
a man who could handle his own.
He roams the streets of Toronto
without a purpose he walks alone.

They fled from destruction and war.
To white hills of snow, and blistered hands.
She held his hand for years,
Fed him, clothed him and held him close.

He took his first steps in a small apartment in Palisades
A happy child, fatherless, she was his everything.
With his feet out the door, she tried to pull him back
Begged him to stay, as she watched him walk away;

Her heart broke that night.
She knew she lost him years ago but the tears came anyway.
A single, cold tear, frozen, she held for him.
But he died on his back,
with a gun in his hand.

A knock wakes her from slumber,
Heavy impatient hands bang on her door.

Disoriented she walks...
opening herself to fear, to grief.
They wait as she stands in shock,
Two police officers with horrible news:
'Are you the mother of Jamal Richard maam'?
She nods her heavy head....
And waits for her life to unravel,
For the news to come,
For time to stop forever,
For darkness to overwhelm her.

'Maam your son Jamal Richard died this morning at
3:45 AM'

'He died from a bullet to the head, we're very sorry
for your loss'
She falls to her knees as her world shatters.
She stops breathing as she remembers...
Her baby lamb,
His soft skin,
his smile,
his first step,
his laughter,
his laughter...

Her tears come
and they never stop.

She remembers the days in the park,
His first day of kindergarten,
His mother's day cards,
His drawings,

Her baby who she held for years,
Who died on his back...
With a gun in his hand,
and a bullet to his head,

Her baby who she had now lost,
To an act of violence,
To a world of drugs and alcohol,
To a bullet that sought vengeance.
To a lifestyle,
To gangs,
To men who profited from her babies
death.

She lost him now to place she could
not follow.
And as she cried for her baby boy that
night,
She remembered that he was in god's
hands now.

As her last tear fell to a cold and un-
forgiving world
It begged for a chance to remember...
Her son who was born an innocent
child,
Like all other children happy and free

But he died on his back,
With his dignity nowhere to be found,
and his mother left behind...

Run Come Now by Joel Taylor

Run come now another youth from my area just got shot
down

And it sucks because he was never into drugs or keeping
the company of wicked men

Listen close now that same youth's mother's tears stain the
cement now her last pillar of faith in humanity just broke
down

Come close and take a look now, all the news stations are
swarming around the latest scoop now

An hour later my front door is on City Pulse and CTV the
story of what really happened a stereotypical assumption
and completely false

Their reporters label this honour student gang affiliated
and the memory of him totally berated

And now the end result is more uniformed troopers in un-
marked cars targeting all the young men now

Unjustified searches as they are denied basic human rights
and more are falsely arrested

Both the good and the bad thrown in the back of squad
cars, clean records stained, and youth lost in this system.

**The question is what should be
done now.**

NEXT STEPS

To report back on the strategy, City staff from participating program areas will review implementation of TYES in partnership with community partners. Together with community partners, City staff will refine the Strategy by identifying adjustments, additional actions, further youth populations and/or opportunities for partnerships for the ongoing implementation of the Strategy.

Staff will report on the evaluation of the Strategy and present refinements to Council. Continual monitoring and evaluation by City staff and community partners will keep the Toronto Youth Equity Strategy a living document, one which is responsive to the evolving needs of youth most vulnerable to involvement in serious violence and crime.



INNER PERSPECTIVE - A SHORT VIDEO

“Inner Perspective” is a short video where two people, Sheldon Bourne and Ocean Grange, share their perspectives on the neighbourhoods they are from. The video was created by Matthew Plummer and Kobi Ntiri.

When asked how he would interpret the term ‘high-risk’, Sheldon responded: “I’m in danger, but I’m dangerous as well.” He continued by describing the impact of this negative stigma on youth: “A lot of the skills that these youth have, are amazing... You have supervisors, managers, public speakers... But they’re not provided the opportunity or being seen in that light. Being seen

in a negative light with these tools, you’re only going to use it to your advantage for self, or for a negative outlet.”

Ocean shared her perspective on how to leverage skills to create opportunities for youth: “We are living in a time when there are not that many jobs, especially for young people. We need to try to foster some entrepreneurship in our youth. We have so much talent and opportunity that is flowing through our city.”

The video can be viewed online at: www.toronto.ca/youth



The Toronto Youth Equity Strategy identified 28 issues that were then used to create the recommendations and actions on the following pages.

1. The City of Toronto does not provide significant opportunities for youth most vulnerable to involvement in serious violence and crime to relate their issues and experiences to decision makers.
2. There is lack of advocacy opportunities for youth most vulnerable to involvement in serious violence and crime.
3. Youth, including those most vulnerable to involvement in serious violence and crime, and the people and programs who serve them, are not always aware of existing City services.
4. The youth services sector in the city of Toronto is a constantly changing and complicated network.
5. Youth services delivered by the City of Toronto are often delivered in a fragmented way.
6. There are insufficient mental health and substance use treatment services for youth.
7. Youth in Toronto need assistance to reintegrate into their communities after being incarcerated.
8. Without significant culture shift, systemic racism and other forms of discrimination will continue to limit opportunities for youth most vulnerable to involvement in serious violence and crime.
9. Inequitable access to education further marginalizes youth most vulnerable to involvement in serious violence and crime.
10. There are insufficient programs for youth most vulnerable to involvement in serious violence and crime which build positive socialization life skills.
11. Inequitable access to economic opportunities further marginalizes youth most vulnerable to involvement in serious violence and crime.
12. Inequitable access to housing opportunities further marginalizes youth most vulnerable to involvement in serious violence and crime.
13. Youth in Toronto lack consistent and reliable access to safe spaces.
14. Times of transition are key moments for youth development, but can also coincide with gaps in City services.
15. There are a lack of important formal and informal mentorship opportunities for youth most vulnerable to involvement in serious violence and crime in Toronto.
16. The City of Toronto offers many youth opportunities and programs, but many have significant barriers to entry.
17. Exclusion policies in City services can further marginalize youth. City procedures for dealing with conflicts with youth can lead to criminalization of youth.
18. Youth services need to be open at locations and hours when youth can access them.
19. Criminal record checks are a barrier to employment and volunteer opportunities. Many City programs are not accessible to youth with criminal records.
20. Some youth most vulnerable to involvement in serious violence and crime do not access any of the City's services.

21. Services for youth most vulnerable to involvement in serious violence and crime lack do not sufficiently involve families, peers, and supportive allies.
22. The systemic change needed to address the deep roots of youth violence cannot be created by municipal government alone.
23. Successfully serving youth most vulnerable to involvement in serious violence and crime will require improved collaboration with communities and community service providers.
24. Many City staff are not aware of the issues facing or strategies to successfully engage youth most vulnerable to involvement in serious violence and crime.
25. City staff often first encounter youth most vulnerable to involvement in serious violence and crime because of a confrontation.
26. Direct service to youth most vulnerable to involvement in serious violence and crime often needs to be delivered on a one on one basis to build trust. Understaffing can produce staff burnout. Staff seeking to meet the needs of youth most vulnerable to involvement in serious violence and crime can find themselves in conflict with safety policies, protocols and program design.
27. Youth, including youth most vulnerable to involvement in serious violence and crime, are not meaningfully involved in the assessment of investments in youth well-being.
28. Performance measures that focus on services delivered rather than outcomes achieved creates a service bias in favour of the most easy to serve.



“Sick”

BY FUNMILOLA LAWSON (LOLA)

I'm sick of all the R.I.P's, I'm so Sick of all the R.I.P's
I'm sick of all the R.I.P's, Somebody help me please

Some people live life,
Every day's a fight/
Trying to figure out what I didn't do right/
Wondering who's right
Wondering who's wrong?/
Hear her words in my mind saying be strong/
Reminiscing about them days on the block we'd just
chill by the green box laugh and just talk/
Remember the hard times, remember the good
times/ remember the 'just another day in the hood
times/
Life's a Bitch try and sugar coat that; it's a fact hard
knowing that today could be your last/
so I look back at my past, and I ask why she had to
go it happened too fast/
word I crashed, my heart skipped a couple beats
when I got the phone call that you passed/
Watch how I act,
I guess God said its time cuz' everybody in the
world's got a task/

I'm sick of all the R.I.P's, I'm so Sick of all the R.I.P's
I'm sick of all the R.I.P's, somebody help me please

You gotta' watch who you eat with, sleep with, beef
with, friends too they think you don't see shit/
You gotta' see the signs read it believe it, gotta' put
your gloves on fight hard and beat it/
I don't need this, take this pain away it hurts think-
ing about you and I don't wanna' feel it/ one of the
realest rest in peace I got my deadline too and one
day I'm gonna' meet it/
Its real hard dog tryna' smoke the pain away see the
sunshine but it feels like a rainy day/ and the block
will never be the same/
Every time I pass through I'ma hear your name/
A real G dog, backed down for no one, just like your
bro said, catch one or hold one.
And even though ya'll took the best of me,
I hope you rest in peace.

I'm sick of all the R.I.P's, I'm so Sick of all the R.I.P's
I'm sick of all the R.I.P's, somebody help me please



“Hood Life”

BY FUNMILOLA LAWSON (LOLA)

We minorities living in priority's/
On the streets we stalked by authorities/
And even though we out here tryna' liv da good life/
No matter what we kinda' stuck living da hood life/
X2

Its kinda' sad the way they c us on da tv/
They think we killing, selling drugs, and we needy
But its a different kinda' problem that we see/
If I ain't stay out on da grind who's gonna feed me/
Over policed we always being watched n getting stopped/
They steady waiting for da next dude to get popped/
They wanna c us kill ourselves on our own blocks/
Outline da bodies on da floor wid da white chalk/
Its kinda hard tryna' beat the stats/cuz They delete the facts/
And then repeat the trash/
Its just media this the media that, they fail to recognize the
truth Wikipedia crap/
I'm jus guessing its wuna those hood thingz
The consequences of what living in da hood brings/
They try n label us n call us at risk/
Blown up all the bad But they never see the good things/
We minorities livin in prioritys/
On the streets we stalked by authorities/
And even though we out here tryna liv da good life/
No matter what we kinda stuck livng da hood life/ X2

I'm running outta ways to hide da struggles of my
life/
Ain't nobody in da world gonna tell me its ii/
Its a fight every morning afternoon everynight/
N I write cover da struggles n da pain n da fright/
Where's da light dat' used to shine on dat' spot dat'
made me bright/
Left behind with the happiness behind with polite/
Fuck the fight climb on top with my strength every
might/
And I mite one day forget the pain I have in my
sight/
Remember da good times things used to b ii/
Not tonight cuz' I'm still tryna' live da hood life/
Da good life where everything's about the cheddar
cheddar/
Like money makes everything round here better/
Struggling back then I'm still struggling today the
only difference is this time I'm tryna' change my
ways/
Tryna' change the phase/
Tryna' fight the blaze/
Tryna' eat tomorrow so I'm on da grind today/

RECOMMENDATIONS

1 The City of Toronto will involve vulnerable youth in decision-making when policies and/or programs are being designed that involve youth most vulnerable to involvement in serious violence and crime.

2 The City of Toronto will support the creation of advocacy opportunities for youth most vulnerable to involvement in serious violence and crime.



Youth Voice

ACTIONS

- 1a The City of Toronto will consult, through relevant youth networks, with youth most vulnerable to involvement in serious violence and crime when developing policies, outreach strategies, program planning/development and evaluation relevant to vulnerable youth.
 - 1b The City of Toronto will investigate means to prioritize the voice of youth most vulnerable to involvement in serious violence and crime in the resolution of conflicts over the uses of City-run spaces.
 - 1c The Toronto Public Library will recruit two Teen Advisors to its Board.
 - 1d The City of Toronto will invest in youth artists and arts groups to develop youth sensitive and appropriate communication materials (posters, videos, songs, stories, etc.) that will promote key city programs that serve youth needs (at all levels of vulnerability) and also promote best practices in youth-led collaboration initiatives.
-
- 2a Social Development, Finance and Administration will create a policy table comprised of youth most vulnerable to involvement in serious violence and crime from across the City to make recommendations, review programs, and provide strategic input.

THE CYCLE

By: Dynesti Williams

I replayed the song over and over again getting angrier every time. What is wrong with me?! How could I allow myself to sound like a feminist? I only get one shot at this, and look how long this took me to realize! I could feel my blood boiling. My chest was tightening and each breath became shallower than the last. Paying attention to my body language, I began to cry.

“This is not a *want* for me... this is a need,” I thought to myself. I pulled myself up off of my bed and walked over to the mirror hanging on my wall as I had done several times before. It was time for a pep talk. Looking at my Dynesti, I loved her, but she still had

a lot of work to do. There were people depending on her success for survival. This was never a hobby, or a side job. This was everything. Where I grew up, second chances don't exist.

When I was 7-years-old I discovered that I could sing while belting a gospel song to my family in a small Toronto housing area called Swansea Mews. After my father abandoned my mother, myself, and my younger sister for a woman who didn't like children my mother moved us from Winnipeg back to our city of birth, Toronto. He had told her that he came to love us after a while, but that he loved this woman more. He said he had only married my mom for his landed pa-

pers. In Toronto we stayed in a family shelter for a year before getting into Toronto housing under an emergency situation. My mother was pregnant with my baby brother, and she'd been showing signs of depression.

My mother's eyes started to water when she heard me sing. “My baby's gunna be a star,” she said. She always was and always will be my number one fan. She was becoming sicker, but as she heard me sing I saw her smile like I hadn't seen my mom smile in a long time. My little sister and baby brother clapped for me, and in that moment I knew I could make people happy through my music. At 7-years-

old I decided that this was what I was going to do for the rest of my life, because it had the power to make my mom smile.

My mom had been diagnosed with a severe case of Seasonal Affective Disorder. She'd been through a lot of traumatic experiences in her life both in her home country of Jamaica and since she'd arrived to Canada at age 12. Something about the weather triggered this for her. There were many days were she was an amazing mom teaching us how to cook, clean, read, play, and make wise choices in friends. Other days her anger was terrifying and sometimes abusive, or she would be tired and cry all day long. She had

attempted suicide twice and we were in and out of her care, but when I sang, it always made her happy.

Music became my therapy. I never spoke to people about what was going on. I always tried to be a good girl and do what's right, and I had way too many responsibilities to waste time crying or complaining. I cried through my writing. I vented about the injustices of life through the belting of notes, I shared the complexities of life through the mixing of words in my wordplay. Music was the source of my sanity, and although my mother tried her best to help me with it, we never had the money to sustain it.

When I was 10 my mother scraped together enough money to get me singing and piano lessons at the royal conservatory of music, but after 6 months of excelling at both far above my classmates, we couldn't pay for it anymore. I had to find free ways to continue pursuing my passion: I joined the school choir. I won the graduation songwriting contest in grade 8. I graduated and got accepted into Etobicoke School of the Arts for musical theatre and was a class favorite and after choosing to leave for grade 11 because of racial profiling

(offered only big mama & voodoo woman type characters) I joined the gospel choir at church. No matter what, I had to make things happen for myself because no system, no friend, and no man were ever able to help people like me. In most cases, they brought us down, and my mother made me promise that I would never turn out like her.

I discovered dance, spoken-word poetry and hip-hop along the way. I've always been educating myself on ways to turn my talent into a for-profit business. Other people like me had done it, but they were few and far between. As I stood in front of the mirror I thought of my mother, and my younger sister and brother. I thought of the years in high school where we were evicted from housing and have been in and out of homeless shelters ever since... I thought of the networks and the fanbase I've built, and all of the people supporting me... I thought of the organizations like the Remix Project, SKETCH Working Arts, UrbanArts Toronto and RISE Edutainment that have helped me grow to be so professional. I thought about the raid that happened in Swansea Mews this summer and the fact that three of

the boys I once played in the playground with were now young black men behind bars for murder... So, sounding like a "feminist" in a song on my debut music project could hinder my survival. This is not a hobby. This is not a joke. There is no backup plan. I have a family to take care of, a standard to set, and a story to tell.

In our lives, either you kick down those barriers with literal blood, sweat and tears and claim your success, or you repeat the cycle.

Creator of all that is, help me. I am afraid that when I reach worldly success, I may never return to the understanding which I currently dwell in. Please do not let me forget it all.

Dynesti Williams is a 22-year-old singer, emcee, poet, actress and writer from Toronto ON. Influenced by her Caribbean background, Dynesti uses her talent to help people reconnect to their higher selves; their utmost potential.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3 The City of Toronto will better communicate the services it provides to youth, with a focus on those most vulnerable to involvement in serious violence and crime, and the people and programs who serve them.
- 4 The City of Toronto will work with external partners (residents, community agencies, grassroots groups, other governments) to bring clarity and stability to the youth services sector.
- 5 The City of Toronto will coordinate policy and program planning between its youth-serving program areas.



Service System Coordination

ACTIONS

- 3a** The City of Toronto will better communicate expectations of the service experience, complaints processes and the ombudsman’s office, and opportunities to get involved in decision-making in services across the City.
- 3b** Shelter, Support and Housing Administration will include youth services stakeholders in the development of its community engagement framework which is intended to support ongoing service planning.
- 3c** The City of Toronto will work with youth to develop and maintain a youth portal on the City’s website to serve as a centralized resource for the City’s services, programs, and initiatives for youth.
- 4a** The City of Toronto will create and maintain a neighbourhood-based key staff contact list of timely supports. This will provide a useful resource for City staff working in the neighbourhood.
- 4b** Shelter, Support and Housing Administration will expand its plain-language series of directories of housing and community services in Toronto to include a guide to services available from all sources for vulnerable youth in the city.
- 5a** Program areas mandated to serve youth in the City of Toronto will appoint a staff person as youth champion, who will connect with community, funders, youth, and other governments. These divisional youth champions will be members of the TYES Table, tasked with coordination of the implementation of the Toronto Youth Equity Strategy.
- 5b** The City of Toronto will coordinate efforts of TYES with those of other related City initiatives, including the Toronto Drug Strategy Implementation Panel.
- 5c** The City of Toronto, through the TYES Table, will identify, share, and invest in best practices of local and city wide interdivisional coordination serving the needs of youth most vulnerable to involvement in serious violence and crime. The TYES table will begin as an interdivisional youth services table, to implement service system coordination and serve as system manager for City youth services. The table will also advocate to provincial and federal partners.
- 5d** Shelter, Support and Housing Administration has plans underway to improve the collection and reporting of service information through the development of detailed performance indicators. These indicators will define and measure the achievements of service goals and objectives for youth most vulnerable to involvement in serious violence and crime and will be developed in collaboration with youth-serving agencies.
- 5e** Social Development, Finance and Administration will implement the Toronto Strong Neighbourhoods Strategy 2020 in keeping with the principles of the Toronto Youth Equity Strategy.
- 5f** Toronto City Council will appoint a City Councillor as a City-wide Youth Equity Champion beginning in the 2015-2019 term of council. The Youth Equity Champion will support and promote the work of the Strategy with fellow councillors, other orders of government, and residents across Toronto.

Society

By: Paul Ohonsi

12 years ago I came into Canada from Nigeria. Because of government and various other forms of injustices the country was not developed enough to make its natural resources advance the wealth and health of the country.

The intention of my family coming to the city of Toronto was to be part of a society that has a developed government, and in many ways the Canadian government does prove itself as a functioning unit, but I feel it lacks in its unique way. Our government does provide incentives to keep youth out of negative situations, but it is obvious that not enough is being done.

The “government” is also a way to say “the people”. I don’t believe the root of our issues is a faulty government, but a society where people can’t govern themselves. The youth I have grown up with in Toronto, are the ones I have seen throughout my elementary and high school years, and we’ve been raised in the same community where I live; Parkway Forest. What I can see that is consistent with a majority of those youths is the lack of information to resources.

The problem with the at risk youth that I’ve met is they lack the knowledge to better take care of themselves without depending on a governing body. I believe the purpose of a government is to ensure its citizens are independent but not separated.



The areas where at risk youth live usually have a sense of separation with the “outside” world; it is my belief that they don’t have enough information about the current human condition. There isn’t a sense of urgency to unite, but how could there be? The environments they are subject to have been neglected for so long, and the saying goes “you are your environment”.

My example of a high risk youth is one that doesn’t know her/himself outside of her/his environment, one that cannot distinguish between the pains going on at home, from the confusion going on in their mind. A high risk youth to me, is one that has endured psychological damages that he/she is not aware of. These are the youth that reflect the pain

they see onto the world around them.

In Toronto, we are “civilized” but seem to neglect the meaning of a civilization. “Civilization concentrates power, extending man’s control over both nature and over other human beings”. There is a block in information, whether it is from the school system or from the media, we can have as many organizations as we wish to, but until the mind of the youth is well developed the decay will continue.

Toronto is a place where I see a lot of youth rising from the oppressions humanity has faced since its inception, it is moving away from old ways of thinking and moving towards a new age.

I came here when I was 11, with a mind eager to

learn new cultures and ways of perceiving life, Toronto is a place that is blessed with cultures from around the world, that bring various outlets of information to the table, I would love to see more places where all these cultures are inspired to share knowledge.

I have lived in Parkway Forest since I came here; I am now 23 and have seen a wide range of people with different backgrounds and stories. The area was once violent, the buildings were broken and it reflected the kind of people that lived here. I would not consider this area High Risk because it is now filled with modern infrastructure and the quality of persons has changed, people are more “civilized”.

The unfortunate truth about our society is we feel money takes away our problems. In my area, low income families had their homes broken down so that the “modern look” could become a reality. Our problems are not being solved; they are simply being neglected and moved.

When a youth is put in a situation where making ends meet means going against the civilization and its rules it is called a crime, when a company chooses to build in a broken home, it’s called, normal. I am in no way condoning the actions of youth that chose to take matters into their own hands and put other persons in society at risk, but it is the ripple effect of a mind that lacks knowledge of self-outside of the established order.

In closing I would like to emphasize that the government is not faulty, it works as it’s supposed to, but it is overwhelmed with having to deal with every aspect of what makes us human, there isn’t enough personal initiative. The youth starts from within, and never dies, I believe our youth need a stronger sense of unity and self, they need more people to show them the world, inspire them to tap into the potential of each being. It’s not the solution to eliminate fear, but to understand it.

Paul Ohonsi, otherwise known as, “Ohm” breaks the boundaries of theatre through his electrifying spoken word performances. In the next year, he plans on writing and directing a play.



RECOMMENDATIONS

6 The City of Toronto will advocate for increased trauma-informed mental health and substance use treatment services for youth, including youth most vulnerable to involvement in serious violence and crime.

7 The City of Toronto will invest in services for youth who are incarcerated and youth who have been incarcerated, to reintegrate into their communities.



Service Gaps

ACTIONS

- 6a Toronto Community Housing's Resident & Community Services will conduct a review of Resident Access Support services to better integrate youth support, develop partnerships and improve referral system.
- 6b Toronto Community Housing's Resident & Community Services will develop and implement a Peer Support Post Traumatic Stress Disorder Pilot for youth in communities that have faced ongoing levels of violence (2-3 TCH locations).
- 6c Toronto Community Housing's Resident & Community Services will refresh TCH's Mental Health Framework, engaging various youth stakeholders in order to promote housing stability for Toronto Community Housing residents.
- 6d Toronto Community Housing's Resident & Community Services will host a Youth Mental Health Symposium.
- 6e Toronto Community Housing's Resident & Community Services will create a new youth focused Mental Health Liaison position to develop and manage a youth mental health strategy.
- 6f Toronto Public Health will provide staff support to the community based program Strengthening Families (a drug prevention/resiliency program for youth 12-16 and their families who have a family member involved in drug use or the criminal justice system).
- 6g With additional funding Toronto Public Health will reinstate the Family Separation and Reunification program. Working with community partners, this program provides counselling and reconciliation services for immigrant children and youth who are experiencing severe mental and social trauma from being separated from their parents for extended periods during the immigration process.
- 7a The Toronto Public Library will pilot the Storybook Parents program model to enable imprisoned and recently imprisoned parents aged 18-29 to maintain family contact, develop their literacy, and engage in training and volunteering opportunities, thus improving their skills and chances of rehabilitation.
- 7b Toronto Employment & Social Services will review the Investing In Youth case management protocols and procedures to ensure that youth who have been incarcerated are supported in their reintegration efforts. The program will also look for new interdivisional and community partnerships.
- 7c The City of Toronto will ensure tools are in place to connect youth who are leaving correctional facilities with relevant City services.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 8 The City of Toronto will renew its commitment to implement positive changes in its workforce and communities to achieve access and equality of outcomes for all residents, including youth most vulnerable to involvement in serious violence and crime, and to create a harmonious environment free from discrimination, harassment and hate.



Service Gaps

ACTIONS

- 8a** Toronto Community Housing's Resident & Community Services and Toronto Employment & Social Services will work to ensure that available employment services are accessible to youth and reflective of youth-specific challenges (e.g. marginalized, racialized, criminalized, educational attainment disparities, gender biases).
- 8b** Toronto Community Housing's Resident & Community Services will review its Resident Employment And Community Hiring (REACH Strategy) and Social Procurement Processes for youth most vulnerable to serious violence and crime, and include language and guidelines to ensure these youth are not alienated from opportunities to access employment and entrepreneurial opportunities.
- 8c** As a member of the Canadian Coalition of Municipalities Against Racism and Discrimination, the City of Toronto will review and refresh its plan of action to address racism and discrimination. The plan of action will consider ten common commitments addressing three areas of municipal responsibility.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 9 The City of Toronto will advocate towards and support where appropriate equitable access to education and training for youth most vulnerable to involvement in serious violence and crime.



Service Gaps

ACTIONS

- 9a The City of Toronto will increase free and/or affordable access to space for groups offering educational attainment support services to youth most vulnerable to involvement in serious violence and crime.
- 9b Toronto Community Housing's Resident & Community Services will review and amend its scholarship criteria to attract and support youth that may not have been able to access such funds in the past or may not qualify under the majority of existing programs.
- 9c Toronto Public Health will actively seek funding in partnership with other key agencies to expand the reach of the Community Food Works program to serve youth most vulnerable to involvement in serious violence and crime. The program provides food skills, food handler certification and employability in partnership with community agencies.
- 9d The Toronto Public Library will continue to partner with the Toronto Catholic District School Board to provide the Transitional Intervention Program for Suspended Students and Supervised Alternative Learning programs.
- 9e Social Development, Finance and Administration will work with the Province of Ontario and the Council of Educators to improve investments in targeted supports for education such as building skills, scholarships and network development for incarcerated youth.
- 9f Toronto Public Health will work with school boards and other community partners to address bullying in schools and the community with a focus on children/youth who are vulnerable to developing antisocial behaviours.
- 9g The City of Toronto will request the Toronto District School Board and the Toronto Catholic District School Board to appoint a staff person as a youth champion, who will connect with community, funders, youth, and other governments. These youth champions will also be invited to be members of the TYES Table, tasked with coordination of the implementation of the Toronto Youth Equity Strategy.
- 9h Toronto Community Housing's Resident & Community Services will conduct a review of its Youth Action and Strengthening Communities grants to ensure criteria and priorities are inclusive, and programs/services for youth most vulnerable to involvement in serious violence and crime are grant recipients.
- 9i The Toronto Public Library will create literacy and creative writing workshops in youth shelters, recreation and community centres and libraries. The City will invest in having these services expanded to jails and under-served communities adding literary supports as necessary.
- 9j Social Development, Finance and Administration will invest in educational attainment programs inclusive of youth most vulnerable to involvement in serious violence and crime.
- 9k Social Development, Finance and Administration will invest in and support community based training that supports building skills, mentorship and network development.
- 9l The Toronto Public Library will advance branch projects in the approved 10-year capital plan, including spaces that engage youth, such as teen zones and innovation hubs.

RECOMMENDATIONS

10 The City of Toronto will invest in programs for youth most vulnerable to involvement in serious violence and crime which build positive socialization life skills.

11 The City of Toronto will leverage its position as an employer to improve access to economic opportunities for youth most vulnerable to involvement in serious violence and crime.



Service Gaps

ACTIONS

- 10a** In the case of pre-employment skills (life skills, transferrable skills, etc.) Toronto Employment and Social Services will consider how Ontario Works Employment Assistance Benefits and the Request for Proposal for employment programming can be used to support youth most vulnerable to involvement in violence and crime on Social Assistance.
- 10b** Parks, Forestry and Recreation Youth Outreach Workers will work with Community Recreation Programmers to connect youth most vulnerable to involvement in serious violence and crime to its existing recreation leagues, drop-in, and sport opportunities.
- 10c** The City of Toronto will create a cross-corporate coordinated leadership and skills development recognition program.
- 11a** Toronto Community Housing's Resident & Community Services will expand its YouthWorx program, which hires youth most vulnerable to involvement in serious violence and crime to work on beautification projects.
- 11b** The City of Toronto will host a Partners' Forum to identify barriers to employment for youth, particularly those facing multiple barriers to employment, with a focus on criminal records. The focus will be on best practices, entrepreneurship creation, service integration and future planning.
- 11c** The City of Toronto will develop and host high-engagement recruitment fairs for youth most vulnerable to involvement in serious violence and crime who have criminal records. This will provide the City of Toronto the opportunity to approach employers and specific growth industries.
- 11d** The City of Toronto will investigate re-instituting the Get In Gear program. This program helped youth most vulnerable to involvement in serious violence and crime access equipment and supplies to find employment.
- 11e** The City of Toronto will create a high-engagement employment program targeted at youth most vulnerable to involvement in serious violence and crime who have criminal records.
- 11f** The City of Toronto will create a high-engagement job incentive program targeted at youth most vulnerable to involvement in serious violence and crime who have criminal records.



Service Gaps

RECOMMENDATIONS

12 The City of Toronto will improve access to housing opportunities for youth.

13 The City of Toronto will improve access to safe spaces for youth.

ACTIONS

- 12a** Shelter, Support and Housing Administration will continue to support the City's advocacy to other orders of government for funding for social housing, including for youth.
- 12b** Toronto Community Housing's Resident & Community Services will explore creating transitional housing options for youth and their families affected by violence or safety issues.
- 12c** Shelter, Support and Housing Administration will create new housing opportunities for youth, in Toronto households by working collaboratively with private sector landlords as well as affordable and social housing providers.
- 12d** Shelter, Support and Housing Administration will complete the review of the waiting list for social housing to create a proactive, coordinated access system for social housing.
- 13a** The City of Toronto will perform an environmental scan of best practices for dedicated youth spaces, including best practices for youth most vulnerable to involvement in serious violence and crime. This should include hours, staffing levels and training, programming, activities, physical infrastructure, transportation supports and healthy snacks.
- 13b** Toronto Community Housing's Resident & Community Services will provide community resources that support housing stability to vulnerable groups, including victimised women with minor children in the household.
- 13c** Shelter, Support and Housing Administration will use the service principles of TYES in the review and update of the current Shelter Standards to ensure that services are delivered in ways that are client-centered and respectful of client diversity.
- 13d** Shelter, Support and Housing Administration will create additional safe spaces in the Youth Hostel system with the opening of Kennedy House, a new Youth Hostel.
- 13e** Parks, Forestry and Recreation will introduce ten new enhanced youth spaces with resources for programming and equipment at suitable locations across Toronto.
- 13f** The City of Toronto will devise criteria for designating public spaces as inclusive and welcoming to youth. The City will create and distribute identifiers (e.g. stickers, posters, etc.) to recognize safe spaces for youth.
- 13g** The Toronto Public Library will expand the reach of digital innovation hubs in branches across the city.
- 13h** Social Development, Finance and Administration will prioritize the creation of safe spaces for youth through capital investments made under the Toronto Strong Neighbourhoods Strategy.
- 13i** Social Development, Finance and Administration will prioritize the creation of safe spaces for youth through operating cost investments made under the Community Partnership Investment Program.

RECOMMENDATIONS

14 The City of Toronto will address age-related and other transition gaps in its services.

15 The City of Toronto will develop mentorship opportunities for youth most vulnerable to involvement in serious violence and crime.

16 The City of Toronto will address barriers to participation by youth most vulnerable to involvement in serious violence and crime in its opportunities and programs.



Service Gaps

ACTIONS

- 14a** Parks, Forestry, and Recreation will support leadership development for 12 to 15 year olds by building on the existing Youth Leadership Framework, youth camps, and Youth Advisory Councils. City Council approved a new universal Youth Leadership program as part of the implementation of the Recreation Service Plan.
- 14b** Toronto Community Housing's Resident & Community Services will prepare a letter for resident youth and their families, explaining a youth's increased responsibilities at age 18. TCH will distribute the letter to resident youth and their families when youth turn age 18.
- 14c** In keeping with the Housing Stability Service Planning Framework, Shelter, Support, and Housing Administration is drawing from best practices to identify priorities and resource requirements to improve the effectiveness of housing follow up support services aimed at achieving stable and successful housing tenancies.
- 15a** The City of Toronto, working with community partners and private sector partners, will launch a mentorship strategy for youth which includes a stream focused on youth most vulnerable to involvement in serious violence and crime.
- 16a** Toronto Employment and Social Services will review the Investing in Youth (IY) case management model and intake (application) procedures to ensure barriers to youth participation are identified and addressed in keeping with the TYES. IY provides enhanced services to youth between the ages of 18-29 who have been involved with the criminal justice system in the past year.
- 16b** The City of Toronto will perform a review of criteria for participation in programs, employment, etc., in order to identify and address potential barriers (age, geography, criminal records, in/out of school, under-employed, ID & documentation, gender biases, citizenship, OW status, poverty, language, literacy, culture) to service for youth most vulnerable to involvement in serious violence and crime.

I had to move from a high risk area to a more upscale neighborhood. I had to learn how to speak proper English and dress different. Step out of what I was used to; being judged and having to explain or prove myself to my new friends. Dealing with different changes in life. Whether that means to be “cool” and “Deaf”, or just the nerd suffering life changes. Hi my name is Azia , I have been moved over 22 times and I’m tired of meeting new friends. Friends were never a problem, the problem was to communicate, no words coming out. I’m 23, deaf and have moved from a high end, to a place we call at risk or they call the ghetto. The life of just trying to express myself. And fit in.

WHAT IS MY STORY

BY KHADIJA SAYEEDI

What is my story..?

It’s unwritten!

I am a young east African woman! From in a land of a struggling, humbling, working community. It may be static, but hey that’s natural! Day by day if it isnt another bill, its more mail, appointments, low subsidy, or the collection agency! But still with a smile on my face i play “doll house” with my beautiful daughter.

Don’t get me wrong, I am not complaining! BUT FUCK I’M JUST SAYING. I do my best and best and I’m going to still do my best why cant the system work with a girl? Thanks for Jane and Finch, for all the unconditional love i’ve allowed myself to have my whole life and thank God for that. These streets are my family; I have a home in almost every home in my neighborhood! On the outside it is a place of tragedy and poverty! But to me its a place of love and selflessness I am who i am because of where I’m from and god bless where I’m from.



JUST HEAR ME OUT

BY HEAVY STEVE

Story of my life, smoking weed

Drinking 40s

Selling drugs, making money

Left my momma worried

At home,

I was never neglected

In school,

forever I'll remember being rejected

Joined a gang so I can feel well protected

It only caused more problems, made my life so hectic

Im trying to get out there, live fair and get my share, but everybody laughed

Cause I was on welfare

Livin in the ghetto is hardcore

Like heavy metal, my soul's like a rose

Slowly losing all its petals, my homies support me, like bikes attached to pedals, I thought thuggin would give me all my street medals, but doing that only made me closer to the devil, so I said forget it, I'm going to start thinkin like a rebel, it's time for me to open my eyes and reach another level, being on this conscious tip has finally made me settle. I can't stop now, without any doubts, and even if I fall, I love this route, this is who I am, and what I'm about, alone I stand, so just hear me out...

RECOMMENDATIONS

17 The City of Toronto will develop and engage in restorative justice practices, protocols and policies and take steps to reduce the criminalization of youth.

18 The City of Toronto will improve access to youth services to better meet the service needs of youth and youth most vulnerable to involvement in serious violence and crime.

19 The City of Toronto will develop appropriate employment and volunteering opportunities for youth most vulnerable to involvement in serious violence and crime where criminal record checks are not necessary.



ACTIONS

- 17a** The City of Toronto will engage a community partner to implement a City-wide restorative justice program that includes mediation between City staff, residents and community partners and youth, to create alternatives to banning, exclusion and eviction policies and practices from City facilities such as libraries, recreation facilities, and Toronto Community Housing.
- 17b** Social Development, Finance and Administration, in partnership with the Toronto Police Service, will investigate the resources needed to deliver, and then implement a City-wide Pre-charge Diversion program to provide supportive interventions and programming as an alternative to criminal charges. Supportive interventions and programming assist young persons in accepting responsibility and addressing the impact of their actions on themselves, their family, their victims, and the community.
- 18a** Toronto Community Housing's Resident & Community Services will review and implement the recommendations around accessibility for meetings/programs and services described by the centralized youth advocacy team.
- 18b** The Toronto Public Library will continue implementation of the new branch open hours vision: Doors Wide Open in keeping with the service principles of the TYES, and focused on Neighbourhood Improvement Areas.
- 19a** The City of Toronto will focus outreach to youth most vulnerable to involvement in serious violence and crime when recruiting volunteers and when providing opportunities for youth to do community service hours.
- 19b** Toronto Community Housing's Resident & Community Services will develop and implement a Volunteer Preparation/Pre-Employment Series for youth most vulnerable to involvement in serious violence and crime.
- 19c** Toronto Community Housing's Resident & Community Services will provide a further review of employment opportunities, both internally and with community partners, for youth most vulnerable to involvement in serious violence and crime, to ensure equitable access to economic opportunities.

RECOMMENDATIONS

20 The City of Toronto will investigate methods to connect, welcome, engage and sustain youth most vulnerable to involvement in serious violence and crime that would not otherwise access City services.

21 The City of Toronto will improve engagement of families, peers, and supportive allies in its services to youth most vulnerable to involvement in serious violence and crime.



ACTIONS

- 20a** The City of Toronto will embed a case management approach, where appropriate, in its programs serving youth most vulnerable to involvement in serious violence and crime. The City will approach the life situations that youth face without being confined by only one line of business or issue area.
- 20b** The City of Toronto will work with managers and supervisors to create models that will increase the capacity of their staff who work with youth most vulnerable to involvement in serious violence and crime, to develop relationships and partnerships in the community as part of their core responsibilities.
- 20c** The City of Toronto will hire Specialized Youth Workers who will identify, engage, and serve youth most vulnerable to involvement in serious violence and crime.
- 21a** The City of Toronto will work with community partners to support place-based family programming through space provision.
- 21b** Social Development, Finance and Administration will pilot delivery of the FOCUS Rexdale program model in Scarborough. FOCUS responds immediately to individuals, families, and groups most vulnerable to involvement in serious violence and crime with co-ordinated and integrated intervention by government and community partners.
- 21c** Social Development, Finance and Administration will invest in support groups for parents of youth most vulnerable to involvement in serious violence and crime in order to create a mutually supportive environment for them to share ideas and seek help.
- 21d** Social Development, Finance and Administration will add two new Community Development Officers (1 in 2014 and 1 in 2015) to the Community Crisis Response Program to provide immediate support and resources to communities impacted by violent and traumatic incidents. This program is coordinated with other City services (Police, EMS), community organizations and residents to assist neighbourhoods to recover from traumatic incidents.

PROGRAMS BY YASMIN ALI

This young mother trying to get into a program to help herself move forward. She ends up getting into the program, but the program is nothing like she expected. They started to belittle her, test her intelligences, ask questions about her life and do nothing. They did not give her the right to resources to help her. One day she was scheduled in for a meeting just because she was asking too many questions and challenging the facilitator of the program.

The first meeting was with the residents from the area. She was not ready to speak with these people so the meeting was said to be rescheduled.

The second meeting was brought to her not by choice. She was pulled out of her class during exam periods, unable to finish her final assignment.

This young mother never signed up for this type of treatment. All she wanted was a program to assist her needs but instead it was getting in her way and stressing her out. Her experience with this program wasn't pleasant and didn't give her motivation to go to the "so called" community programs. This experience caused her to drop out of the program and lose faith in similar programs like this one.





A young man by the name Tay was on the right path up until he graduated high-school. Considering he came from the projects where he didn't see too many people doing good things. His brother also died when Tay was ten, so that still weighed heavy on his heart. Despite all of that he was a great student all until high school when he graduated.

He was confused after, didn't know the next step, he didn't have enough money to go to university. Lost in his circumstances he lived in he eventually got into selling drugs, and for a while, it seemed promising. He sold crack cocaine for a few months to stay out of enemy's lines and he seemed to be docking the cops with ease. Eventually he started getting cocky and confident and started telling people about how much money he was making and that he is was invading other people's territory.

Enemies living in another hood got word of this and made a plan to set Tay up. One day while Tay was on the block selling rock, his friend ask him to accompany him on a ride to the store, naturally Tay would be cautious and wouldn't go but he figured it was his good friend he knew for years and didn't think much of it. They went to the store and as they were coming out, people in a hummer pulled up started shooting! Tay grabbed his friend and tried to get to the floor. Tay and his friend got hit by several bullets and fell victim to their injuries and died that night. The hummer zoomed off and there laid Tay and his friend. Victims of the streets.

TAY

BY ABDI ABINASIR

RECOMMENDATIONS

22 The City of Toronto will work with other government partners to address systemic issues which contribute to the deep roots of youth violence.

23 The City of Toronto will improve coordination of service delivery for youth most vulnerable to involvement in serious violence and crime with communities and community service providers across Toronto.



ACTIONS

- 22a Social Development, Finance and Administration will develop and lead an intergovernmental table between the City and other orders of government to discuss and coordinate responses to the needs of youth most vulnerable to involvement in serious violence and crime.
- 23a The City of Toronto will constitute and consult with a TYES Community Panel when developing policies, outreach strategies, program planning /development and evaluation relevant to the Toronto Youth Equity Strategy.
- 23b Social Development, Finance and Administration will review the Identify n' Impact grants program to identify how youth most vulnerable to involvement in violence and crime can be included as a focus.
- 23c Shelter, Support and Housing Administration is pursuing and strengthening partnerships with community agencies/service providers to improve service coordination through enhanced services delivery in line with the strategic directions and key actions outlined in the 2014-2019 Housing Stability Service Planning Framework.

THE LOSING RACE OF RACISM

BY RENE DHINSA



Growing up in the west end of Toronto, I came from a single parent household. I was also a single child, so as I grew older, I learned that the people you surround yourself with really reflect the type of person you become. Starting in elementary I was surrounded by privileged Italian kids who had pretty much everything. Most of them lived in houses, with two parents and possibly a brother or sister. My best friend at the time was Andrew, who was a single child with two younger half brothers, with a Peruvian background. Just by the colour of our skin people would assume we were brothers, and as we saw it, we were. He lived in the same building as I did, I was on the sixth floor and he was on the fourth.

We also had other kids who went to our school that lived in our building who would meet up and either play hockey in the halls or man hunt. At our school,

we were neither popular or unpopular, we were the funny guys, so we connected everyone through jokes and laughs. Through humour, is where I witnessed and experienced racism. I remember it was winter time and we had to line up outside along the walls for a headcount before we went to class and standing behind me in line was a Indian boy named Sikdeep, 13 and his brother Osama, 10. This was around the time after 9/11 and I remember that the kids would poke fun at both of their names at any chance they got. This time was different because Sikdeep was a quiet kid who rarely talked anyways, but when Paolo tripped his younger brother Sikdeep obviously got defensive. He stood up for his brother but Paolo was too big for him and threw him down as well. The whole thing happened before a teacher came out, and when she did Sikdeep had already wiped his tears and attempted to clean the snow off his

clothes. Later on after school, Andrew and I were walking home and we saw Sikdeep talking to what seemed to be his older brother, and he approached us asking us if we saw who did it. Sikdeep knew we were there and asked if we knew where Paolo lived. I didn't want to get further involved because Sikdeep once told me how his brother was in trouble with the law before. I sensed trouble. The next day after school Sikdeep's older brother picked them up, and when he saw Paolo he picked him up by the scruffs of his collar and threatened him if he were to pick on his brothers again, then he would regret it. The other kids never seen an older brother do that before. To me it was kind of good the bully got what was coming to him. Soon after, a teacher had witnessed what happened and called the cops on Sikdeep's brother, and he was charged. The next few weeks, the bullying really never stopped. The teachers and kids treated Sikdeep as a criminal. He would be sectioned off during gym class, and he couldn't even stay inside during recess anymore.

I remember my teacher had moved me next to Sikdeep to sit because I was making a distraction to the class, and I saw Sikdeep with his head down. I started to talk to him even though he had his head down. A few jokes later he finally raised his head and told me he wasn't in the mood and today's not the day. Him, Andrew and I were on good terms because we would walk home together and sometimes to school with each other. I was shocked when I seen him pull a small knife from his desk to show me. My eyes were wide open. I asked him what he wanted to do with it and he seemed so angry and confused. He mentioned that either he deals with Paolo or he takes himself out of this world. I knew the bullying was bad, but I never knew that it got this far. I knew I

didn't want to see him in jail or dead, so I had to talk him out of it. At recess he still had the knife on him, I brought him on the far side of the track right by the fence and began my attempt to talk him out of his mindstate. He opened up about how his dad used to beat him, and his mother wouldn't say much of anything. When he came to school his peers would do the same, and he never really had much of any friends. Then when the teachers started to treat him different, he didn't feel like he wanted to be here anymore. I went on to tell him that if he does the worst, and either dies or gets sent away, who would look after his little brother. He asked if I could. That very moment was one I would never forget. I told him I wouldn't, because he's not going anywhere. I wanted to wrestle the knife from his pocket, but I knew someone would get hurt. We had 10 minutes left of recess and I felt like I made no progress, that's when Andrew came. He had no idea what was going on but he saw our faces and the fact that we were off alone was weird to him. When he found out, he too was nervous. We both had an understanding that somehow we need to get him to throw away the knife. I thought if we went back to class, he could do something drastic at any moment. Just then his little brother came over to us from the field where we was playing with marbles by himself, and gave his brother a hug. Everyone including Sikdeep was shocked. Right there, he broke down and started to cry. The moment was so heavy for him, Osama had no idea what happened, he started crying too. I had a chance to tell Andrew to take his brother on a walk after they stop. I felt like this was my chance. A few minutes passed and I only had a few minutes left. Andrew took his brother and I told Sikdeep that I am not able to be who he is to his brother. I asked him

to wonder what he would feel if his older brother did what he is thinking of doing. I threw out everything I had, I told him I cared and I loved him and that this was only a short time in our long lives. There was a moment of silence and then he reached into his pocket and pulled out the knife and gave it to me. At that same time, this boy Jack came to get us because we were late for line up and saw the knife and yelled for a teacher. I threw the knife over the fence and across the parking lot of the building. When the teacher came she asked where the knife was. I denied it, and had to write lines in detention after school with Andrew and Sikdeep for being late. After detention, Sikdeep thanked both Andrew and myself for taking the time and caring enough to save his life.

Bullying and racism is something that happens very often in our multicultural society in Toronto. Kids don't know, and they behave how their parents behave. If the older generation has a certain ignorance towards a particular race, the kids will pick up on it. The future lies with our younger generation. We need to focus on them, focus on the safety and really have a support system for at risk youth to speak freely and openly about what they are dealing with.

I haven't followed up with Sikdeep after elementary school, but I have heard from Andrew that he saw him two years ago, and they talked briefly. Sikdeep is working in a community centre which is populated by mostly middle eastern residents. He had said that he found himself, while helping others and that the act that both Andrew and myself did that day, is what motivates him to be the same hero for other kids.

Through hip-hop, Rene Dhinsi uses his performance name "Ray" to shed light upon the people. However, Ray finds his urge to create is summoned when an artistic design of any form resonates with his current frequency. The up and coming rap artist is now working on his developing his craft.



RECOMMENDATIONS

24 The City of Toronto will improve staff ability to engage and serve youth most vulnerable to involvement in serious violence and crime.

25 The City of Toronto will improve staff ability to avoid and mediate conflict with youth most vulnerable to involvement in serious violence and crime.

Staff Competencies & Support



ACTIONS

- 24a Toronto Community Housing's Human Resources will review its human resources policies to identify potential barriers to employment for youth most vulnerable to involvement in serious violence and crime.
- 24b Equity, Diversity, and Human Rights will work with Human Resources and other relevant City Divisions to consider how social and community value can be incorporated into the key qualifications in relevant City of Toronto opportunities.
- 24c The City of Toronto will ensure that the service planning principles and recommendations of the Toronto Youth Equity Strategy are considered in divisional strategic and service planning. This will help to embed the principles of the TYES in the everyday work of the City.
- 25a The City of Toronto will continue to recruit and hire staff that have experience working with youth most vulnerable to involvement in serious violence and crime to ensure a positive service experience for all youth.
- 24d The City of Toronto will develop a youth component to its equity lens to ensure that the service planning principles and recommendations of the TYES are considered in divisional strategic planning.
- 24e Toronto Community Housing's Resident & Community Services and Human Resources will examine options to simplify hiring practices for entry-level positions for all youth.
- 25b The City of Toronto will designate staff members in City-run public spaces who are trained in de-escalation and conflict mediation, anti-oppression and issues impacting youth most vulnerable to involvement in serious violence and crime, who can be an onsite resource person to intervene if an incident occurs.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 26 The City of Toronto will improve supports to staff working with youth most vulnerable to involvement in serious violence and crime, including training, staff policies, and staff wellbeing resources.

ACTIONS

- 26a Social Development, Finance and Administration will review supports available to staff who work with youth most vulnerable to involvement in serious violence and crime, including the Workplace Safety Insurance Board (WSIB).
- 26b Social Development, Finance and Administration will investigate how to work with the Employee Assistance Program to better support staff who work with youth most vulnerable to involvement in serious violence and crime.
- 26c Toronto Employment & Social Services will consider the importance of continuity of service/support and the opportunity to build trusting relationships when assigning youth to Investing in Youth caseloads and making case management decisions.
- 26d Toronto Employment & Social Services will ensure staff are aware of recent changes to the Community Visits and Contacts Protocol and Waived Address procedures. Toronto Employment & Social Services will continue to communicate changes, share principles and design considerations with other relevant Divisions and relevant community stakeholders.
- 26e Toronto Community Housing's Resident & Community Services will develop staff safety guidelines for front line staff working with youth.
- 26f Social Development, Finance and Administration will review the occupational health and safety act and review the concept of the "workplace" to include places where case management of youth most vulnerable to involvement in serious violence and crime occurs.
- 26g Toronto Community Housing's Resident & Community Services, working with youth, will develop an Anti-Oppression/Equity training series related to youth most vulnerable to involvement in serious violence and crime. The series will be designed for front line workers, including Community Safety Unit Officers, Community Service Coordinators and management.
- 26h The City of Toronto will investigate and develop coordinated training models and resources for working with youth most vulnerable to involvement in serious violence and crime for City of Toronto staff who serve youth. Training would be matched to identified need and could include such areas as outreach to youth, de-escalation techniques, restorative justice practices, conflict mediation skills, mental health, vicarious trauma, self-care, available services and resources for youth most vulnerable to involvement in serious violence and crime, grief support, legal issues, and positive youth development. This will help grow the shared expertise of staff across the City.

Potential

by akanni james (kobe)



Everyone is born with extraordinary capabilities.

But not many are given a fair chance to showcase them.

And there's parents who see the potential in their very own children but cry daily because they can't provide for them.

These kids didn't choose to be born in such a life, but who are now confined and destined to be living in these conditions while majority of the outside world lavishes in relevant luxury.

Make you ask "what will become of these children in 10+ years from now?"

Especially without any education, opportunities or a normal healthy living environment. These children are bound to be doomed and so will we if these children are continued to be allowed to be trapped in such living conditions. ALL OF SOCIETY will suffer.

Numerous unprivileged youth live largely, unnoticed across the world, without any of us knowing who or what they can become. A great scientist, an actor, singer or the kids on the courts with big hopes to become a star athlete like LeBron one day.

Has the world missed out on them or they're currently still out there now that whom we will never know about. Think about it... how much of a different world this would be if they all were given a chance?.

Unfortunately most of the youth living in poverty around the world do go unnoticed,

Never to be known by any of us, but in some random cases there's those who made it in

This world by complete chance, Someone has discovered them and believe in their

Potential. How many others are like them out there in this world? That's for us to figure out.



RECOMMENDATIONS

27 The City of Toronto will meaningfully involve youth, including youth most vulnerable to involvement in serious violence and crime, in the evaluation of the Toronto Youth Equity Strategy and the City's youth programs.

28 The City of Toronto will increase its capacity to evaluate the impact of youth programs and to assess the equity of wellbeing and other outcomes.



Accountability & Impact

ACTIONS

- 27a** Shelter, Support and Housing Administration will develop a comprehensive community engagement framework that includes a process to engage with service users and people with lived experience of homelessness in keeping with the service planning principles of the TYES.
- 27b** Toronto Community Housing's Resident & Community Services will review its youth engagement process to ensure access is equitable and barriers minimized to support youth most vulnerable to involvement in serious violence and crime to being involved in feedback and decision-making mechanisms in the organization.
- 28a** The Chief of Police, or designate, will work in partnership with the City of Toronto through the Executive Director, Social Development, Finance and Administration to develop and implement expedited data-sharing agreements to support ongoing analysis of safety and quality of life of youth in Toronto.
- 28b** The Chief of Police, or designate, will work in partnership with the City of Toronto through the Executive Director, Social Development, Finance and Administration to provide violence and victimization data related to youth in Toronto on an ongoing, annual basis at a neighbourhood level of geography.
- 28c** The City of Toronto will design regular town hall meetings for youth most vulnerable to involvement in serious violence and crime, to review implementation of the Toronto Youth Equity Strategy.
- 28d** The City of Toronto will work with community stakeholders and other orders of government to investigate and develop shared tools to measure: project impact; collective impact, and; overall service access of youth and youth most vulnerable to involvement in serious violence and crime.
- 28e** The City of Toronto will work with community stakeholders and other orders of government to develop a youth outcomes framework, a common set of indicators for monitoring progress and impact for youth in Toronto.
- 28f** The City of Toronto will work with community stakeholders and other orders of government to develop data systems to collect data across City divisions, agencies, and corporations on key demographic variables for employees and clients, including youth most vulnerable to involvement in serious violence and crime, to enable the City to plan and develop more effective interventions and monitor progress on areas of action.

Growing UP

By Anthony Gebrehiwot



“ I remember racial slurs being thrown out towards me or the other two African Canadian kids at least once a week. ”

Like most first generation immigrants, both my parents left their homeland of Africa in search of safety, stability and better opportunities. Upon their arrival, they were instantly faced with obstacles and controversy. Between acquiring their citizenship (which was particularly difficult at the time), finding a home and holding down a steady job, life was already tremendously challenging for them. This was all happening before I came into the picture. Prior to entering the world, my parents, with their combined income, managed to save up a decent amount. They were able to save up enough money to take the weight off their shoulders for a little bit.

That was until they decided to have a child. When you do something for the first time, you aren't always prepared for what's to come. When I was born, whatever amount that my parents had saved up went straight to diapers, formula, toys and whatever other expenses go into raising a newborn. By the time I was four, both my parents' savings accounts were exhausted and they had even managed to run into a debt that my mother is still attempting to pay off until this very day. When I turned 7 years old, the stress of financial instability took its toll on my parents resulting in a separation. I remember the day that my Father left the home. My mom told me that he didn't want to give her money to do laundry and for many years, growing up, I believed that they split up over that specific argument.

Without a positive male figure to influence and guide me in the right direction, I looked up to my cousin who also came from Africa when he was 11 years old. At the time, he was processing feelings of losing his father at war back home. Therefore, he liked to get into trouble; he wanted to get as much attention as he could from everyone around him. He taught and showed me things that I wasn't supposed to encounter at such an early age such as stealing, smoking and pornography.

Because my Mother was on her own now, she had to work extra hours to keep things afloat. While she was gone, I kept myself busy by hanging out with my cousin and his friends. When they weren't around I made friends of my own that lived in the same complex as me. I remember being ten years old and having a wrestling match with a couple friends of mine. After having a fantastic time, one of my friends Josh went to the convenience store and came back with a beer. To this day I have no idea how he got it and at the time I didn't even know what it was. He offered me a sip; I tried it and spit it out. This same friend shortly after would dare me to go into the local convenience store to steal those 5 cent gummies. Looking back, outside of school, there wasn't much out there for me to keep me out of trouble. We were playing basketball, playing video games or getting into trouble.

The population at my school mostly consisted of people of Asian descent. I remember racial slurs being thrown out towards me or the other two African Canadian kids at least once a week. I remember having to defend myself on many occasions because of the emotional abuse that was going on. Each time that I was called a nigger, I would get into a state of rage and react without thinking. It got to a point where, because of my large size, I became a bully and displaced my anger, even towards my friends who treated me well.

Fast forward to age 24 and I can now say that there are facilities and organizations established that I could have only wished to have in my days of growing up. For example, there are organizations such as RISE, Unity and Manifesto that give youth a platform to openly express themselves without the fear of being criticized or judged for the manner in which they choose to express themselves. Within these organizations there is a sense of inclusion, belonging and community. I can personally say that because of these community based organizations, I have been able to accelerate my growth and development as a person far beyond the years that I've been alive on this planet. There are also facilities in priority neighbourhoods such as the S.P.O.T. which provide youth with a safe environment off the streets and an opportunity to learn new outlets of expression such as photography, spoken word, hip hop and design. Lastly, there are programs that go on in the community centres situated all around the city of Toronto that I didn't have the luxury of being aware of when I was younger. There needs to be an awareness campaign when it comes to these programs, especially if they're free.

On stage Anthony Gebrehiwot is known as "Qi". The rap artist recently dove into music but has years of experience in photography, with a new tumblr blog titled "XvXyphoto". Although Gebrehiwot has graduated from York University with a degree in Kinesiology, he is now pursuing music and photography full time.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Toronto Youth Equity Strategy was developed through the collective efforts of numerous residents, youth, youth workers and City of Toronto staff. We would like to sincerely thank everyone who contributed their time, ideas and creative energy to developing the strategy.

City Departments:

- Children's Services
- Economic Development and Culture
- Equity, Diversity & Human Rights
- Parks, Forestry & Recreation
- Shelter, Support & Housing Administration
- Social Development, Finance & Administration
- Toronto Community Housing Corporation
- Toronto Employment & Social Services
- Toronto Police Service
- Toronto Public Health
- Toronto Public Library

Community Partners - External Panel:

The Toronto Youth Equity Strategy External Panel includes 20 youth and youth workers who applied to participate on the panel through a request for volunteers. The External Panel provided expertise, feedback and advice throughout all stages of the strategy's development. The External Panel members include:

- Jodi Alderson
- Mafaza Assan
- Talia Bronstein
- Michael Callejo Dizon
- Dr. Mark Campbell

- Samuel Egonu
- Deshanel Evans
- Daniel Faranda
- Tracy Ford
- Hibaq Gelle
- Ildi Gulyas
- Andrea Gunraj
- Judith Kerr
- Terri-Lynn Langdon
- Serena Nudel
- Chuck Okonkwo
- Dulaa Osman
- Letecia Rose
- Joan Wilson
- Andrea Yip

Creative Contributions

The Toronto Youth Equity Strategy is committed to valuing youth voice. The TYES recognizes the artistic talent that many youth have further developed through their participation in community-based youth-led initiatives.

NIA Centre for the Arts – Photography

Founded in 2009, Nia Centre for the Arts is a Toronto-based not-for-profit organization focused on the development of young people through arts delivered and showcased from an African-Diasporic perspective. “Nia” is a word of Kiswahili origin meaning purpose, and a key focus on the organization's mandate is to support young people in finding their purpose. In addition to delivering culturally specific programming, Nia Centre showcases and promotes arts from the African Diaspora in a way that engages artists and the general population artistically, emotionally, spiritually, and intellectually.

Contributing Photographers:

Idil Jeilani is a freelance photographer based out of Toronto. Her love for travel has influenced her photography style. Her works mostly consist of editorial and lifestyle photography. Idil is a graduate of Nia Centre's Gallery 44 "Out-reach" photography partnership and continues to work closely with community and corporate organizations to capture events and conceptual shoots.

Mapela Uhindu-Gingala's world has always revolved around the arts. At the age of 16, she had the opportunity to enter a photography contest called "My City, Our Stories" powered by Canon. She won second place and received a camera that helped launch her career. Since then Mapela has mentored and worked alongside Micheal Awad, Jalani Morgan and Ruthie and has shooting events and photoshoots for many artists, specifically in the performance arts, around the city.

Fonna Seidu is a queer-identified Black-Filipina photographer and an enthusiastic community supporter. Her passion for collaborating on local initiatives drives her passion as a community artist. In response to normalizing "traditional" media, she prioritizes her work with marginalized communities. Fonna is continuously exploring innovative approaches to photography through outlets such as creative editing, film photography, and mixed-media projects.

Carolyn Roberts is a Toronto based multidisciplinary artist who uses intricate concepts that make people think. She launched her business 'Carolyn and Philippe Creative' with her business partner Philippe and this year she launched her new independent brand 'By Carolyn Roberts' where she delivers photography and videography services for her clients.

Nomanzland – Poetry & Creative Writing

Nomanzland first and foremost is a family. We are raw and revolutionary. We rep the hood. Nomanzland is a collective that comes together to create theatre, poetry, music, and art that represents the struggle of marginalized and oppressed people all over the world.

We are: Real Life. Real Drama. Real Theatre.

Nomanzland was created in 2006 under a different name, "CAST". Since then we have grown, evolved, to become who we are today. Nomanzland meets every week on Thursday from 4-8pm at the West-Side Arts Hub located at 1785 Finch Ave. West, (Jane-Finch). All artists, community members, and youth (15+) are welcome to come join us, and create, politick, talk shit, and fight for the revolution. Ya dunnoe.

Contributing writers include:

- Abdi Abinasir
- Maryama Ahmed
- Yasmin Ali
- Arkanni James
- Funmilola Lawson (Lola)
- Steven Salguero (Heavy Steve)
- Khadiija Sayeedi
- Maazia Tait
- Joel Taylor
- Drae Walsh

RISE Edutainment – Poetry & Creative Writing

RISE stands for Reaching Intelligent Souls Everywhere. Every Monday nights, our open-mic events take place in Scarborough where youth from around the greater Toronto area gather to express themselves through poetry, music, dance, and a variety of different art forms in a positive and accepting environment. Using different themes every week to encourage building upon individual creative design. RISE Poetry is under RISE Edutainment which combines education with entertainment because we believe that we learn best through being engaged and emotionally interested. We recently held our first RISE Edutainment Convention which consisted of workshops, two concert performances at the Toronto Centre of the Arts and a panelist discussion that included established artists like Director X. Our goal is in our name - we want to reach every single intelligent soul - anywhere and everywhere.

www.facebook.com/RisePoetry

Contributing RISE writers include:

- Zakisha Brown
- Rene D
- Anthony Gebrehiwot
- Faduma Mohamed
- Paul O
- Dynesti Williams

Dwayne Holness and Corex Media - Logo Creation & Graphic Design

As a director, graphic designer, photographer and brand developer, Dwayne Holness is a man of many hats --all of which fit him exceedingly well. At just 25 years old, Dwayne has been able to forge a career in the media industry. In 2008, Dwayne co-founded Highclass; a multi-media youth art organization that aims to encourage artistic interests in community youth. That same year Highclass teamed up with Rated Inc. to develop the annual "106 & York" festival. There is no doubt that the future will see Dwayne expand on a global scale as he builds his corporate clientele and adds to his already impressive portfolio, through his company Corex Media.

Matthew Plummer - Filmmaking

Matthew is a Seneca @ York graduate from the Broadcasting and Television program. He currently resides in the Jane and Finch community, where he takes part in a film mentorship program called "Shoot With This". This program runs for eight months working with the youth of Jane and Finch teaching them the various steps of filmmaking. Just a few years ago, Matthew himself was a youth that was at risk himself, but now is a young man that is trying to bring about change in the neighborhoods that are at risk. In 2008, he created a youth led program called " Film Stars" that teaches youth living in the priority neighborhoods the steps on how to create a movie. His youth led program has made a big difference in the neighborhoods, and also gave youth in the neighborhoods the chance to dream again. February 2011, Matthew traveled out to Saskatchewan to share his story and also do a presentation on

his program Film Stars to Aboriginal youth. He made a partnership with West Flat Community Centre, where they want The Film Stars Project to work with their youth for a few weeks. At a young age, Matthew has accomplished a lot of things, but believes he has more to accomplish in life. He has many goals that he wants to achieve, but his goal in life is to help youth that are at risk to believe in themselves and help make changes in their lives.

Rich Uncle - Filmmaking

Rich Uncle is a collective of ambitious filmmakers specializing in commercials, music videos, branded content, digital content and short films. Our passion is to tell stories through visually stunning images. Our work has been acknowledged in award ceremonies including Festival De Cannes Short film corner, JUNO Music Awards, East Coast Music Awards and Country Music Awards. We believe in pro-active teamwork – closely collaborating with clients to accomplish and deliver outstanding films. We take pride in our services and strive to create memorable compelling content.

Kobi Ntiri - Filmmaking

Born in Accra, Ghana and raised in Toronto, Canada, Kobi Ntiri is an ambitious filmmaker specializing in television commercials, branded content, digital content, PSA's and short films. His short film FADING, screened at the TIFF Bell Light box, and was acknowledged in the 2012 Festival De Cannes. www.kobintiri.com

180 Change Street - Song-writing

180 Change Street is an movement that was initiated behind the wall of Canada's prison system and has since emerged as a successful, award winning program for youth incarcerated or in conflict with the law. 180 Change Street "turns stumbling blocks into stepping stones" through a 13 program curriculum that focuses on leadership, life-skills, academics, cognitive thinking, entrepreneurship, recidivism and community while maintaining a strong emphasis on lifestyle-fitness through our programming. www.180changestreet.com

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